

## M. in Hell 351

Chapter 351 - Walking Past the Back (3)

“Oh, fuck,” Oh Kang-Woo expressed.

*‘He’s not dead, is he? That’d be bad.’*

Kang-Woo looked down at the fist he had used to punch Fidelio.

*‘Dammit, I held back quite a lot on that.’*

He had held back to a level that he would use to wipe off dust from his hands; no, even more than that. He had not even used a single speck of demonic energy, but...

“Kurgh! Guuuu...”

“Hey, you good? Whoa, you lost a few teeth. Your nose is a bit crooked too, I think.”

“Y-You bastaaaaard!!”

“But for real, I held back a lot on that, okay? Come to think of it, I’m older than you. Why are you talking down to me, fucker?”

Fidelio glared at Kang-Woo.

Clack!

“Oh, what’s with these guys?”

As Kang-Woo turned around while snickering, twelve knights wearing black armor appeared out of nowhere and surrounded him. Sharp swords were pointed at his neck, eyes, heart and groin. Kang-Woo whistled.

“Holy shit, that’s some badass armor. But I think you guys messed up the timing for your appearance a little.”

*‘You should’ve appeared before I fucking decked Fidelio in the face. Just look at him, he’s crawling on the floor with blood pouring out from his nose.’*

“Also, do you mind not pointing your sword there, my guy? My Fran?ois is trembling in fear.”

*‘He’s already lifeless enough as it is, you fucking sons of bitches.’*

“You son of a bitch...” Fidelio got up on his feet. He glared at Kang-Woo with bloodlust, but then closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Do you seriously believe... this will go unpunished?”

Fidelio had regained his composure much faster than Kang-Woo had expected. He had not managed to take control over the empire by a fluke.

“Princess Iris,” Fidelio called.

“E-Eek!” Iris exclaimed while flinching as Fidelio glared at her.

She crouched with tears flowing down her cheeks.

“It seems you will need... a harsher lesson once this is over.”

“N-No... N-No more...”

Iris trembled while stuffing her head between her knees.

“Enough of that shit.” Kang-Woo smirked and stepped forward. “You’ve way overused that trope.”

*‘That shit has overstayed its welcome.’*

“Halt,” said the knight in black armor, who was pointing his sword at Kang-Woo’s groin.

“Hey.” Kang-Woo slightly twisted his torso and clenched his fist. “I told you...” He turned 180 degrees while using his left leg as the axis and drove his fist forward. The black knight calmly tried to block the fist with his sword. “Not to point your sword there.”

*Bash!* Kang-Woo swung his fist and destroyed the sword before smashing it into the black knight’s solar plexus, and the knight’s upper body vanished. Left with only his lower body, the knight collapsed.

“Wh-What the—?!”

“Kuh!”

The shocked knights widened their distance from Kang-Woo. Fidelio aggressively frowned.

“I see you were hiding your strength,” he said.

“It’s a common cliché, you know?”

The cliché of the protagonist hiding their strength.

*‘Oh fuck, right. I’m not the protagonist. If I had to give myself a role, I’d be more the antagonist. Oh, well.’*

“Shadow Knights,” Fidelio called.

“Whoa, they’re called shadow knights? That’s cool as fuck. I wanna try saying that too,” said Kang-Woo.

“Kuh. Let us see how long you can keep that leisurely attitude for!” Fidelio pointed at Kang-Woo. “Kill that man!”

“Dude, please stop with the respectful speech.”

*‘You sound like Frieza.’*

Whoooooom!

Blue aura enveloped the black knights' swords. Kang-Woo's expression crumpled.

"The hell? Not black aura? Come on, you should be staying consistent with your color scheme. Where's your sense of style?"

"Your arrogant attitude ends here," said the black knights to Kang-Woo, who was completely unfazed despite them having unleashed their aura.

Kang-Woo smirked. "Zat so?"

He snickered and took one step forward.

"Kill h—"

Kang-Woo teleported; he vanished and appeared right in front of a black knight. Kang-Woo used the momentum to land an uppercut. *Bash!* The knight's head flew off along with his spine from the massive impact. Kang-Woo took the collapsing black knight's sword.

"You see, I've been practicing martial arts like my life depended on it lately."

*'I'm gonna have you all by my practice dummies.'*

"Haap!" The black knights charged toward Kang-Woo.

Two had died, and now ten remained. Kang-Woo dodged a sword swung at his neck by leaning back.

"So..."

He recalled Kim Si-Hun's teachings.

- Your worst habit is that you aim for the vitals far too much, hyung-nim.

*'Obviously, since demons won't die just from getting their limbs chopped off.'*

- Once you fix that habit, your sword swings will become much smoother.

"Like this, right?!"

Kang-Woo bounced back and swung his sword. He did not focus on killing his opponent; he simply went with the flow of his martial arts.

