

M. in Hell 341

Chapter 341 - Would You Look At This Bitch?

“Brother...?” Iris von Arnan muttered in bewilderment. She had ended up calling the man enveloped in blinding light in front of her, her brother before she had realized it. “Ah.”

However, after her thoughts settled and she took a closer look at the man in front of her, she realized that the man was a completely different person from her older brother. The man had black hair and eyes, and was handsome enough to be a work of art, to the point that she wondered if he had been blessed by the high elves as well.

“Wh-Who are...” Iris asked in a trembling voice.

Kim Si-Hun took her hand and helped her up while smiling faintly. “I came here after I heard the noises while I was passing by with my party members. Thank goodness I’m not too late.”

Iris flinched. It did not seem like this man knew who she was. The man glared at the masked men.

“Why would you attack this poor woman?” Si-Hun asked.

“Hah, poor woman, you say?”

“Do you have any idea who that woman is?”

“That’s Iris von Arnan! The witch who brought the empire to ruin!”

The masked men exclaimed in fury.

“Ngh...” Iris lowered her head in pallor from their screams.

She knew very well her reputation among the public, and a portion of the spreading rumors were true.

“I see, you’re the Imperial Highness.” Si-Hun purposefully expressed surprise.

The masked men snorted and approached Si-Hun. “Step aside. The empire can only regain its peace once that witch is dead.”

“I’m sorry, but I cannot.”

Si-Hun raised his shining sword, firmly expressing that he would not step aside. He turned his head toward Iris, who was trembling behind him.

“Don’t worry.” He stretched out his hand and placed it on her cheek. “I will protect you.”

“Ah...”

Iris’s eyes widened. It had been far too long since someone had said that they would protect her. Her eyes unwittingly teared up. She shuddered all over.

‘Nghh.’

Unlike Iris's reaction, Si-Hun was having mixed feelings.

'Is this really gonna work?'

In Si-Hun's opinion, a woman being told by someone who had literally fallen from the sky that they would protect her would only raise her caution instead of trust.

'I'm doing it because hyung-nim told me to, but...'

He honestly did not have much hope in the plan.

'But I'll stick to it, since it's for hyung-nim.'

Si-Hun had unconditional trust for Kang-Woo.

'Don't worry, hyung.'

Si-Hun gripped his sword handle and poured his bloodlust toward the masked men. This operation was crucial for establishing a connection with Princess Iris, as well as the very first step for him to become a savior.

'For hyung...'

He could not afford to let the plan fail. Si-Hun glared at the rebel army with blazing eyes.

"K-Kuh!"

"S-Such eyes..."

Si-Hun was powerful enough to face the princes of Hell. His assimilation rate with the Martial God had almost reached 70% during the past few months of training, so there was no way that mere soldiers of a rebel army would be able to handle his bloodlust.

Tap.

Si-Hun leaped forward with a step so quiet that one would not be able to hear it unless they concentrated, but unlike that faint sound, his body shot forward so quickly that it looked as if his body was being stretched.

'Heavenly Dragon Foot Technique.'

It was one of the martial arts techniques of Martial God Tian Taihuang; Si-Hun moved as if a dragon was soaring across the sky. He sliced the sword of one of the masked men without hesitation with his holy sword.

"Wh-What the fuck?!"

The masked men were shocked by how Si-Hun had reached them in the blink of an eye and sliced a sword clean in two. Si-Hun kicked a masked man's stomach with his right leg.

"Kurgh!"

The masked man rose slightly into the air and tumbled to the ground. Si-Hun rode the momentum and continued to swing his sword. *Clang! Clang!* The weapons of the masked men were sliced in two, one after another.

“Y-You monster!”

“He must be the witch’s puppet!”

“Kill him!”

The masked men did not back down even after witnessing Si-Hun’s prowess. They depended solely on their numbers which reached five hundred. The masked men approached Si-Hun while getting into a military formation that they seemed to have practiced thoroughly.

“Tsk.”

However, such a strategy was utterly ineffective against Si-Hun.

“Heavenly Dragon Lightning Strike.”

A blue dragon appeared from the shining holy sword. Si-Hun jumped toward the center of the formation without hesitation while flying in the air using Void Steps. He gripped his sword with both hands and swung it down while falling, as if he was chopping firewood.

Crackle—!!

The blue dragon that was leisurely flying in the air opened its mouth. It clad itself in lightning and descended to the ground.

“Kurgh!!”

“Aaaarrgghh!”

The masked men screamed. The ones that had been struck by the lightning head-on collapsed on the spot. The unexpected tight formation by a rebel army had been destroyed from a single attack from Si-Hun. Si-Hun stood up from the crater that had been formed as if a meteor had crashed down. The brilliant light flowing from the holy sword enveloped his body.

“A-Aaaahh.”

They were no match for Si-Hun. After realizing that they were in completely different leagues, the soldiers of the rebel army lost their morale and trembled on the spot with their mouths agape.

‘This should be enough.’

Si-Hun loosened his grip on the sword handle while staring at the rebel army stricken by fear. They had already lost their will to fight, so Si-Hun did not see the need to slaughter them.

‘It’s a bit uncomfortable.’

Si-Hun frowned as he stared at the terrified men. He was not physically uncomfortable; it was just that using his powers on fellow humans, albeit a rebel army, did not feel right to him.

“Kuh! Kurgh!”

“Wh-What the...?! This is...”

Just then, the corpses of the rebel army sprawled on the ground, rose. Their eyes were gray, and they were staggering. Si-Hun’s eyes widened.

“Undead?”

It was not just the corpses of the rebel army. Skeletons wielding weapons also appeared from all around the forest.

“What’s going on...?”

Si-Hun fell into confusion. Why were there Undead monsters all of a sudden? He scanned the group of Skeletons with sharp eyes; they came out of the forest and stood in front of the rebel army as if protecting them. Such behavior from Undead monsters only meant one thing.

“Sons of bitches...”

Si-Hun bit his lip. His resentment toward the demonic that had grown ever since his first encounter with Satan surged.

“You’ve joined forces... with demons.”

If that was not the case, nothing could explain why Undead monsters would protect the rebel army instead of attacking them. Si-Hun regretted going easy on them because they were fellow humans.

“Y-You’re wrong!”

“Urgh! Wh-What the hell is wrong with these Skeletons?!”

The rebel army grew confused as well. The resentment dyeing Si-Hun’s face momentarily faltered as he saw the masked men’s genuine confusion.

Just then, Kang-Woo, who had been watching from above, came down the canyon. “I knew something was off.”

“Hyung-nim?”

Kang-Woo continued while staring at the rebel army and the horde of Undead, “Si-Hun, I think they’ve joined forces with demons.”

“There are demons in Aernor as well?”

“Have you forgotten where Lucifer came from?” Kang-Woo mentioned with sunken eyes.

“Ah,” Si-Hun expressed. He nodded and glared at the rebel army and the Undead. “I see.”

There was likely a group similar to the Demon Cult in Aernor as well.

“Si-Hun.”

“I know without you telling me, hyung-nim.” .com

Si-Hun raised his sword while emitting chilling bloodlust. Kang-Woo above all others had assured that the rebel army had joined forces with demons. They had done something they should have never done, for the sake of overthrowing the nation. In that case, there was only one thing for Si-Hun to do.

'Formless Sword.'

Swords made out of pure-white sword energy formed around Si-Hun. He lowered his stance and charged toward the rebel army and the Undead.

“Are you okay, Your Highness?”

Si-Hun approached Iris, who was on the ground, after clearing out the Undead that had appeared from the forest. She was trembling slightly, possibly from seeing Si-Hun’s astounding combat prowess.

“I-I’m alright... Urgh!”

Iris tried to stand, but grimaced from the sharp pain shooting up her ankle. Si-Hun quickly ran up to her and helped her up.

“Ah...”

Iris blushed. She looked around warily, and then asked hesitantly, “M-May I ask who you are?”

“My name is Kim Si-Hun.”

“Kim Si-Hun.”

She engraved the name in her mind. Although such a name did not exist in the Arnan Empire, she paid it no mind.

'I heard the Eastern Federation uses such names.'

He even had black hair and eyes, so Iris was sure that he was from the Eastern Federation. If that was the case, it also made sense why he had not called her a witch since he likely did not know of the exact situation in Arnan.

“A-Ahh.”

However, whether Si-Hun was from the Eastern Federation or not did not matter at the moment. She stared at Si-Hun dreamily, shivers traveling down her spine.

“I see. Then may I call you... Sir Si-Hun?”

“You don’t have to address me so formally, Your Highness.”

“N-No! I will call you Sir Si-Hun!” Iris responded brightly.

Kang-Woo smirked from seeing Si-Hun and Iris.

'This exceeds my expectations.'

Thanks to Si-Hun’s fantastic looks as well as his perfect rescue timing, Operation “Knight In Shining Armor” has been a huge success.

'Getting her support will be a piece of cake.'

Seeing how Iris was acting, they could even hope for her full support for everything instead of just having her as a backer.

'Right, then.'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. It was time to squeeze out some information from the imperial princess about the things that were bothering him in regard to the rebel army.

"Princess Iris, there are a few things I would like to ask you."

"Who the hell are you?" Iris glared at Kang-Woo as soon as he approached her. "Stop bothering us and screw off."

She was staring at him in disgust as if he were a bug. She hid behind Si-Hun as if she would throw up just from Kang-Woo getting closer to her.

'Huh?'

Chapter 342 - Who Should I Allow to Win?

'What the hell?'

Oh Kang-Woo was left momentarily shocked from the complete opposite treatment that Iris had given him compared to Kim Si-Hun. He recalled how the citizens of the empire had referred to her as a witch.

'So that means...'

This was how Iris usually treated people.

'I guess it would've been bad if we didn't do this plan.'

If they had not gained the princess's favor by having Si-Hun save her in her time of need, there would have been massive complications in their plan.

"Did you not hear me telling you to screw off? Are you deaf or something?"

Iris was staring at Kang-Woo coldly. Kang-Woo was more dumbfounded by her attitude than angry.

"What do you think you're saying to my hyung-nim?"

Si-Hun reacted first to Iris's rudeness. He glared at Iris, who was hiding behind him, with a hint of bloodlust. Kang-Woo was more bewildered by Si-Hun's action than Iris was.

'Jesus, Si-Hun. Stop that. You'll spoil the affinity that you have with her.'

"Ah, mm, I-I'm sorry. I never thought that he would be your older brother..."

Iris quickly lowered her head, but her eyes were still filled with wariness and hostility. Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and stared at her.

'Something's off.'

It was hard to consider her attitude as one that simply arose from her personality.

'Her reaction is a bit too extreme for that to be the case.'

It was understandable that Iris would not consider Kang-Woo and Si-Hun to be brothers since they were not blood-related. However, she likely at least knew that they were comrades since she had seen them conversing.

'So why is she so hostile toward me?'

It was weird. Iris should have had absolutely no reason to be so hostile toward Kang-Woo. Considering her attitude toward Si-Hun, she should have naturally been kind to Kang-Woo as well.

'Her having a shitty personality doesn't explain it.'

Something continued to bother Kang-Woo. Kang-Woo stared at Iris sharply.

'Could it be...?'

He recalled what Douglas had muttered before.

- I at least want you to know that it is not entirely her fault.

'Something must've happened.'

Kang-Woo did not know the details yet, but he was sure that something had caused her personality to become this twisted.

'Wait.'

Kang-Woo fell into thought as he tapped the bridge of his nose. He had a feeling that what had bothered him about the rebel army and Iris were related.

It was not based on logic, but simply a hunch.

"May I continue my questions, Your Highness?" Kang-Woo asked.

"What is it? I'm tired, so make it quick," Iris answered disrespectfully.

Si-Hun frowned in displeasure, but Kang-Woo stopped him by giving him a look. He couldn't care less if she was disrespectful or downright cussing him out; there was something far more important than that.

"Where were you coming back from?"

"What?" Iris became wide-eyed from the unexpected question, but answered while turning her head away, "I went to the founding emperor's grave to pray in hopes that he would help resolve the empire's crisis."

It was a pointless gesture; no, that was not the issue.

'Would a princess with that kind of personality willingly go to a grave to pray?'

With only a few dozen knights, no less?

'I'm starting to get the full picture now.'

Kang-Woo smiled. The fog in his mind was getting cleared up. The questions in his mind were getting answered.

'I see what happened.'

Kang-Woo nodded and turned around. He looked down at the corpse of one of the masked men. To be exact, he looked down at the sword in the masked man's hand.

'Their weapons are unnaturally good.'

Not just their swords, but the round shields on their wrists and the armor they were wearing practically looked brand new.

'And...'

The rebel army had assumed such perfect formations as if they had been professionally trained. It had been easily broken because they had been against Si-Hun, but those who were just slightly above average would have had a difficult time breaking through it.

'That makes no sense.'

There was no way that a rebel army made up of regular citizens who had left their jobs behind to overthrow the nation due to poverty and hunger would be able to have high-quality armaments and assume airtight formations.

"Tsk," Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

There was no need to even think deeply about it; the simplest answer to a complicated question was usually the correct one.

'If it makes no sense for a rebel army to possess high-quality armaments and assume elaborate formations... The answer is simple. It means they were never part of the rebel army in the first place.'

Even if they were part of the rebel army, Kang-Woo was sure that they had at least been backed by someone.

'Who it could be is still a mystery, but...'

They had manipulated these men to come here and kill the princess.

"Who made you go to the grave?" Kang-Woo asked.

Iris froze. She lowered her head in pallor and muttered, "I-I went there of my own accord."

Kang-Woo remained silent.

Iris responded fiercely, "I'm the imperial princess. Who would dare make me go anywhere?"

"Oh, I guess you're right."

Kang-Woo nodded with a smile. It was cute how she was trying her best to maintain her pride. It was like seeing a child getting on their tiptoes to grab something high up without any help.

"What? Is that all you have to ask?" Iris asked.

"Yes, that's all." Kang-Woo nodded and turned around.

He had a few things that he had wanted to ask, but this was enough for now. There was no reason for him to find out at the moment who had made the princess turn out this way.

'Besides...'

The answer would come to him sooner or later. Kang-Woo gave Si-Hun a look.

Si-Hun nodded and said to Iris, "We will escort you to the capital, Princess Iris."

"Sir Si-Hun...?"

"We can't afford to leave you alone after what happened here."

"Sniff. Th-Thank you so much."

Iris was reacting in a way completely different from her attitude toward Kang-Woo. She shed tears from being moved deeply.

"I will make sure to reward you handsomely once we get to the capital!" Iris exclaimed while clenching her fists.

Kang-Woo chuckled at the absurdity.

'Come on...'

Kang-Woo's feelings were getting hurt. He shook his head and turned around.

"Hup." Si-Hun lifted Iris in a princess carry.

"Ah..." Iris turned her head away, completely red in embarrassment.

"I will introduce you to my other comrades besides Kang-Woo hyung-nim."

"I don't ca— A-Ahem. Okay. I'm looking forward to meeting them." Iris giggled.

"Umm... Your Highness," one of Iris's maids called out.

"What is it now?" Iris, whose time with Si-Hun had been interrupted yet again, asked in irritation.

"Well... About the report for this incident..."

Iris turned gloomy in an instant. She continued while trembling, "Yeah, o-of course we should report it. Report that I was attacked by a rebel army, and that Sir Si-Hun came to my rescue."

"Yes, Your Highness."

Something was amiss. Kang-Woo, who had been watching their interaction in silence, smiled and turned his head.

'I knew there was something off. This is gonna be interesting.'

Kang-Woo's eyes glimmered as he licked his lips. If the situation was what he thought it to be...

'I'll have to think a little bit.'

There was no need to rush. It would not be too late to act after taking his time to think.

'Besides...'

It was completely up to Kang-Woo to choose who would come out victorious in the Arnan Empire, which was approaching its imminent demise. The rest were trash that would have no choice but to acknowledge the choice that he made and submit willingly.

'Now, then...'

Kang-Woo thought leisurely with his arms crossed. Either Iris, who was sticking very close to Si-Hun, or the mastermind who had tried to kill Iris here...

'Who should I allow to win?'

Snicker. The demon's eyes shone as if he was playing a fun game.

Kang-Woo's party headed to the capital with Princess Iris. Although Iris's carriage had been destroyed from the rebel army's attack, it was easily fixed at a nearby city. Kang-Woo's party bought a few more carriages and set off to the capital. They could have flown there on Echidna, but they did not.

'Iris might faint from shock.'

It was not difficult to imagine how that immature princess would react if she saw a dragon. Not just that, Echidna was a demonic dragon; she could not be shown to others recklessly.

Although Iris had acted coldly to everyone besides Si-Hun at first, she opened up to them over time. She smiled every now and then, and they even chatted during meals. However, there had been something that Kang-Woo had not expected at all.

"Kyaaaaaaaaaahh!" Iris screamed and threw down her spoon on the ground. "S-Spicyyyyyyyyy!" She glared at Kang-Woo, who was eating kimchi stew, teary-eyed. "How can you eat something like this?!"

Kang-Woo closed his eyes.

'Just let it go.'

The spiciness could not be helped. Kang-Woo was not ignorant enough to complain to a person of another world why they couldn't eat something so delicious.

Tap.

"Kang-Woo, bring me some water."

"Go get it yourself, Your Highness."

"I hurt my ankle."

"Are you still going on about an injury that was already fully healed days ago?"

"Argh! You talk too much!"

“Yes, I have a big mouth. What are you going to do about it?”

“Water! Water!”

“Si-Hun, Her Imperial Highness wants some wat—”

“Kyaaaahh! D-Don’t call Sir Si-Hun!”

A fuss broke out between Iris and Kang-Woo. The other party members did not even pay it any mind, having gotten used to it. This was what Kang-Woo had not expected.

‘Why is she sticking so much to me instead of Si-Hun?’

Kang-Woo frowned as if his head hurt. For things to go according to his plan, Iris, who had fallen in love with Si-Hun at first sight, needed to grow closer to him to form a hero-princess bond.

However, after a few days of spending time together, Iris was sticking only to Kang-Woo instead of Si-Hun and was chatting her mouth off.

‘And don’t even get me started on the reason.’

Iris stole glances at Si-Hun from time to time, wondering if Si-Hun was actually getting her water, but Si-Hun was not even paying any mind to Iris and was having the time of his life chatting with Layla. Seeing that, Iris sulked, and so did Kang-Woo.

‘This is driving me fucking insane.’

Iris was only talking to Kang-Woo because of the stupid reason of being too embarrassed to talk to Si-Hun. The problem was that Iris’s personality was so twisted that her methods of conversations consisted of commands. Since there was no way that Kang-Woo would follow those commands willingly, it resulted in arguments.

‘And an even bigger problem...’

Iris seemed to enjoy having such arguments. She, who had never met anyone in her life as an imperial princess who would defy her, was enjoying the new responses that Kang-Woo was giving her.

‘Fucking hell, are you some noble lady in a bishojo game? The kind that goes “Y-You’re the first person to ever treat me this way!”?’

“Haaa...” Kang-Woo sighed.

‘Please let us arrive at the capital soon.’

Even if it was part of the plan, it was exhausting to deal with a sassy princess all day. Kang-Woo turned to look at Han Seol-Ah for some mental healing.

‘Huh?’

He could feel thick bloodlust in Seol-Ah’s eyes as she looked this way.

“Hurry up with the water!”

'Holy fuck. We have to get to the capital soon. Like, right now. Please, the plan will get fucked at this rate.'

Chapter 343 - Paying For One's Sin

"At this pace, we'll reach the capital by tomorrow."

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

Iris's expression darkened. She lifelessly walked to the carriage with slumped shoulders. Oh Kang-Woo clicked his tongue as he watched her. He had realized a few things about Iris during their few days together.

'She hasn't been completely irredeemable from the start.'

Although she was a little immature, she was occasionally delicate. However, she spoke disrespectfully to her maids and Kang-Woo as if it was completely natural. Kang-Woo wondered what had caused her personality to become so twisted.

'Well, I'm sure I'll find out tomorrow.'

Kang-Woo stared with sunken eyes at the pale, trembling Iris. The problem was not what sort of trauma she had suffered.

'Public opinion of her is worse than what I had expected.'

Opinions regarding Princess Iris in the Arnan Empire literally could not get any worse. The people were blatantly showing their detest of her to the point that it seemed excessive.

'An incompetent, greedy and egocentric princess.'

The people pretty much considered her the epitome of corruption.

'I have a feeling that someone spread such rumors intentionally.'

However, it was hard to absolve the princess of any fault. Considering how Iris treated her maids and everyone other than Kim Si-Hun, she could not be treated as a victim of false malicious rumors. As for how she treated the people below her...

"Siesta!! I told you to clean the inside of the carriage!" Iris yelled while hopping madly.

'Jesus Christ.'

She was usually fine, but she turned hysterical whenever anything related to the capital was mentioned. Whatever the reason, the people of the empire as well as Kang-Woo's party members did not have a good impression of her due to her hysteria.

'That's a problem.' .com

At this rate, it would throw a wrench in the plan to support the princess and raise Si-Hun as a hero, to the point that it would have been easier for Si-Hun to be hailed as a hero if they had taken the rebel army's side instead.

'I'll have to think about it.'

Kang-Woo stood up. There was only one day left until they reached the imperial capital.

“Wow, so this is the capital?” Han Seol-Ah expressed in amazement.

Kang-Woo, who was in the same carriage, looked around in surprise.

“I knew that they had made great advancements in magic, but this exceeds my expectations.”

It could not even be compared to a tiny city like Velen. Five-story buildings were erected along the road that the carriage was traveling down, and the sidewalks were extremely clean, having been made with pure white marble.

'So this is...'

It was the capital of Arnan, the most prosperous city in Aernor. Its size truly befitted its reputation. Kang-Woo looked out the window to check the expressions of the passersby.

“Tsk.”

It was no different in the capital; likely having been notified of the princess's arrival, the people were glaring at the carriage that Iris was in with hostility. It felt like a riot would occur with the slightest push, but it did not because a crowd of imperial soldiers came out to protect the carriage. Kang-Woo and his party were able to reach the golden imperial castle with the imperial soldiers escorting them.

“S-Sir Si-Hun. Umm... How long will you be staying in the imperial castle for?” Iris asked cautiously after getting off the carriage.

Si-Hun momentarily fell into thought.

'It's all an act, though.'

He had already talked it over with Kang-Woo beforehand.

“Since we're not in a rush... May we stay here for a while?” Si-Hun asked.

“Ah! O-Of course!” Iris answered happily.

She guided the party into the imperial castle while smiling brightly. Just then...

“Oh, are these the good people that had saved you from the rebel army, Your Highness?” An old man in white vestments walked over to them slowly. He grabbed Si-Hun's hand and said softly, “Thank you very much for saving Her Highness. Fuuu. My heart sank when I found out that she was attacked by rebel forces...”

The old man in priest vestments sighed in relief while teary-eyed.

“I only did what I should have done,” Si-Hun replied.

“Hahaha. You are as heroic as I’ve heard.”

The old man went up to every single one of Kang-Woo’s party members to shake their hands and bow to them.

“Oh, I’ve forgotten to introduce myself. I am Prime Minister Fidelio, Her Highness’s advisor.” Fidelio politely bowed to Kang-Woo’s party. He turned to the maids in the area and continued, “They are the heroes that have saved Her Highness. Guide them to the VIP rooms.”

“Yes, Prime Minister.”

“It seems we’ll have to hold a grand party soon. I will have to tell the other nobles of your heroics.” Fidelio smiled and approached Iris. “Are you hurt anywhere, Your Highness?”

“Ah, uhh...” Iris turned pale as soon as Fidelio approached her. She lowered her head while trembling. “I-I’m... fine.”

“Phew. You have no idea how anxious I was when I heard that you went to the founding emperor’s grave while I was away.”

“I’m sorry,” Iris muttered.

It was not difficult to guess which of the two held more power in the imperial palace just from seeing Iris’s attitude.

Kang-Woo stared at Prime Minister Fidelio with sharp eyes. He had expected to find the mastermind of the incident sooner or later once he arrived at the imperial palace, but he had not expected to find them so soon.

‘It was you, huh?’

Kang-Woo smirked. The fog in his mind had cleared up completely.

Kang-Woo’s party unpacked as soon as they were guided to the VIP rooms. They were each given one room, and every single one of them was luxurious enough to make their mouths agape.

“Haaah.” Kang-Woo laid down on the soft bed. “Lilith.”

“Yes, Master Kang-Woo.”

Lilith appeared from the shadow on the ground as if she had expected Kang-Woo to call her. She alluringly sat down on the bed next to Kang-Woo and leaned toward him. She knew why Kang-Woo had called her even without being told.

“What will you do, my king?”

“I’m thinking about it,” Kang-Woo answered.

“I think we will get through to that Fidelio human better than the princess.”

“That’s true.”

It was easier to work together with the prime minister, who practically had the empire in his grasp, than the incompetent princess. It was none of Kang-Woo’s business whether or not Fidelio actually tried to have the princess killed.

“The problem is...” Kang-Woo slurred.

“The blessing of the high elves, correct?”

“Yeah.” Kang-Woo nodded.

The blessing of the high elves was apparently passed down to members of the imperial family. Kang-Woo could not be sure if that would influence the appearance of a high elf before the savior.

‘It’s hard to say that they’re not related.’

Considering a high elf appeared before the founding emperor himself, it was hard to be sure that it had nothing to do with the manifestation of the high elves in the physical realm. Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and fell into thought.

‘It would be a piece of cake to cooperate with Fidelio and make Si-Hun a hero.’

All they had to do was raise up the rebel army and kill Iris, just like what Fidelio had originally planned. If they did, Si-Hun would easily acquire the title of hero who had executed the corrupt imperial family and brought peace to the empire. They had plenty of justification to do so since Iris’s reputation among the people of the empire could not be any lower.

‘As for the other choice...’

Taking Iris’s side and eliminating Fidelio; even if they did, it would be very difficult for Si-Hun to be hailed as a hero.

‘There are too many problems.’

First of all, the impression of Iris that the people of the empire held was the absolute worst. They needed to change that impression for the better, but it was difficult to do it through normal means.

‘It’s not like Iris is competent.’

No, even if she was competent, people’s impressions of her would not change if her twisted personality did not change as well. They needed to fix her twisted personality as well as allow her to break free from people’s opinion of her being a witch.

“It’s hellish.”

Kang-Woo could barely see a future for that path. Considering Iris’s hysterical behavior, she would not be easily persuaded, and there was a mountain of work they would need to do for her witch image among the public to be wiped clean.