Clang—!

"Wow."

The sword that had been swung at him was deflected. Simply swinging his sword as per the flow of the Heavenly Dragon Sword Technique had easily blocked the attack aimed at him.

*'This is awesome.'*

Kang-Woo felt like he was reciting a script that he had practiced in a play. He was only swinging as he was taught, but none of the knights' attacks were reaching him.

- You rely too much on weapons, hyung-nim. You keep trying to attack only with your sword.

*'Yeah, because I'll be the one to die if I don't. The constitution of demons is no joke.*

- Your martial arts will improve by leaps and bounds once you become proficient in using your knees, legs, shoulders and elbows.

Kang-Woo pushed away a knight who was charging toward him with his shoulder. He dealt a low kick, and the knight's stance crumbled.

*Stab!* Kang-Woo thrust his sword into the collapsed knight's neck.

"I think I'm getting the hang of this."

He was feeling something that he had not been able to feel from fighting an insanely talented genius like Si-Hun.

"What in the world are you all doing?!" Fidelio shouted.

The black knights approached Kang-Woo anxiously.

"But to be honest..." Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and threw the sword aside. "This isn't really for me."

Fighting like this was extremely bothersome.

"Let's just do it the easy way."

Kang-Woo slowly raised his hand and snapped his finger.

Fwoosh—!

Blades sprouted from the ground with Kang-Woo at the epicenter.

"Just get split in half, will you?"

The blades shot into the knights' groins and out of their mouths. Their bodies were split vertically into two, and all collapsed simultaneously. The stench of blood filled the room.

"Kyaaaaahh!!" Iris screamed at the horrifying scene.

"Wh-What in the..." Fidelio stared at Kang-Woo with his mouth agape.

Kang-Woo had massacred the shadow knights in just one attack, and with just the snap of his finger, no less. Fidelio could feel his pants getting wet.

"Fuck's sake, that's disgusting." Kang-Woo frowned. "Lilith."

"Yes, Master Kang-Woo."

Lilith appeared from Kang-Woo's shadow as if she had expected his summons.

"Clean up these bodies."

"As you command."

Kang-Woo approached the shaking Iris.

"Wh-What are you? H-How did you kill the shadow knights...?" Iris asked.

“Hm? You’re being rather rude again.”

“Urgh...” Iris bit her lip. “You mentioned that... you were a bad fighter.”

“Oh, that? I lied.”

“Now, get it together and drink this.”

Kang-Woo bit his thumb to spill blood and stuffed his thumb into Iris's mouth.

“Mmrp!” Iris expressed surprise from Kang-Woo’s sudden action, but became wide-eyed once she saw that her wounds inflicted by Fidelio had completely healed. “H-How...”

“I’ll explain later. Follow me.”

Kang-Woo turned around. They left Iris’s chambers and went to Kang-Woo’s room while Kang-Woo dragged Fidelio along, grabbing what little remained of his hair.

“Kurgh! L-Let me go! Do you have any idea what you’re d—”

“Oh shit, some strands fell out.”

“Y-You bastaaaaaard!!”

“Come on, man. It’s not like you had that many left. Having none at all is better than dearly holding on to a few strands.”

“Y-You abominable...! You call yourself a human after committing such atrocities?!”

“Fuck’s sake, you’re so intolerant. Did losing your hair make you this way? Anyway, take a seat here.”

Kang-Woo dragged Fidelio into his room and seated him on a chair.

*‘Authority of Sealing.’*

*Clatter.* Black chains bound Fidelio to the chair.

“K-Kang-Woo. What are you planning on doing...?” asked Iris, who had followed Kang-Woo after changing clothes.

Her eyes were shaking heavily in worry and anxiety. It was no exaggeration to say that Kang-Woo had declared war on the entire empire the moment that he attacked Fidelio. Even if he and Si-Hun were strong, would they be able to take on the full force of the empire?

*‘It’s impossible.’*

There was no way that two people would be able to face an entire nation. Although they had party members, there were merely ten of them altogether.

“I’m not gonna do anything,” said Kang-Woo as he turned to look down at the trembling Iris. “You are.”

“What?” Iris asked, wide-eyed. “Wh-What does that mean?”

Kang-Woo scanned her while narrowing his eyes.

*‘Still not enough.’*

Although Iris had managed to overcome her fear of Fidelio for the very first time, it was nowhere near enough. She was still afraid of him to the point that she could barely look at him, despite him being strapped to a chair and unable to move an inch.

*‘This won’t do.’*

It was nowhere near enough. Her fear of Fidelio was still rooted deeply within her. She had only taken the first baby step; she was unable to stand on her own. She could barely walk or move forward.

“You said that you wanted to take revenge against Fidelio, didn’t you?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Y-Yeah. I mean... Yes! I-I want to take revenge!” shouted Iris with her fists clenched.