‘Is it really worth doing all that for the blessing of the high elves that might not even have an influence?’

Kang-Woo put one leg over the other while lying down on the bed and bobbed the top leg up and down. Lilith laid down next to him and embraced him.

“How about we cooperate with Fidelio and imprison Iris instead of killing her?” Lilith suggested.

“I don’t know, that might be even worse. In the high elves’ point of view, we would pretty much be imprisoning someone that they blessed.”

It was better for her to die by Fidelio’s hands.

“Mm... May I voice my opinion?” Lilith asked.

“Of course.”

“I believe we should help that princess.”

“Iris?”

Lilith nodded. “Even if it would be a hassle, isn’t it better to pick the one that has a higher chance of manifesting the high elves?”

“True.”

Kang-Woo nodded. If he had to choose, it was more beneficial to him to take the side of the imperial family blessed by the high elves. Although he would have to work his ass off for a profit that he was not sure he would even gain, it was not something that he could not handle.

‘It’s only bothersome; it’s not impossible.’

Kang-Woo nodded.

Lilith giggled seductively and continued, “And... You would be paying for your sin.”

“Sin?”

“It would be better for you to go see yourself.” Lilith smiled softly without giving a concrete answer. “You will find out once you go to where the princess is right now.”

“Mm,” Kang-Woo expressed while nodding.

‘Well, it doesn’t hurt to take a look.’

It could be a clue to fix Iris’s twisted personality. Kang-Woo did as Lilith said and headed toward Iris’s chambers. Although there were imperial soldiers guarding the hallways, he was easily able to get past them using the Authority of Stealth.

“Sniff... Sniff.”

Once he was right in front of Iris’s chambers, he heard sobbing from across the door.

“Brother...”

Kang-Woo could hear a sorrowful voice.

'Brother?'

Kang-Woo used the Authority of Transparency while tilting his head. The room beyond the door was reflected in his eyes. Iris was holding a small picture frame while scrunched up in her bed.

'Who is it?'

He had not heard from her over the past few days that she had a brother. Kang-Woo repositioned himself to take a better look at the picture frame in Iris's hands. An extremely handsome blond man came into view; it was a familiar face.

"Reynald?"

Kang-Woo's eyes widened.

"Ohhh... I see." Kang-Woo nodded with a long face.

The pieces of the puzzle had been placed. Reynald von Arnan, the prince of the Arnan Empire and the hero overflowing with justice, had met a wretched death by the hands of Satan, the Prince of Wrath.

'It's our fault for failing to stop Satan earlier.'

Kang-Woo's heart became heavy when he thought about Reynald.

'He was a good guy...'

Kang-Woo clenched his fists to the point that veins popped out. Although the main reason for his demise was him having gone off on his own, Kang-Woo was also at fault for not having warned him about Satan in advance.

"Haaa... So this is what she meant."

Kang-Woo lowered his head in sorrow. He finally understood what Lilith had meant.

- You would be paying for your sin.

'Paying for my sin, huh? Yeah, I'll pay for it.'

The opportunity to pay for the sin of failing to save Reynald from Satan had arrived.

Chapter 344 - (Hellish) Party (1)

"I see." Kim Si-Hun nodded with a heavy expression.

He sighed in pity. After finding out that Iris's brother was Reynald, Oh Kang-Woo gathered his party members and told them of her circumstances.

"I never thought that Satan's actions would have influenced another world as well..."

Si-Hun bit his lip in frustration. Satan, the Prince of Wrath, had been the decisive factor for Si-Hun's resentment for the demonic. Just thinking about Satan made Si-Hun's blood boil. Kang-Woo grabbed Si-Hun's arm to calm his thick bloodlust.

"Calm down, Si-Hun."

“Oh, I’m sorry, hyung-nim.” Si-Hun looked down at his hands while smiling awkwardly. “Even after a year since Satan died... I can’t seem to forget.”

There was no way that he would ever be able to, since Si-Hun had never actually won against Satan even once. The one who had killed Satan was none other than Rakiel, one of the Four Heavenly Kings.

- I am death. I am the end. I am the father of all wrath, and I am wrath itself.

Si-Hun recalled the golden eyes staring at him. A chill traveled down his spine, and he clenched his fists.

- I am Satan.

The memory of back when he had first met Satan, and him kneeling powerlessly without being able to do a thing lingered in his head. Si-Hun still trembled in fear whenever he thought of that memory. He became so scared that he could barely do anything.

“Si-Hun.” Kang-Woo clenched Si-Hun’s arm even harder. He smiled and said, “Don’t make that kind of face. Satan is dead.”

“Yes... You’re right.”

Si-Hun nodded, still with an awkward smile. He put his hand over Kang-Woo’s hand on his arm.

‘It’s warm.’

He could feel Kang-Woo’s warmth chasing away the chill that had spread throughout his body. Si-Hun took a deep breath and calmed his mind.

“Then does that mean Princess Iris’s personality is... related to Reynald’s death?” Si-Hun asked.

“But how does it make sense that someone becomes that much of a bitch just because their older brother died?” Cha Yeon-Joo interjected in irritation. She pounded her chest in frustration and complained, “My God, I barely held in my urge to smack that bitch’s head. How did her personality get so twisted?”

Although the other party members did not insult Iris like Yeon-Joo had, they seemed to have the same opinion just from looking at their faces.

“I don’t like Iris. She keeps coming onto you, Kang-Woo.” Echidna pulled on Kang-Woo’s arm while grinding her teeth.

Echidna seemed to have been bothered by the fact that she had barely been able to talk to Kang-Woo on the way to the capital because of Iris. It was cute how she was pouting in dissatisfaction.

“I-I agree! To M-Master Kang-Woo... She was so...! So...!”

Halcyon clenched his small fists while trembling.

Balrog also nodded in agreement and remarked while grimacing, “She is far too disrespectful to the king. If it had not been for the king’s command, I would have long since ripped her head off.”

Lilith grinned. "I think she's cute."

"That's cute to you?" Yeon-Joo chuckled.

Lilith simply giggled without a response.

"Yes, I think she's cute too." Han Seol-Ah answered in Lilith's place unexpectedly. "I... would like to get along with her."

Seol-Ah giggled while covering her mouth. She was smiling, but her eyes were not. Chills ran down Yeon-Joo's spine.

"Y-Yeah." Yeon-Joo nodded in puzzlement.

Kang-Woo groaned.

'Pretty much everyone hates her.'

Everyone other than Lilith was practically grinding their teeth. It was a little awkward since Kang-Woo had decided to take Iris's side.

'Fixing Iris's personality takes absolute priority.'

However, that was easier said than done.

"I agree with Yeon-Joo. I don't think she became like that just because of Reynald's death," Kang-Woo stated.

Her attitude toward Fidelio was far too extreme for that to be the case.

'I have a feeling that Fidelio had something to do with it.'

If that was the case, it was good for Kang-Woo since it would be naturally resolved once they took Fidelio out of the picture.

'But...'

A different thought crossed his mind, but he shook his head. It was still too soon for him to be sure of such a guess.

"How about I go talk to her?" Si-Hun suggested while raising his hand.

"No, I got this. Si-Hun, you focus on deepening your bond with the princess while keeping the same distance from her as now," Kang-Woo responded.

"Mm. I understand."

It would be right to leave it to Si-Hun to fix Iris's twisted personality, but he could not trust Si-Hun to take care of it.

'Considering Si-Hun's personality...'

He would be the worst person for such a delicate matter. Since it would be a bother to tell him every single line for him to recite, it was better for Kang-Woo to just take care of it himself.

“Then will we be staying in the imperial palace?” Yeon-Joo asked while pouting.

Kang-Woo fell into thought for a moment, and then answered, “No, that would be inefficient.”

This plan did not need so many people to execute.

‘No.’

This many people would actually be a detriment to the plan to raise Si-Hun up.

‘It’s not like there’s a certain date for when a high elf will manifest.’

They couldn’t just wait while twiddling their thumbs, relying only on a plan to have a high elf manifest. To make the most use of their time...

“Let’s split the party into two,” Kang-Woo stated.

“Split the party...”

“Into two?”

Yeon-Joo and Seol-Ah became wide-eyed.

“While the first party works on making Si-Hun a savior, the second party will look for information related to the Demon God’s corpse,” Kang-Woo remarked.

“W-Wait, that means...”

The faces of a few party members paled. If the party was split into two, it meant that half the members of the party would be separated from Kang-Woo.

“I-I’m going to stay with you, Kang-Woo!” Seol-Ah shouted urgently.

Kang-Woo smirked. “I already have five people in mind for the second party. Balrog, Yeon-Joo, Echidna, Halcyon, and Layla.”

They were all people that would not be of much help for this plan. Lilith was one of the very few party members that he could share his true plan to, and as for Vernaak, he could add more realism to the plan by making use of Undead. There was no need to even mention Si-Hun.

‘Seol-Ah is a bit of an odd one out.’

Kang-Woo sighed in relief after seeing Seol-Ah smiling brightly. As for her, she required special care from him because she had already fallen from grace once before.

‘She’s still mentally unstable.’

The only ones who could control Seol-Ah at the moment were Kang-Woo and Lilith. Since both he and Lilith were in the first party, Seol-Ah also needed to be with them.

“Ah...”

“Wh-What the hell?! Why me?!”

Joy and sorrow intermingled from Kang-Woo’s choice. Yeon-Joo sprang up in anger while grinding her teeth.

“Why? You don’t want to be separated from me?” Kang-Woo asked.

“O-Of course not! It’s just a hassle to travel all over the place!”

Kang-Woo turned around while snickering. “You’re the leader of the second party, Balrog.”

“Understood.” Balrog nodded without complaints.

He seemed to know that there was nothing for him to do even if he stayed here.

“Kang-Woo...” Echidna pulled on Kang-Woo’s clothes, teary-eyed.

Kang-Woo patted her head. “We’re not gonna be separated for very long. Besides, you can fly over in a flash in your true form, can’t you?”

“Urgh. Okay.” Echidna nodded while pouting. She then snorted while clenching her fists. “Hm! I’ll find tons of information for you, Kang-Woo.”

“Okay. I’ll look forward to it.”

Although Kang-Woo answered with a smile, he did not have high expectations for them.

‘They’d be lucky to even find a single clue.’

There was a reason why Kang-Woo had gone with the bothersome choice of bringing Aernor to the brink of collapse to make the high elves manifest. It was near impossible to locate the Demon God’s corpse with no information whatsoever. Kang-Woo had split the party into two because he wanted to focus on supporting Si-Hun for the true plan.

‘Next up...’

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and recalled what Fidelio had said.

- It seems we’ll have to hold a grand party soon. I will have to tell the other nobles of your heroics.

‘A party, huh?’

Kang-Woo smiled widely.

‘A perfect stage.’

Balrog left the imperial castle along with the second party. Iris was bewildered to hear the news at first, but was relieved after hearing that Si-Hun had remained.

Kang-Woo made several preparations for the party, and one of them was figuring out the exact situation that Aernor was currently in. In regards to that, he received help from the second party that was currently traveling around the continent.

‘An era of peace, huh?’

If the situation of Aernor could be summarized in one phrase, it was exactly that. The forces worshiping Evil God Lucifer had been reduced to only a few due to the sudden disappearance of Lucifer a few years ago. Even Demon King Vaal Zahak, who had invaded several kingdoms in the northern region, had been subjugated through Reynald’s heroic sacrifice, or that was what the public

believed. The continent had entered an era of peace for the first time since the appearance of Evil God Lucifer.

'It doesn't feel like an era of peace, though.'

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly. The situation in Arnan was not good enough for them to enjoy the era of peace.

'But one good thing about it is...'

The fear of demons was still rooted deep within the people of the continent. Surprisingly, life in Arnan was far better compared to when they were at war.

While Kang-Woo was organizing the information that he had gathered about the current situation in Aernor, someone knocked on his door. *Clack*. The door was carefully opened.

"Are you ready, Kang-Woo?" Seol-Ah asked.

"Oh, yeah." Kang-Woo paused his thoughts and turned his head toward Seol-Ah's voice. "Wow."

He could not take his eyes off of Seol-Ah in a pure-white ball gown.

"Does it... look good on me?" she asked while looking down at her gown that had a bit too many laces.

"You look absolutely gorgeous." Kang-Woo gave her a thumbs up.

Seol-Ah smiled.

"Shall we go?" Kang-Woo stood up and lightly grabbed Seol-Ah's hand.

Today was the day of the party that Fidelio had mentioned. The imperial castle was bustling with nobles that had arrived since morning. They were showering Si-Hun with gifts to gain his favor after hearing of his overwhelming combat prowess.

Kang-Woo smiled while looking down through a window of the imperial palace.

'Today...'

A (hellish) party for Si-Hun would commence in the imperial palace.

Chapter 345 - (Hellish) Party (2)

"Are you the rumored hero?"

"I've heard many things about you. Is it true that you defeated five hundred soldiers of the rebel army all by yourself?"

"I would like to hear more about that. Oh, I am Tyrande Westwood of Westwood Viscounty."

"Oh, umm..."

Kim Si-Hun was put on the spot as he was being given the full attention of nobles that had come from all over the empire. The rumor that Si-Hun had wiped out five hundred soldiers of the rebel army plus Undead monsters that black mages had summoned, spread quickly throughout the nation.

Since the Arnan Empire was currently in a state of disorder, nobles greatly valued those with high combat prowess. Hence, their interest in Si-Hun rose, and they approached him with all sorts of strategies such as gifts and beauty traps using ladies of each noble house to recruit him as a knight of their house.

“Damn, his popularity is through the roof.”

Oh Kang-Woo snickered as he watched the noble ladies stuck all over Si-Hun. Each house seemed to have gone all out, because each and every lady was considerably beautiful.

‘Well, they’re nothing compared to Si-Hun.’

He felt sorry for the noble houses that had made great preparations to recruit Si-Hun into their house, but the ladies were far lacking compared to Si-Hun in terms of looks.

‘A hero who defeated five hundred rebel army soldiers, huh?’

It was nowhere near enough of an accomplishment to become a hero. As proof of that...

‘The ranks of nobles approaching Si-Hun aren’t that high.’

The true powers of the empire, such as those from duke and marquess houses, were simply observing Si-Hun from afar as if they were window shopping for clothes. Kang-Woo smirked.

‘Watch him while you still can.’

Because they would not be able to lay eyes on Si-Hun so easily in the future. Kang-Woo drank a glass of champagne on the table and laughed softly. The refreshing carbonation and the sweet taste of champagne lingered on his tongue.

“That aside, I’m jealous,” Kang-Woo unconsciously muttered as he watched Si-Hun surrounded by about ten noble ladies.

He had expected something like this to happen when he first executed the plan to make Si-Hun a hero, but he could not help but feel jealous when it was happening right before his eyes.

“You’re jealous?”

Clack. Han Seol-Ah, who was standing next to Kang-Woo, put down her champagne glass on the table and smiled.

‘Huh?’

“No, that’s not what I...” Kang-Woo tried to defend himself.

“You just said that you were jealous.”

‘Fuck.’

“Hahaha. It was just a figure of speech.”

'Please spare me.'

"All I need is you, darling."

"You say that, but aren't there a bit too many women around you? Lilith, Yeon-Joo, and..."

"But you're the best out of them." Kang-Woo embraced Seol-Ah by the waist and lightly kissed her.

Her eyes that had been gleaming sharply relaxed from just a single kiss. Seol-Ah caressed her lips with her hand and giggled.

"Hehehe. I was just joking."

'It didn't feel like a joke.'

Kang-Woo coughed and reached for the various scrumptious-looking foods laid out on the table.

"The food here isn't bad. You try some too, darling."

"Oh, okay." Seol-Ah continued while staring vacantly at Kang-Woo, "Sure looks tasty."

'You're talking about the food, right?'

"Oh right, Kang-Woo. Tonight—"

"So this is where you were!" Iris walked toward Kang-Woo with big strides while interrupting Seol-Ah. She pulled on Kang-Woo's arm and said, "Are you just gonna let Sir Si-Hun suffer all by himself like that? I'll go with you, so get those women off of him."

Seol-Ah's eyes narrowed. She glared at Iris coldly, and then smiled toward Kang-Woo.

"I'll excuse myself first, Kang-Woo," Seol-Ah said as she turned around.

Iris displeased her, but she knew that it would cause trouble for Kang-Woo if she were to pick a fight with Iris.

'What a relief.'

Kang-Woo was worried about Seol-Ah's mental state, which was getting unstable again lately, but it was not to the point that she was unable to make rational decisions.

'I'll have to give her some more attention.'

As Seraph's influence grew stronger, so did Seol-Ah's obsession for Kang-Woo due to the unique racial characteristic of angels. Kang-Woo had managed to quell that obsession last time by proposing to her, but it seemed like its effect was weakening. He needed to engrave deeper into Seol-Ah's mind that she was the most important person in his life.

"Hey, Kang-Woo! Are you ignoring me?" Iris yelled at him in irritation as he momentarily thought about Seol-Ah.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and turned toward her, answering, “No, I’m listening, Princess Iris.”

“Hmph. It looked like you were distracted by something else.”

“Hahaha. How could I dare show such disrespect toward you, Your Highness?”

“What’s with you all of a sudden?” Iris stared at Kang-Woo warily.

“More importantly, are you not one of the key people of this party? You should interact with the other nobles instead of someone like me.”

In other words, Kang-Woo was telling Iris to fuck off.

Iris glared at him. “What? Are you refusing my company?”

She was as temperamental and domineering as always when she wasn’t around Si-Hun.

Kang-Woo sighed and answered, “You must have come to me because you have no one to talk to. I understand, Your Highness.”

“Ngh! Y-You’re wrong!” Iris shouted while stomping her feet aggressively.

‘Wrong, my ass.’

It was obvious that she had come to Kang-Woo because no one would give her any attention, since she was considered the worst among commoners and nobles alike.

‘Whatever the case...’

This was a good opportunity.

“In that case, could you tell me more about the nobles over there?” Kang-Woo asked while staring at the nobles who were looking at Si-Hun from a distance instead of fighting for his favor.

There was a good chance that they were the true powers of Arnan.

“Mm. Okay.” Iris nodded. “The one seated over there drinking coffee is Marquess Berocca. He runs a huge slave market in the northeast region of the empire. And...”

As Iris was explaining the nobles one by one to Kang-Woo, her eyes stopped on one woman. She seemed to be in her forties with silver hair in an updo, and her eyes reflected an inexplicable sense of sorrow.

“Mm, who was she again?” Iris tilted her head in confusion.

It did not seem the woman was of high peerage.

“Well, that’s pretty much it,” Iris expressed.

“Thank you very much.” Kang-Woo nodded.

Iris’s information would prove very useful, especially during this party.

‘I already see a few evils that I need to eliminate.’

To allow Iris to gain more power, Kang-Woo couldn't eliminate only Fidelio. He also needed to eliminate Fidelio's backers; in other words, the nobles that were sucking the empire dry.

"Princess Iris, it seems Si-Hun is finally free," Kang-Woo mentioned as he pointed at Si-Hun, who had barely managed to run away from the noble ladies. He picked up a random dish on the table and said, "Come to think of it, this dish happens to be Si-Hun's favorite. Why don't you take some to him?"

It was a smoked fish with some vegetables on the side; he had no idea what sort of fish it was, but Kang-Woo had enjoyed it quite a lot while he was chatting with Seol-Ah earlier.

"Oh, I-I see Sir Si-Hun likes elroy as well." Iris stared at the dish in Kang-Woo's hand in surprise. The fish seemed to be called elroy. She muttered softly while trembling, "Just like Brother.."

"Your Highness?" Kang-Woo called.

"Hm? N-Never mind! Ahem. Yeah, he likes elroy, huh?" Iris nodded in succession and took the dish from Kang-Woo. "I'm off to see Sir Si-Hun, so stay right there!"

Iris cautiously walked toward Si-Hun. Kang-Woo smirked and turned around. Of course, he had no intention of staying here like she had asked.

'I have my targets.'

It was time to execute his true plan that he had not divulged to Si-Hun, Seol-Ah nor Cha Yeon-Joo.

'Now, then...'

It was time to ring the bells of demise.

"No, I'm not a fan of fish..."

"K-Kang-Woo said to take it to you because he was sure that you would like it."

"Oh, did he?"

Si-Hun's eyes shone. He took the dish from Iris while smiling. The fact that he did not like fish was of no matter compared to the fact that Kang-Woo had recommended it.

"I would gladly eat anything that hyung-nim recommends."

Si-Hun smiled and tried the fish known as elroy. Although it was a bit fatty, he was still able to eat it without issue because it did not have the characteristic fishy taste of fish.

'As expected of hyung-nim.'

This must have been the reason why Kang-Woo had recommended a fish dish to him despite knowing that he did not like fish. Si-Hun smiled while thinking of Kang-Woo.

Iris stood restlessly in front of him. "Umm... Sir Si-Hun, are you thinking about becoming a knight of a certain noble house?"

“Oh.” Si-Hun recalled the nobles that had come to see him before the party had even begun. He smiled bitterly and shook his head. “No, not at all.”

“Th-Then what will you...”

“My goal is to eradicate demon worshipers with my party members.”

It was truly a goal befitting a hero. Although his true goal was a little different, he had chosen this goal after consulting with Kang-Woo because it sounded the most hero-like.

‘And...’

Si-Hun’s eyes sharpened. He had not lied just to deceive Iris.

‘If Aernor also has an organization like the Demon Cult...’

He would execute them himself with his sword. The seed of resentment that had sprouted when he had knelt before Satan still had not vanished.

‘They might have something to do with the Four Heavenly Kings.’

The Constellations of Evil had apparently been sealed in Aernor. Rakiel, who had been one of them, had crossed to Earth, but there was no guarantee that the other constellations had as well. No, since Earth’s protection had been restored and Gaia had regained her power albeit temporarily, there was a high chance that they were still in Aernor.

‘No matter what...’

Si-Hun clenched his fists. Whatever happened, he would not let them do as they liked. Kang-Woo, Layla, and his other party members...

‘I won’t lose them.’

Si-Hun came to a resolution and looked at Iris, who trembled from seeing his eyes full of conviction.

“Brother,” she unconsciously muttered.

“Pardon?”

“N-Nothing.” Iris shook her head fervently while as red as a tomato. She gulped and continued, “I will give you my support, Sir Si-Hun.”

The Arnan Empire could not overlook forces that worshiped demons either, since no one knew when a being like Demon King Vaal Zahak would attack the continent again.

“Thank you very much, Princess Iris.” Si-Hun bowed with a bright smile.

Iris blushed. She lowered her head, rolled her feet and carefully mentioned, “Umm, Sir Si-Hun. You can comfortably call me Iri—”

Crunch!

“Kyaaah!”

“Wh-What the—?”

Just as Iris was in the middle of saying something, a commotion arose.

“Kurgh! Urgh!”

“Marquess Berocca?!”

“What’s wrong?”

Marquess Berocca, the noble who possessed the largest slave market in the empire, suddenly collapsed while convulsing. The nobles around him approached him, and then...

Slash!

“Kyaaaaaaah!!”

A green tentacle shot out from Marquess Berocca’s back and decapitated one of the nobles who was walking up to him. Horrifying screams filled the party venue.

“Skreeeeee!!”

“Kyaaaaaaah!!”

“H-Help me!!”

“Guards! Where are the guards?!”

At the same time, demonic beasts appeared from all around and began to randomly slaughter nobles around them. Hell descended on the party venue that had been filled with laughter.

Chapter 346 - (Hellish) Party (3)

“What the hell?”

Kim Si-Hun stared at the green tentacles in surprise. They looked familiar; they were the tentacles that were on Yogg-Saron, Satan’s subordinate, and he had also seen them when he had charged into the dungeon where Rakiel had been to rescue Oh Kang-Woo. Si-Hun did not hesitate for long.

“Sir Si-Hun!” Iris exclaimed. free(w)eb

Si-Hun summoned Holy Sword Ludwig and charged toward Marquess Berocca, who had turned into a hideous monster. He flew into the air while leaving afterimages that looked as if he was being stretched.

Slash—!

He split Marquess Berocca in two with a single slash. Yellow pus splashed all over the place as the green tentacle was cut. Si-Hun fluidly dodged the pus; it splashed on the floor of the imperial palace, which melted as soon as it came into contact with the pus.

“Wh-Whoaaa!”

The eyes of the nobles shone after watching Si-Hun cutting down the demonic beast with a single slash.

“P-Please save me!”

Tyrande Westwood, one of the noble ladies that had approached Si-Hun earlier, quickly ran toward Si-Hun. Behind her was a hideous Undead that looked as if eight legs were forcibly attached to it. As she was running with her face pale, a middle-aged man next to her yanked her.

“You’re just a bitch from a mere viscounty!” the man shouted as he threw Tyrande down toward the demonic beast. He waved at Si-Hun. “Please help me first!”

Crush!

“Grrrrrk!”

“Argh! Kurgh!”

However, the demonic beast ran right past Tyrande for some reason and attacked the middle-aged man first. It wrapped its eight legs around the man and bit down on his neck with its rotten teeth. Crimson blood sprayed everywhere.

“Shit!”

Si-Hun quickly shot a wave of sword energy to cut down the demonic beast, but the man whose neck had already been ripped apart by the demonic beast could no longer stand. Not just the man, but screams sounded out from all over the party venue. Si-Hun grimaced.

‘There are too many of them.’

Si-Hun could face these demonic beasts easily, but protecting the people from the demonic beasts was a whole other issue. It was impossible for him to eliminate the countless demonic beasts at once all by himself.

‘What are the guards doing?’

It had been over a minute since the commotion in the party venue sounded out, but there were no signs of guards arriving. Considering this venue was within the imperial palace, that was absolutely impossible; there was no way there would be no guards in an area where so many nobles were gathered.

‘If they’re not coming despite that, it means...’

The guards had likely been attacked by demonic beasts as well.

“Hyung-nim...”

Si-Hun looked around for Kang-Woo, but he was nowhere to be found. He could not see Han Seol-Ah, who had also attended the party, either.

‘I have to do it alone.’

Si-Hun gripped his sword tight. He could not let the demonic beasts run amok any longer.

“Huuu.”

He took a deep breath and spread the Qi in his dantian throughout his body. Every single one of his meridians were filled with enormous amounts of Qi.

'Don't be shackled by form.'

Si-Hun did not have any techniques that would be able to wipe out the countless demonic beasts in the party venue all at once, since he was but a swordsman who slayed demonic beasts with a sword.

'If my sword is the problem...'

Si-Hun closed his eyes and imagined the shape of a sword. A transparent sword made of Qi formed in his mind.

'I'll abandon the shape of a sword.'

Si-Hun manipulated the Formless Sword. It was but a weapon formed with his Qi; it did not necessarily have to be in the shape of a sword. It was such a simple thought that he had no idea why he hadn't thought about it earlier, but that simple thought brought about a massive change.

Slash, slash, slash!

"H-Huh?"

"Wh-What's going on?"

Hundreds of hands made of blue sword energy spread throughout the venue, tearing apart the hundreds of demonic beasts that had invaded the venue.

"Graaaaaaaaaahh!"

A few demonic beasts dodged the blue hands and charged toward Si-Hun. Si-Hun lowered his stance. If they were aiming for him instead of the people, there was no need for him to use Formless Sword.

'Heavenly Dragon...'

Si-Hun brought the sword to his waist as if to perform a sword draw technique. He twisted his hips with his right leg as the axis and swung Ludwig.

'Flash!'

Fwoosh!

Pure-white condensed sword energy surged from Ludwig. The ten-meter-long sword energy horizontally slashed the demonic beasts charging at him in half.

Fuuu. Si-Hun took a deep breath and raised himself up.

"Wow..."

"How can a person be so powerful...?"

The nobles who had witnessed Si-Hun's true power could not keep their mouths closed. Facing five hundred rebel army soldiers was nothing compared to what they had just witnessed, since they knew after experiencing the war against demons, just how powerful and terrifying demonic beasts were.

“It’s not over yet,” Si-Hun remarked quietly as he stared at the nobles who were walking toward him.

He walked to Iris’s side as if protecting her and stared at the wall of the venue. He could feel thick demonic energy from across it.

Crash!

“Grrrrrr!”

“Skreeeee!”

Just as Si-Hun had thought, the wall shattered, and demonic beasts poured into the venue from it. Although there were not as many as before, each of them was much stronger. They scanned Si-Hun from a distance instead of rushing in recklessly. Si-Hun gazed at the demonic beasts with sharp eyes.

‘They’re all Undead.’

There had not been a single demonic beast that had attacked the venue that was alive. They were all hideous monsters that looked as if they had been made by forcibly stitching dead demonic beasts together. They were more difficult to face because they did not stop their charge even if they were decapitated or dismembered. They needed to be slashed into bits to the point that they could no longer move.

Whooom.

Just then, the communication crystal in his pocket vibrated. After raising the crystal to check who it was, Si-Hun exclaimed, “Hyung-nim?!”

Kang-Woo’s voice flowed out from the crystal.

[Si-Hun. I’m in the VIP room, but...]

“Have the demonic beasts attacked that area as well?”

[Yeah.]

Like Si-Hun had thought, the party venue had not been the only place that was attacked.

“Hyung-nim, where could these demonic beasts have come from?”

[I have no idea. Kuh! These sons of bitches!]

“A-Are you okay, hyung-nim?!”

[I’ll take care of things here, so you protect the princess. Got it?]

“Understood, hyung-nim.” Si-Hun nodded and put the crystal back in his pocket. He turned to the nobles who had survived the first wave of demonic beast attacks and remarked, “Everyone, please gather around me.”

“G-Got it!”

“*Sniff! Waaaaah!*”

“What the hell are the guards doing?!”

The surviving nobles gathered around Si-Hun without hesitation. Si-Hun walked forward and adjusted his grip on his sword. He had not been able to save every noble because they were far too dispersed, but that was no longer the case.

Fuuu.

Si-Hun had consumed a considerable amount of Qi from using Formless Sword, but he was still fine. He could fight.

“Sir Si-Hun...”

“Please stay right behind me, Your Highness.”

Si-Hun stood right in front of Iris and focused. He glared at the demonic beasts. Facing these demonic beasts was not an issue for him. Although they were much stronger than the ones from the first wave, considering the fact that Si-Hun was strong enough to face the princes of Hell, demonic beasts of this level were nothing to him.

‘The problem is...’

He needed to fight while keeping the princess and the nobles safe. Fighting while protecting someone was far more difficult than fighting all by oneself.

‘Even so...’

Si-Hun gripped his sword tighter. It had been none other than Kang-Woo who had asked him to do it.

“Grrrrrr!!”

The demonic beasts that had only been watching began to charge. Si-Hun cut down the demonic beasts.

“Aaaahh. My subordinates...” Vernaak groaned.

He was watching a live feed of Si-Hun cutting down the demonic beasts.

“Kurgh. After all the time I had taken to create those Undead Chimeras...”

“Come on, you can always make more. I’ll help you out.” Kang-Woo lightly patted the dejected Vernaak’s shoulder.

Although half of the Undead demonic beast army that they had diligently made for the past few months before crossing to Aernor had been wiped out, it had been a necessary sacrifice.

“Ahem. I understand, Master.”

“More importantly, it’s almost time, my king,” Lilith expressed.

“Got it.”

Kang-Woo turned around. It was time for the main event of the (hellish) party that he had planned for Si-Hun. It was time to make the seed of demise sprout in Aernor.

'Let's do this.'

Kang-Woo leisurely walked toward the party venue.

'I've been wondering which coin to invest in this time.'

He had thought about Vaal Zahak at first. The demon king that the hero Reynald had defeated invading the continent once more was not a bad plot. However...

'It's too weak.'

Unlike what Vaal Zahak had boasted about, he had not been as infamous in Aernor as he had made himself out to be.

'It would be weird to create a completely new being as well.'

Kang-Woo could also make up a completely new character like he had done with Rakiel. He had not revealed the group known as the Four Heavenly Kings for nothing.

'But...'

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. Even if it was the same song, it being sung by a world-renowned singer versus a street performer was completely different. It was simply a matter of public recognition.

'It would be difficult to plunge the entire continent in fear if I used a completely new character.'

He needed to become a being that everyone in the continent knew and feared.

'Well... I say all that, but there's only one person who fits the bill.'

There was no need to think too deeply about it. Kang-Woo covered his face with his hands and used the ability he had acquired back in Shade.

"Mimicry."

Kang-Woo was enveloped in black shadow. He grew larger, and ten black wings sprouted from his back. Although they were black wings, they were different from those of a fallen angel. His hair grew longer, and his teeth grew sharper. Goat horns sprouted from his forehead, his skin turned light purple, and a long tail extended from around his butt. Treacherous crimson eyes shone.

Kang-Woo had transformed into Lucifer, the Prince of Pride, who was known as the Evil God in Aernor.

'Alright.'

Kang-Woo snickered at how perfect the transformation was. He walked toward the party venue where Si-Hun was fighting the demonic beasts.

'Let's begin.'

Kang-Woo took a deep breath.

[—————!!]

A demon roar that transcended sound itself shook the party venue. Hundreds of demonic beasts moved to clear a path for Kang-Woo and bowed down.

Step, step.

“Y-You’re...”

Kang-Woo could see Si-Hun’s eyes quivering. He smirked and spoke as if humming.

[It is nice to see you again, humans.]

He slightly bowed with his right hand on his chest as if he were a butler greeting his master.

[I am the almighty. I am the mocker. I bring demise to mortals, and am the master of the demonic, enchanted by pride.]

‘Shiet, I spent a whole week thinking about this fucking line, you know? Huh? Do you sons of bitches have any idea?’

[I am...]

Kang-Woo slowly raised his torso.

[... Lucifer.]

Silence fell on the party venue. Suffocating fear spread throughout the palace from the return of the Evil God.

‘Good, good!’

The plan was a massive success. Kang-Woo suppressed his laughter with all his might.

‘Yes, that’s it! This was the reaction I wanted to see!’

He couldn’t help but shrug in satisfaction from seeing the people stricken by fear.

“D-Dear!” Just then, a middle-aged woman who had been hiding in a corner called out to him. “Dear! Where have you been all this time...?!”

The woman trembled as if unable to believe what she was seeing. She ran up to Kang-Woo and embraced him with tears in her eyes.

“Sniff. I’ve missed you. I’ve been waiting for the day that we would meet again, my love.”

Kang-Woo looked down at the woman with silver hair.

[Pardon me?]

‘Who might you be?’

Chapter 347 - Advent of the Evil God (1)

‘What... the fuck?’

Oh Kang-Woo looked down dumbfoundedly at the silver-haired woman embracing him. She looked familiar; it was the middle-aged woman who had been staring into nothingness in sorrow while Iris had been introducing the nobles. She was just a nameless noble that not even Iris, who was quite knowledgeable about nobles, knew.

'But...'

Dear? My love?

'Wha...'

Kang-Woo couldn't understand what was going on. His thoughts were in jumbles, and his eyes quivered. He could not see any hint of lies in the middle-aged woman's eyes. He naturally thought about Lucis.

'He was born between a demon and a human.'

Kang-Woo recalled hearing something regarding Lucis when they first met, about how he had been discriminated against because he was a half-breed.

[Wait.]

If that was the case, that meant... Kang-Woo's eyes widened.

'Holy fuck. For real? She's Lucifer's wife?'

Kang-Woo felt dizzy as if his head had been smashed with a hammer. It was a bad joke. He had of course known that Lucifer's partner was a human since Lucis was a half-breed. He had also considered the possibility of her still being alive.

'But...'

How could he have possibly known that she would be in this party venue? There could not have been a worse coincidence. The back of his head hurt.

"Dear? What's wrong?"

'You, ma'am.'

[I am simply happy to see you.]

He suppressed the words of confusion from leaving his mouth as best as possible and embraced the middle-aged woman. Although he had no idea how things were turning out, he needed to play along for now.

'I can't afford to fail here because of such a stupid reason.'

Kang-Woo's eyes set ablaze with passion. The gears in his head turned in overdrive.

The middle-aged woman smiled brightly and mentioned, "Finally... The time must have come!"

'What time?'

[You've done well to wait this long.]

“H-Hohohoho!! I’ve waited so long to take my revenge against the nobles of this corrupt and depraved empire!”

‘Oh that’s what you meant. I don’t know when you guys talked about it, but it seems you’ve waited a long time. Plus, your fucking husband is nowhere in sight. You must’ve gone through a lot.’

[I will be hosting a party just for you tonight.]

“Aaaahh...! My love!!”

The middle-aged woman laughed maniacally while trembling.

‘Man, this lady isn’t right in the head either. I mean, I guess anyone who marries a prince of Hell would be.’

[I love you, darling.]

“Darling...?”

‘Oh, fuck. Should I not have called her that?’

“Hohoho! That’s so out of style!”

‘Out of style? What’s so out of style about it? Darling is the most affectionate way you could address your lover! You would’ve been decapitated in seconds if my darling heard you say that. Got it, lady?’

[Hahaha. Things like this are good every now and then.]

“Haaa. My love... But I love it the most when you call me by my name.”

‘Pardon me? Your name? What is your name, ma’am?’

“It’s been so long, so please call me by my name, my love.”

‘So what is that name of yours?’

[Well...]

“Hurry. Do you have any idea how worried I was when you just vanished without a word?”

‘Well, tell me your fucking name, then.’

[About that...]

“My, what are you so embarrassed about after all we’ve done?”

‘Wow, it seems you two have a very healthy relationship. Congratulations. However, I don’t think you did a very good job on the child-raising aspect. Anyway, what’s that name of yours?’

[...]

“What’s wrong, dear?”

‘That’s my line. What’s wrong with you, ma’am?’

“Please hurry up and call me by my name.”

‘I don’t know.’

“Hurry~”

‘I really don’t know.’

“Jeez, are you teasing me? I would’ve been fine with it normally, but I can’t endure it this time.”

‘Please, just endure it. Act your age, for God’s sake. You have a child.’

“Hurry! Call me by my name!”

‘For fuck’s sake.’

“My love!! Hurry!!”

‘I don’t knooooow! I don’t know, for fuck’s sake! I don’t even know who you are! Why the fuck are you even here?! Argh, fuck... My head.’

Kang-Woo’s head felt like it was about to explode. All sorts of curses swirled around his head. He had used the Authority of the Beholder in hopes of finding out her name like he could do for Players, but no status window popped up.

‘Ahh, I wanna hear it. Please lemme hear that goddamn bell chime.’

Kang-Woo bit his lip as he stared at the middle-aged woman yelling at him to call her name.

‘Since it’s come to this...’

He had no choice; he needed to muster up the resolve.

“Please call me by my—”

Whip. Kang-Woo yanked the middle-aged woman’s waist toward him. He leaned down and kissed her aggressively with tongue action.

“Ah...”

The eyes of the middle-aged woman widened. She became teary-eyed while trembling subtly.

Kang-Woo swept back her silver hair and said gently, [I’m sorry.]

“What do you mean, d—”

Kang-Woo shushed her with his finger.

[Do not say a word.] He stared at her in sorrow. [I left you without a word. I have... left you with a scar in your heart.]

'Hahaha. What the fuck am I even talking about?'

"Lucifer..."

[I...! I don't have the right... to call your name.]

"Lucifer!"

'Whoa, whoa. One kiss is enough, ma'am. Calm down. Please, calm down.'

"Sniff."

Kang-Woo gently grabbed the crying middle-aged woman's shoulders and asked, [Could you step aside for a second?]

"Yes, my love."

The middle-aged woman modestly bowed and stepped back. She then glared at the nobles while grinning mockingly.

"Hah." Kim Si-Hun chuckled in absurdity after hearing Lucifer's conversation with the middle-aged woman.

Although he knew that he should not be acting in such a way before the Evil God, he couldn't help but laugh at the spectacle he was shown.

"Lucifer." Si-Hun emitted bloodlust while baring his teeth. "So you were behind all this."

The sudden demonic beast attack, the demolished party venue, and everything else had all been planned by Lucifer.

'I heard he had suddenly vanished a few years ago, but...'

He had launched an attack out of the blue. Si-Hun frowned. It had been such perfect timing that it was hard to explain it as simply a coincidence.

'If it's not a coincidence...'

There was only one answer.

"Are you... serving the Demon of Prophecy as well?"

There were only two of the Four Heavenly Kings remaining after the deaths of Satan and Rakiel, and Si-Hun was certain that Lucifer was one of them.

[Who knows?] Lucifer smiled widely without answering the question.

Si-Hun raised his sword. "Well, it doesn't matter whether you're one of the Four Heavenly Kings or not." It did not change the fact that he was an enemy that Si-Hun needed to kill. Si-Hun gripped the holy sword tighter. "Those tainted by darkness... Receive the judgment of light!"

Si-Hun shouted the words of Ludwig, who had suffered a miserable death after having been corrupted by Satan. He charged toward the culprit of the incident using his foot technique, and swung down on Lucifer's head as if chopping firewood.

Rumble—!!

Lucifer slightly raised his hand. Black demonic energy gathered in front of it and blocked the holy sword pouring light. The holy sword and demonic energy clashed, forming a powerful shockwave. Si-Hun, who had been in the air, was flung backward. He twisted around mid-air and nimbly landed on his feet.

“Kuh.” Si-Hun bit his lip anxiously.

That impact should have formed a crater dozens of meters wide, but...

‘There’s... not even a scratch on the ground.’

It meant that Lucifer had completely offset the damage. No, that was not the right word to describe what had happened.

‘He absorbed the impact.’

Si-Hun's face turned pale from Lucifer's great power. He regretted having separated from his other party members.

[Young hero. It is not yet time for us to battle.]

“What are you talking about?”

[I mean that this party is not for you.] Lucifer grabbed the shoulder of the middle-aged woman next to him. [Today is meant only for her revenge.]

[You have no idea what she had to suffer in Arnan,] Lucifer mentioned faintly.

“What happened?” Si-Hun asked as he looked toward Iris.

Iris shook her head in pallor. “I-I don't k-know either...”

Si-Hun remained silent. It did not seem like she was lying. “What in the world could have...”

Si-Hun bit his lip and stared at the middle-aged woman. Since she had married a demon, one who was known as the Evil God no less, he was certain that it was no simple circumstance.

[I will have her expl—]

“No, Lucifer. Tell them yourself.”

[Huh? Me?]

“Tell them what those filthy and wicked nobles made me go through!”

Lucifer remained silent and then grabbed his head as if it hurt. He was panting and slightly trembling.

[I'm sorry. Just thinking about what you had to go through... I can barely contain my rage.]

“Dear...”

The middle-aged woman grabbed Lucifer's clothes while teary-eyed.

Lucifer covered her with his black wings and continued, [The reason matters not. Besides... It can never be undone.]

"You're right. Even if we tell them the reason, there's no way that those wicked beings would ever listen." The middle-aged woman nodded.

Lucifer slowly walked forward. The moonlight shone down on him through the cracks of the destroyed party venue walls. He raised both his arms as if he was praying to God.

[I declare in the name of Lucifer, the Prince of Pride!]

His thunderous voice shook the entire imperial castle. No, it was not just the castle.

"Wh-What?"

"L-Lucifer?"

"As in E-Evil God Lucifer? Wh-What?! What the hell is happening?!"

Lucifer's voice spread throughout the entire imperial capital. The people who had been asleep in their homes quickly opened their windows and turned toward the source of the sound. There, they saw... a giant black Rift dozens of meters tall above the imperial castle. Green tentacles spraying yellow pus wriggled out from the black Rift.

[Tonight, the Arnan Empire will drown in blood! And Aernor will meet its demise!]

The eyes of the middle-aged woman widened from Lucifer's declaration.

"D-Demise?"

'What? What the fuck is it now?'

"You never told me about that!"

'Yes, I really haven't.'

"Leaving the empire aside, if you destroy the c-continent..."

'What? Weren't you going about revenge and whatnot earlier? What's wrong this time?'

"Where is our Lucis supposed to live?!"

'Oh... Stop it. Just stop, ma'am.'

"Answer me, Lucifer!"

'Just fucking stop, please.'

[Fuck my life,] Lucifer muttered so that no one could hear him.

Chapter 348 - Advent of the Evil God (2)

[Don't worry, my dear.] Lucifer calmed down the middle-aged woman while smiling. [I have already thought of a place for our Lucis to live.]

“Wh-Where?” The woman looked up at Lucifer with shaking eyes.

Lucifer whispered while staring at Kim Si-Hun, [There is a world known as... Earth.]

“Earth...” The woman tilted her head in confusion from a word that she had never heard of before.

[We will start anew there.]

“Another world...”

The woman gulped from what she had never even thought about. It was certainly not a bad idea.

“I see, that was an option!” She nodded her head in delight.

“Earth, you say?” Si-Hun bared his teeth fiercely. He clenched the sword handle as if he were trying to break it and shouted, “I will not let you have your way!”

There was no way that he would allow the demon to lay his hands on Earth on top of Aernor. Si-Hun infused Ludwig with his Qi and elongated the condensed sword energy. Lucifer raised his hand as he stared at Si-Hun, who was about to charge toward him at any second.

[I believe I told you that this party is not for you.]

“What the hell are you talking about after pulling all this shit?!”

Lucifer pointed at the black Rift above the imperial castle while smiling. Hideous green tentacles were wriggling out from it. Undead demonic beasts that had attacked the party venue were also pouring out from it.

“Wh-What the...”

The problem was that they were not heading toward the castle, but toward the imperial capital. Si-Hun was not dumb enough to not know what that meant.

“You crazy son of a bitch!!”

It was not hard to imagine what would happen if those demonic beasts were left to run amok in the capital; countless people would be eaten alive by the demonic beasts. Although the capital could not be considered peaceful, many people lived in it, and Hell would befall them in an instant.

“Those people have done nothing!!”

That was true; if Lucifer was truly planning on taking revenge for that middle-aged woman, his targets should naturally only be the nobles.

[You’re absolutely right.] Lucifer nodded. [They did nothing.]

[All they did was blabber unsightly complaints. All they do is sit in bars and shout that the world is going wrong, as if that would change anything.]

They looked down at the world in arrogance.

[No one took action.]

They did not think, resist, nor act.

[Not even when they were pathetically spending their days like livestock. That is their sin.]

Lucifer slowly turned around. *Split*. A three-meter-tall Rift formed in front of him. He walked toward it.

“Where do you think you’re going?!”

Si-Hun could not afford to let Lucifer go. He quickly charged toward him, but...

[Do you have the leeway to face me?]

Si-Hun stopped in his tracks.

[There are still many beasts remaining in the castle.] Lucifer glanced at the demonic beasts that were bowing their heads toward him. [I command you, my retainers.]

He slowly raised his hand and pointed at Princess Iris behind Si-Hun.

“Eek!” Iris exclaimed while crouching.

Lucifer ordered without interest, [Kill her.]

“Skreeeee!!!”

“Grrrrr!!”

The demonic beasts that had been bowing down stood up and charged toward Iris while baring their teeth.

“Kuh!”

Si-Hun turned away from Lucifer and swung his sword at the demonic beasts.

[Well, then...] Lucifer waved his hand with his back toward Si-Hun. [I will be waiting for the day we meet again.]

Lucifer disappeared into the black Rift.

Oh Kang-Woo walked out into a dark plain outside the capital.

[Fuuu,] he sighed.

He was still in the form of Lucifer because there was still plenty of time until Mimicry would be undone.

[I guess the first step was a succ—]

“Lucifer, why have we left already?”

‘For fuck’s sake, why did you follow me, lady?’

Kang-Woo turned toward the voice.

‘How did she even manage to follow me?’

The black Rift that he had created using an Authority was one meant for demons, which only those with demonic energy could pass through. However, this woman had managed to pass through it without issue, meaning...

'I knew she wasn't just a normal human.'

Kang-Woo could feel thick demonic energy from her. The fact that she had not turned into a demon or demonic beast despite having such demonic energy meant that she had perfect control over it.

'A black mage, huh?'

He had heard that there were people in Aernor who possessed demonic energy but could still maintain their human appearance.

"Weren't you going to tear the nobles apart in front of me?"

The middle-aged woman stared at Lucifer, unable to understand why he had left the venue right when they were about to exact their revenge. Kang-Woo fell into thought while staring at her.

'Should I kill her?'

Si-Hun was no longer here, so it would be a piece of cake to end the facade and eliminate her.

'No.'

Kang-Woo shook his head. He couldn't afford to get rid of the valuable pawn that was Lucifer's wife.

'I'm sure she'll be of use later on.'

He had no idea where the real Lucifer was nor what he was doing. This woman could be able to become the link between Kang-Woo and Lucifer.

[No, it is not yet the right time.]

"What do you mean?! We could have killed them all right then and there!" the middle-aged woman shouted angrily.

Horrifying bloodlust poured out from her crumpled face.

'Witch.'

The woman wrapped in madness perfectly matched the word that popped up in Kang-Woo's mind.

'A witch, huh?'

He smiled and approached her. He swept back her silver hair and caressed her cheek.

[Calm down.]

Kang-Woo continued softly, [Death is nothing.]

"Pardon?"

[I said, death is nothing.] *Snicker.* Kang-Woo continued as his eyes filled with madness, [Only life is true agony.]

“Ah...”

The woman trembled, and her eyes opened wide. She could easily understand what Lucifer was trying to say.

[Are you truly okay for your revenge to end so easily?]

“N-No! I can't let it end like this, after everything I've been through!” the woman answered while nodding furiously.

Kang-Woo smiled. [In that case, trust me and wait just a little longer.]

“Okay. I'll wait. I will wait as long as I need to, my love.”

The middle-aged woman entered Kang-Woo's embrace, and they kissed passionately once again.

“Lucifer..”

The woman slightly pulled down her dress with her eyes hazy.

‘Whoa, whoa. Calm down, ma’am. Calm down.’

“Hngh, Lucifer..”

‘Calm down! Fucking calm dooooooown!’

[I'm sorry. It's time for me to go.]

“What do you mean, you have to go? A-Are you going to leave me again?”

Lucifer turned around, his eyes filled with sorrow. [I'm sorry I cannot stay by your side.]

“D-Don't go, Lucifer! Take me with you!”

[I cannot do that.]

“Why?”

[I... cannot tell you right now.]

Lucifer lightly trembled, and then turned around to embrace her fiercely again.

[One day... I will tell you everything.]

“Lucifer..”

Transparent tears flowed down the woman's cheeks. Lucifer gradually began to turn into black smoke.

“L-Lucifer!”

The woman grabbed Lucifer in surprise, but he only slipped through her grasp. Lucifer, who was disappearing in smoke, reached his hand out toward her, their hands overlapping in the air.

[Until we meet again...]

“Okay! I will wait, Lucifer! No matter how long it takes, I...!”

Lucifer completely vanished without being able to hear the final part of her sentence.

“Haaa, haaa!”

Si-Hun, who had cut down hundreds of demonic beasts, panted heavily. The demonic beasts with green tentacles were far stronger than the ones from the first wave that had attacked the party venue.

“The guards! The imperial guards have arrived!”

“Where the hell have you been?!”

Several people might have died if the imperial guards had not come as reinforcements. Si-Hun quickly turned around after having managed to kill every single demonic beast in the castle. The crisis was not over yet.

‘The capital is in danger.’

The demonic beasts that had poured out from the Rift in the air were heading to the capital.

“Your Highness! We must stop the demonic beasts from reaching the capital!”

“O-Okay! I understand!” Iris nodded and turned her head toward the guards.

“Imperial guards, hear me! Set out from the castle immediately and protect the citiz —”

While she was commanding the imperial guards, her expression suddenly froze and she turned pale.

“Huh...? Wh-Why?”

Iris grabbed her head, unable to understand. She began to tremble.

“Your Highness?” Si-Hun frowned.

Iris stuttered, “I-Imperial guards... S-Stay here and protect the c-castle.”

“What are you saying?!” Si-Hun yelled with his eyes wide.

The demonic beasts were heading to the capital, but she wanted to leave the imperial guards here?

“Argh...”

Iris bit her lip in pallor. She averted her gaze from Si-Hun and lowered her head, her hands clenching on her dress shaking.

“Th-There might still be demonic beasts remaining in the castle. I-Imperial guards... p-protect the castle.”

Si-Hun bared his teeth from the absurdity. “Your Highness!”

He clenched his teeth while glaring at Iris, but she only lowered her head in pallor.

‘Shit!’

Si-Hun could not afford to waste any more time. He quickly turned around and ran toward the bridge connecting the imperial castle and the capital. The demonic beasts that were trying to head to the capital were gathered there. They were crossing the bridge extremely slowly for some reason.

“Skreeeee!!”

“Kuh!”

Si-Hun blocked the bridge to the capital and raised his sword. Hundreds of demonic beasts had come out from the Rift.

‘I’ll protect them.’

Si-Hun quickly glanced back. The citizens of the empire had come out due to the huge commotion and were staring at Si-Hun facing the demonic beasts in surprise. Si-Hun’s heart set ablaze.

‘Whatever it takes!’

Fwoosh—!!

White light burst out from Si-Hun, dyeing the darkness white.

“Shit, shit, shit!” An old man in white vestments was swearing in a luxurious room. He shouted with a shaky voice, “E-Evil God Lucifer... Wh-What the hell is going on?!”

His expression crumpled.

“She wants to let the imperial guards out in a situation like this? Crazy bitch!”

Pant, pant. Fidelio’s shoulders trembled in fury. He clenched the transparent orb in his hand so hard that it could break. It was a magic tool imbued with telepathy magic. Unlike a communication crystal that only transmitted sound, this was an advanced magic tool that could transmit one’s voice directly into a target’s brain. If Fidelio had not taken quick measures, Iris would have sent the imperial guards to the capital.

“It seems...” Fidelio’s eyes narrowed. It seemed he would have to give Iris another *lesson*.

“Fuuu,” Fidelio sighed and leaned back on a chair.

It felt like his plan that had been going smoothly was going awry as of late.

“And those morons that joined forces with a black mage... What in the world...”

The rebel army that he had supplied with various armaments and training instructors had joined forces with a black mage out of the blue, but they had failed in the one job they had despite that.

‘Useless sons of bitches.’

Fidelio frowned as if his head hurt. Just then, someone knocked on his door, and the door slowly opened.

“You’re...” Fidelio turned toward the uninvited guest that had entered his room.

“Oh, I’m glad you see you’re alright.” The young man with sharp eyes extended his hand toward Fidelio while smiling brightly. “We’ve met before, haven’t we? My name is Oh Kang-Woo.”

Chapter 349 - Walking Past the Back (1)

“Ohh, you’re Sir Kim Si-Hun’s brother.” Fidelio grabbed the hand that Oh Kang-Woo had extended with a smile. He shook his head with a dark expression and said, “I’ve heard what was going on. *Fuuu...* If Sir Si-Hun had not been in the imperial castle, I can’t even imagine the atrocity that would have occurred here.”

“Did you not attend the party, Prime Minister Fidelio?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Hahaha. I had some work to do. As an elder, it is my duty to shoulder the work for the young princess,” Fidelio mentioned while chuckling as he glanced at the pile of documents on the table.

Kang-Woo smirked.

‘Oh, of course you’d be busy.’

After all, he was controlling the entire continent through the princess. Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and used the Authority of the Beholder; the transparent orb that Fidelio had been holding before he entered the room came into view.

‘He must’ve used that to command her.’

Kang-Woo had been able to feel the mana connected to Iris’s body the moment her expression froze in the party venue. The thread of mana had been connecting her and that transparent orb.

“Haaa. I’ve heard about the situation in the party venue, as well as Her Highness’s decision...” Fidelio continued while sighing, “Please do not think badly of Her Highness because she did not send the imperial guards to the capital. I’m sure she was scared due to the sudden crisis.”

Kang-Woo chuckled.

‘You’ve got some brains, I’ll give you that.’

Fidelio had so naturally pinned Iris as the culprit who had stopped the imperial guards from taking action. Considering Kang-Woo had come to visit Fidelio without warning, it had been a very quick judgment on Fidelio’s part.

“I understand. My party is stopping the demonic beasts from reaching the capital,” Kang-Woo expressed.

“Phew, what a relief. I can’t even imagine what would’ve happened if you all weren’t here...”

“Not at all. More importantly, I’m glad to see you’re alright, Prime Minister.”

“Hahaha. Thank you for worrying about an old man like me.” Fidelio smiled gently and bowed.

Kang-Woo let go of Fidelio’s hand and turned around. “Now that I’ve confirmed that you’re safe, I will excuse myself.”

“Are you leaving already?”

Since Kang-Woo had more or less figured out what sort of person Fidelio was, there was no more reason for him to stay here.

“I can’t leave Si-Hun fighting all by himself.”

“But I’ve heard that you’re not a great fighter..”

“But I know how to fight, at the very least. Though I’m nothing compared to Si-Hun.”

“Ohh, I see.” Fidelio nodded. He continued as his eyes shone, “I would like to have a meal with Sir Si-Hun one day.”

It was obvious what Fidelio had in mind. Kang-Woo was sure that Fidelio was made aware of Si-Hun’s astounding combat prowess that he had shown in the party venue.

‘The situation has changed for him.’

Although defeating five hundred rebel army soldiers all by oneself was very impressive, it was not to the point that Fidelio would do anything to get his hands on Si-Hun. As proof of that, Fidelio had not approached Si-Hun nor anyone in Kang-Woo’s party after offering them their VIP rooms. However, wiping out Evil God Lucifer’s subordinates was a completely different story.

“Haha, Understood.”

Kang-Woo softly laughed and turned around. Even if Fidelio had not asked for it, he had been planning on arranging a meeting between the two.

‘Soon.’

Kang-Woo smiled widely.

The news of the advent of Evil God Lucifer stirred the entirety of Aernor. Not only had the Evil God, who had vanished without a trace a few years ago, come back, his declaration of the continent’s demise was enough to relight the fear that had been deeply rooted in the hearts of the continent’s residents.

Si-Hun’s name spread throughout the continent like wildfire at the same time as the fear of Lucifer surged within the people. He was the hero who had protected the imperial capital from demonic beasts. Just seeing him stopping the horde of demonic beasts from crossing the narrow bridge between the castle and the capital had been enough to capture the hearts of the people. However, the expression of the hero himself was not bright at all.

“Haaa,” Si-Hun sighed. He stared at Kang-Woo in worry. “Hyung-nim...”

“We had expected this to happen, Si-Hun.”

They had already expected that the Demon of Prophecy would not stand idly by as Kang-Woo’s party continued their Aernor expedition.

“But thanks to that, the conditions have been fulfilled,” Kang-Woo expressed.

“Conditions?”

“I told you in the beginning, didn’t I? Once the continent is sent to the brink of collapse after the Demon of Prophecy takes action, the high elves will appear.”

“Oh.”

Si-Hun had completely forgotten about the high elves because of the appearance of Evil God Lucifer. fre(e)

He groaned and asked, “When will they appear?”

“How should I know? But it’s an undeniable fact that the conditions have been partially fulfilled.”

Evil God Lucifer had declared the continent’s demise, and Si-Hun had gained fame exceeding that of Reynald. They had met the fundamental requirements for a high elf to manifest.

‘Though it’s still lacking.’

Kang-Woo’s eyes shone sharply. He did not hope for a high elf to appear after barely having done anything. It had only been a few days since Evil God Lucifer had descended. Also, there had not been many casualties from this incident. It was far too lacking of a situation for the continent to be considered on the brink of collapse.

‘But we’ve taken the first step.’

This operation had been a huge success. Although there had been an unexpected variable midway, it had been a huge success purely in terms of results. Si-Hun’s name had spread throughout the continent, and people were praising him one after the other.

‘Maybe I should’ve tried to build it up better.’

Whatever the case, the result had been beyond perfect despite the plan having only just begun.

‘Now then...’

It was time to prepare for the next part of the plan.

“Si-Hun, you’ll have to go around.”

“Go around? What do you mean?”

“You know, like congresspersons going on election campaigns for votes. There are a bunch of rumors about you, but barely anyone has seen you in person.”

“That’s... true.”

“Show your face to the people, and make bullshit small talk with merchants about how hard life is nowadays and that you’ll change this nation for the better.”

“Haha... I think I know what you mean.” Si-Hun nodded while smiling awkwardly. “But wouldn’t that be dangerous to do when we have no idea what Lucifer is planning?”

“We’re doing it exactly because we don’t know what he’s planning. We can’t let him have his way, can we? Besides, Lucifer probably doesn’t know that we’re trying to use his advent to manifest a high elf either.”

“I guess... you’re right.” Si-Hun nodded.

If he were Lucifer, he would likely have no idea about what Kang-Woo was planning.

“Using Lucifer’s advent to our advantage...” Si-Hun nodded in succession. “As expected of you, hyung-nim.”

Anyone could have thought of such a plan if they racked their brain even a little, but Si-Hun had not even thought to pull off such a thing due to having been so intimidated by Lucifer.

Si-Hun continued with a smile, “You don’t seem to be scared of Lucifer at all, hyung-nim.”

“Huh?”

That was obvious, since Lucifer had not actually appeared.

“I... didn’t even think to use this crisis as an opportunity because I was scared of losing more comrades like in the past against Satan.”

“Hahaha. That just goes to show how much I trust you. I’m scared too, man.”

‘I didn’t even manage to get any sleep last night.’

“Anyway, get out of the castle and go around the empire. You can go around with Balrog’s party if you want to.”

“Huh? You’re not coming with me, hyung-nim?” Si-Hun asked, wide-eyed.

He subtly trembled at the fact that he would be separated from Kang-Woo. Si-Hun looked at Kang-Woo pitifully as if he were an abandoned puppy looking up at its owner.

‘What the hell, man? You didn’t say much when you were separated from Layla. Why are you like this with me?’

Kang-Woo shook his head with an awkward smile. “I have things left to do here.”

“Ah...”

‘Don’t make that face, Si-Hun. You’re making me cringe— No, scratch that.’

“I don’t want to separate from you either, but I don’t think I can go with you this time,” Kang-Woo mentioned.

“It’s okay, hyung-nim.” Si-Hun responded in all seriousness. “I’ll do my best so I don’t disappoint you.”

“Okay, man.”

‘My cute little bro.’

“I’ll trust you, Si-Hun.”

Kang-Woo patted Si-Hun’s shoulder and stood up.

Si-Hun left the imperial castle as per Kang-Woo’s instructions. Iris tried to stop him while in tears, but Si-Hun left without looking back after promising her that he would come back soon.

“*Fufu*. Are you feeling lonely after being separated from your little brother?” Lilith giggled while having her hand on Kang-Woo’s shoulder.

“Lonely, my ass. I’m glad I have one less person to care about,” Kang-Woo answered bluntly.

Lilith held in her laughter while covering her mouth. “You say that, but even this morning, you were just standing in front of Si-Hun’s room—”

“Shut up.”

“My, I apologize.”

Lilith giggled innocently; she seemed to have grown quite fond of teasing Kang-Woo lately.

“More importantly, have you finished with the investigation?” Kang-Woo asked.

“About Lucifer’s wife?”

“Yeah.” Kang-Woo nodded.

She had been the one variable that he had not expected in the previous operation. No, it would have been impossible for him to have expected it. He needed to figure out who she was in advance.

“My apologies. I have not yet been able to create an effective information network in this world. Could you wait a little longer?”

“Yeah, it’s fine. I’m not in a rush. But wouldn’t she be a noble of high peerage if she was invited to the party?”

“Well... She seems to have forged her identity. After some investigation, even her invitation letter seems to have been forged.”

“Hmm.” Kang-Woo nodded.

‘Well, I’m sure I can just leave it to Lilith.’

“In that case...”

Kang-Woo got up from the chair.

“Are you planning on going to see Iris?” Lilith asked.

“Yeah.”

The reason why Kang-Woo had remained here was to fix the princess’s twisted personality and to devise a plan to change her witch image among the public.

‘I’ll have to take care of that shitty personality of hers first.’

Iris’s hysteria had become even worse after the previous incident. Since her true personality was exactly like that of the rumors, he wasn’t able to devise a plan to rectify it.

“I’m off, then,” Kang-Woo said to Lilith, and then left the room.

His mind was full of thoughts about Iris.

‘Did Fidelio place some sort of brainwashing magic on her?’

It was a possibility, considering how she had been trembling in fear. Kang-Woo used the Authority of Stealth and headed to Iris’s room.

Shatter—!!

“Out! Get out!!”

Just then, a hysterical voice echoed throughout the hallway. Kang-Woo headed to the source of the sound and saw a woman leaning on the wall of the hallway, crying.

“Sniff, sniff...”

It was Siesta, one of Iris’s maids. She was crying while having one hand on her swollen right cheek.

‘What the hell?’

Kang-Woo watched over the situation while frowning.

“I-I’m sorry, Your Highness...”

Siesta bowed in front of Iris’s room door while crying, and then turned around.

‘Is she acting like this because Si-Hun went away?’

Kang-Woo entered Iris’s room while completely dumbfounded, but his expression froze soon after.

“Sniff... Hurgh. Waaaaahh.” Iris was crying while on her knees on the bed. “No more... I-I can’t take any more... *Sniff.* Brother... Brother...”

Her clothes were loose as if they had been ripped apart, and her hair was completely disheveled. Her cheeks were bruised as if she had been punched. Kang-Woo could see sheets stained with some sort of fluid under the blanket that Iris was using to cover herself with.

“Hah,” Kang-Woo feigned laughter.

A chill ran down his spine. It was not hard to deduce who had done this to her.

'Fidelio... You're far crazier than I had thought.'

Chapter 350 - Walking Past the Back (2)

Oh Kang-Woo had thought brainwashing magic to be the most likely. If not, he had also thought of the possibility of Fidelio having taken advantage of Iris's unstable mental state and put her through chronic hypnosis.

'Turns out it was nothing like that.'

Fidelio was controlling Iris through simple and primitive violence. It was so simple that Kang-Woo felt like an idiot for having thought of complicated possibilities for this long.

'Crazy old fucker.'

Even though Fidelio held the true power in the empire, laying one's hands on an imperial princess was absolutely insane.

"Hurgh... *Sniff*. Waaaahh."

Kang-Woo stared at the crying Iris. After taking a closer look, there was fluid smeared on her mouth, and it reeked like organic waste.

'... It reeks?'

Kang-Woo looked at the fluid staining the bed sheet again while tilting his head.

'Oh.'

It was vomit. Kang-Woo used the Authority of Transparency to take a look at Iris, who had covered herself with a blanket. Although her top was loose, her bottom was left untouched.

"*Fuuu,*" Kang-Woo sighed in relief, unbeknownst to himself.

However, he grimaced and shook his head moments after.

'No, this isn't something to be relieved over.'

Just the fact that Iris had been struck to the point that she vomited was crazy enough. It did not change the fact that Fidelio had laid his hands on an imperial princess. Kang-Woo recalled how pale she had gotten whenever the imperial capital was mentioned, and how she had trembled as if she was freezing.

'I see. I see why now.'

Kang-Woo slowly closed his eyes. He recalled the sorrowful Douglas. His words echoed in Kang-Woo's head.

- I at least want you to know that it is not entirely her fault.

Kang-Woo's thoughts were jumbled. An unpleasant feeling lingered around him.

"Wh-What? Who's there?"

Possibly having heard Kang-Woo's feigned laughter, Iris wiped her tears and looked around.

Kang-Woo turned away from her, thinking that she wouldn't want others to see her in this state. Just then...

“Oh Kang-Woo?”

“...!”

Kang-Woo's eyes widened.

‘How?’

He was currently using the Authority of Stealth. It would have been a different story if he had been noticed by someone with extremely heightened senses like Kim Si-Hun, but there was no way that Iris would have been able to sense him.

“You're Oh Kang-Woo... aren't you?”

Kang-Woo turned his head. He saw that Iris's eyes were shining gold.

‘The blessing of the high elves.’

There was nothing but the power to detect the demonic, which was passed down through imperial blood, that would have allowed Iris to be able to detect him.

“Yes, I am.”

Having no choice now that he was discovered, Kang-Woo dispelled the Authority of Stealth. Kang-Woo appeared in the dark room.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-Why are you...”

Iris stared at Kang-Woo with shaking eyes. She glared at him with slight bloodlust while pulling in the blanket to cover her bruises.

“Since when were you here?” she asked.

“I only just arrived.”

Deathly silence fell.

Iris mumbled while lowering her head, “Get out.” She screamed while holding back her tears, “Out! Get out!! Get out right now!!”

Kang-Woo felt pity from her mad screams.

Kang-Woo looked up to the ceiling.

‘What should I do? How should I handle this? Should I console her first? Ah, you must've been in such agony until now. Fidelio, that fucker, he's a piece of shit. That must be why your personality is so shit. Yeah, I understand it all. It can't be helped since you had to go through something like this.’

She must have gone through a very hard time.

‘Fuck that.’

Such empty words were a pointless form of consolation. Consoling her right here and now would be nothing but a way for him to lighten the burden in his heart.

'Considering the state she's in...'

The problem would not be resolved even if Kang-Woo were to eliminate Fidelio. Her memories of Fidelio would not vanish just because the person himself did; Kang-Woo was sure of it just from the fact that Iris was barely able to look at Fidelio in the eyes. Her fear of him had already been deeply rooted in her soul.

'It won't disappear.'

The fear that had been branded on her soul would not disappear. She would have to live on with that horrifying agony for the rest of her life. It was already far too late for Kang-Woo to do anything about it.

Kang-Woo stared at the trembling Iris; she was bawling her eyes out while scrunched up. Did that mean she would have to live this way forever? Would she have to stay imprisoned by fear, covered in unhealable scars for the rest of her life?

Kang-Woo slightly opened his eyes. There was one way to eradicate the deeply-rooted fear in her heart.

'But...'

Conflict momentarily clashed in his mind. It was difficult to eradicate her trauma through normal means; in other words, the method that he had thought of was not a normal means. Hence, the aftereffects would be massive. Kang-Woo closed his eyes.

'What should I do?'

Should he leave Iris to be imprisoned by fear for the rest of her life?

'Or...'

Should he erase the fear in her heart while letting her suffer the aftereffects?

"Why... Why..." Iris muttered.

She was trembling with her hand on her swollen right cheek.

Kang-Woo did not have to think for very long. He slowly opened his eyes.

"Did Fidelio do this?" he asked despite already knowing the answer.

"What does it matter to you? Didn't I tell you to get out?! Go away! Get out!!" Iris screamed like a wounded beast.

She picked up a lamp next to her bed and threw it at Kang-Woo. He easily deflected it. *Shatter!* The lamp broke, and transparent glass shards scattered across the floor.

"Please, please..." Iris sobbed, transparent tears flowing down her cheeks. She begged, "Get... out."

Kang-Woo did not listen; he slowly walked toward her. *Step, step.* The small sound of footsteps filled the room.

“And then what?” Kang-Woo stared at her with deeply sunken eyes. “What’re you gonna do after I get out?”

“What?”

Iris’s eyes widened. She was more shocked by the content of his sentence than the fact that he was talking to her disrespectfully.

‘Did you think I was gonna console you? Empathize with you? Would shit like that be able to save you?’

“I asked you what you were gonna do after I left.”

“Y-You...!” Iris frowned.

“Are you just gonna take it lying down while trembling in fear? Is trembling pathetically all you’re capable of doing?”

Iris remained silent. She bit her lip and said in a shaky tone, “Then... What do you want me to do?” More tears flowed down her cheeks. She screamed, “What was I supposed to do?!”

Kang-Woo chuckled. “What did you do until now, then?”

“What?”

“I get that you suffered at Fidelio’s hands, but what did you do to get away from it?”

“I...”

“Are you gonna say that you weren’t able to? Because Fidelio held all the power?”

Kang-Woo smirked. “No, there’s no fucking way. All that power wouldn’t have gone straight to Fidelio’s hands, would it?”

“Th-That’s because Brother—”

“Yeah, I get that it happened because Reynald died, but had there been absolutely no one who offered to help you, who held the most right to that power as the one next in line for the throne?”

Iris refrained from answering.

“Well, fine. Let’s say that it ended up that way after you kept yielding to Fidelio. But even so, you could’ve at least told Si-Hun about it, couldn’t you?”

Iris had seen Si-Hun’s impressive combat prowess with her own eyes, meaning she also knew that he was capable of saving her. However, she did not tell her; she did not beg to grab hold of that opportunity.

“Why? Because you were scared? Of Fidelio? Did you not even attempt to grab on to a sliver of hope because of a crappy reason like that?”

Kang-Woo recalled his miserable and wretched days in Hell. Even though he had been scared, he had fought through it. He drank the blood of demons and devoured their flesh. He abandoned everything purely for the sake of victory.

Iris continued to remain silent.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue as he stared at her.

‘Bullshitting is so damn hard.’

His argument was a fallacy.

‘There’s no way she would’ve been able to resist.’

What he had said to Iris was like telling a victim of domestic, school, or any other forms of violence why they did nothing to stop their parents, teachers, or any other perpetrator from beating them up. People became powerless when fear was rooted deep in their hearts.

‘But...’

That fact would not solve anything. Sympathizing with such logic would not eliminate the fear that had rooted itself in Iris’s heart. Kang-Woo needed to make Iris think of her own accord that she had been mistaken all this time, or she would remain a scarred victim her whole life. For her to overcome her fear, she needed to stand on her own two feet.

“All you did was vent your anger on others,” Kang-Woo stated.

Iris had simply tried to make herself feel better by taking her pent-up rage out on the weak.

“Y-You’re wrong.” Iris shook her head.

“You just complained about how much you were suffering, that’s all.”

“You’re wrong!!” Iris shouted.

A glint of bloodlust shone in her eyes. Hatred began to sprout from within her.

‘Good.’

Kang-Woo had waited for this response.

“What am I wrong about?” he asked.

“W-Well...” Iris was lost for words. She trembled while biting her lip. She lowered her head and mumbled, “Then... What should I... have done? What am I supposed to do?”

Kang-Woo tilted his head and asked back, “What do you want to do?”

“Tell me what you want to do most right now.”

“You... know what it is.”

Kang-Woo did indeed know; he was not stupid enough not to. However...

“I wanna hear you say it.”

Iris had been under Reynald’s protection her whole life. Even after Reynald had died, she was curled up behind his back, trembling in fear.

‘At that rate, she’ll never be able to come out from there.’

Silence fell. Iris shut her eyes tightly while trembling.

She whispered, “... enge.”

‘I can’t hear you.’

“I want to... take revenge,” Iris answered with her head lowered.

“Really? In that case... beg.”

“ What?”

Kang-Woo continued with deeply sunken eyes, “I said, beg for my help. Get on your knees, put your head on the floor and plead for it.”

Kang-Woo was forcing her to abandon everything for the sake of victory. Iris’s expression froze.

“What? Your pride won’t stand for it?”

Iris closed her eyes. As she was about to say something...

Shatter!

“Wh-What? Why are you...”

A voice was heard from the door, belonging to an old man who was wearing casual clothes instead of his usual white vestments. Fidelio glared at Kang-Woo after dropping the bottle of alcohol that had been in his hand.

“Your Highness, what is the meaning of this?” Fidelio asked.

“A-Aaaahh...”

Iris turned pale, her teeth clattering as she trembled.

“That’s what I want to ask you,” Kang-Woo interrupted. He slowly reached out to touch Iris’s swollen cheek. “What have you done to Iris?”

Fidelio flinched. After racking his brain, he answered calmly, “It was a lesson.”

‘A lesson?’

“You could call it... tough love. You know how Her Highness acted during the incident at the imperial castle,” Fidelio continued.

“Th-That’s—!” Iris expressed.

“Be quiet.”

Fidelio glared at Iris, who then lowered her head as she was about to say something.

“Tough love, you say?” Kang-Woo responded.

‘You call a beating to the point of her vomiting a lesson?’

Silence stretched out for a moment.

“Pfft.” Laughter managed to squeeze out from Kang-Woo’s mouth. He let it burst out without restraint, grabbing his stomach. “Bahahahahahahaha!!! Fuck, man. You have a better sense of humor than I thought.”

Fidelio lightly bit his lip and then responded calmly, “This is not for outsiders to get involved in. I had no choice but to do it to guide Princess Iris toward the right path.” He continued while grabbing his chest as if the act had truly hurt him, “I did not want to do something so brutal to Her Highness either. But... I had no choice but to be tough on her... All because I love her!”

“Jesus fucking Christ.”

‘That’s quite the poker face you have there.’

Kang-Woo was genuinely impressed by how Fidelio could bullshit so hard in such a situation. His bullshittery was honestly a work of art.

Fidelio glared at Kang-Woo in displeasure. He turned to Iris and said, “Tell him yourself, Your Highness. Tell him why I had no choice but to hit you.”

“Princess Iris.” Fidelio continued while aggressively clenching his fists, “Go ahead and tell him.”

“U-Umm...”

Iris looked at Kang-Woo in pallor. Kang-Woo simply waited for her to speak without a word.

Iris continued while trembling and with her head lowered, “Y-Yes. Prime Minister Fidelio was... g-giving me some... tough love... all for my... sake. He has done... nothing... wr-wrong.”

She bit her lip, shuddering pitifully.

“You heard Her Highness.” Fidelio approached and aggressively gripped Kang-Woo’s shoulder. “Even if you are one of Her Highness’s saviors, I cannot let this slide.”

Kang-Woo paid him no mind.

“I’m sure you know how grave a sin it is to trespass on Her Imperial Highness’s chambers.”

Kang-Woo ignored Fidelio. His attention was only on Iris, who was trembling in pallor. There was no point in him trying to give her any more of a helping hand. It was all up to her now.

“Iris,” Kang-Woo called.

‘If you want to win, abandon it all. What remains of your pride, the fear pushing you down, and that back you’re hiding behind... Everything.’

Iris's teeth clattered. Her fear of Fidelio and the horrifying memories dominated her mind.

'Brother...'

The dependable back that had always been protecting her... Iris had spent her days in joy while hiding behind that back. Once that back vanished, she was left fully exposed to hands stained with greed.

- What did you do until now, then?

Iris could not refute the fact that she had done nothing.

- Had there been absolutely no one who offered to help you?

There had been. Douglas and the members of Reynald's party, who had gone on countless adventures together with Reynald, had offered their help, but Iris did not accept their help; she simply shrunk down in fear.

- Why? Because you were scared?

She was scared. Scared of the retaliation worsening, and of more pain. Hence, she said nothing; she was unable to say a word. She did not fight; she gave up on fighting.

- Did you not even attempt to grab on to a sliver of hope because of a crappy reason like that?

"A-Arrgghh." Iris grabbed her head. "Urgh... Arghh..."

She saw Reynald's back. For the very first time, she slowly walked past the back that had always protected her.

"H..." Iris looked up at Kang-Woo with quivering eyes. "H-Help."

Kang-Woo snickered. "That's a rather rude way of begging someone for help."

Iris slowly put her forehead on the floor. She said again while weeping, "P-Please... help me. Please... Please help me!"

'Very good.'

"Your Highness, what are you say—"

Kang-Woo grabbed the wrist of Fidelio's arm that was on his shoulder.

"Tough love, was it?"

'You had no choice because you love her, right?'

"Fidelio."

'I have a confession to make.'

"I love you too, motherfucker."

Bash—!!

Kang-Woo pulled on Fidelio's arm and punched him in the face.