“In that case, I will give you a choice.”

“A choice?”

Iris’s eyes shook.

Kang-Woo continued, “You have two choices.” He put up two fingers. “First is that you let me take revenge for you. If you choose this, you will stay like this forever.”

“Stay like... what?”

“I mean, even if you manage to get your revenge, you’ll never be able to escape from your fear of Fidelio.”

Iris’s expression froze. She was easily able to understand Kang-Woo’s abstract expression.

*‘If I let Kang-Woo take revenge against Fidelio for me, I...’*

Iris bit her lip and clenched her clothes. She recalled her days of being beaten by Fidelio after Reynald disappeared. Fidelio had struck her using the excuse of it being a lesson. There was once she had been beaten so hard that her cheekbones had fractured.

“U-Urghh.”

Iris couldn’t stop shaking just from recalling that memory. She felt nauseous. Her fear of Fidelio overpowered her hatred toward him.

*‘I would keep having nightmares of him beating me for the rest of my life.’*

Iris was not even able to escape reality through her dreams. She panted heavily.

“Wh-What’s the second choice...?” she asked.

“You’ll be taking revenge with your own hands,” answered Kang-Woo.

“If I do that... Will I really be able to overcome my fears? Will the nightmares stop?”

Iris grabbed on Kang-Woo’s clothes in desperation.

Kang-Woo answered calmly, “Yes, but there will be side effects.”

“Side... effects?”

“You could break. No, you will most definitely be broken.”

“What... do you mean...?”

“I mean, as the price for overcoming your fears, you will no longer be yourself.”

There might be another way if they took their time to search for one. Iris might even forget the horrifying memories one day over time. However, at the very least, the method that Kang-Woo had thought of and was planning on doing, would change Iris permanently.

Silence fell. Iris lowered her head and fell into thought. She honestly could not understand what Kang-Woo was trying to do nor what he meant by she would not be herself anymore. However...

“I... want to do it myself,” Iris said with difficulty. She then continued as her eyes glinted with an unbendable will, “If I can be freed from this fear.. this nightmare... I could even sell my soul to a demon.”

“Hah,” Kang-Woo chuckled.

*‘What a coincidence.’*

He slowly closed his eyes.

“Very well.”

*‘If that’s what you have chosen... If you truly wish to sell your soul to free yourself from that fear... I’ll buy it. I’ll pull out the fear within you by the roots. I’ll make it so that you’re never plagued with nightmares... Even if it breaks you.’*

Kang-Woo slowly opened his eyes. He raised his hand and patted Iris’s head.

“In that case...”

A black droplet dropped from the ring on Kang-Woo’s right middle finger, which turned into a black dagger about twenty centimeters long.

Kang-Woo handed Iris the dagger and said, “Stab him with your own hands.”

“Pardon...? Y-You want me to kill him?”

“No, I didn’t say that. Let’s start from the thighs. After that, we’ll slowly gouge out his arms, calves, toes, fingers, ears, eyes, and tongue. One by one, slowly. Don’t worry. I’ll make it so that he won’t die until we’re all done.”

*‘Until your deeply-rooted fear disappears...’*

“You can take it slow.”

*‘Until your fear turns into hatred...’*

“What are you doing? Take the dagger.”

*‘Until your hatred turns into madness...’*

“Go on. Stab him.”

*‘Until you go insane.’*

Chapter 352 - Broken

“A-Aaaahh...”

Iris trembled as she clenched the dagger that Oh Kang-Woo had given her. She looked down at the sharp dagger in her hands. Her fear of Fidelio overtook her hatred for him.

*‘I-I’m supposed to... stab him with this?’*

Her head was in jumbles. She had honestly imagined killing Fidelio with her own hands. No, she had imagined doing things way worse than that countless times, but...

“Haaa, haaa, haaa,” Iris panted heavily.

Her heart beat faster. She could not even look in Fidelio’s general direction. She wanted to throw aside the dagger in her hands.

*‘Why... Why?’*

Despite all the hatred she had for Fidelio...

*‘Why... Why isn’t my body moving?’*

Iris aggressively bit her lip. She gripped the dagger tighter and forced herself up. She looked up and stared at Fidelio, who was shaking while bound to a chair.

Clatter!

Then, the dagger in her hands fell to the ground. Iris collapsed and panted heavily.

“Wh-What? Wh-Why...?” Iris expressed confusion.

Kang-Woo looked down at her.

*‘Well, it’s to be expected.’*

Iris had never even held a blade before, so there was no way that she would be able to stab someone just because she was told to.

*‘Especially in a situation like this.’*

Kang-Woo could see that Iris could barely look Fidelio in the eyes even now. The fear that had deeply rooted itself in her soul was getting in her way.

*‘At this rate...’*



She would not be able to stab Fidelio. Kang-Woo walked toward the trembling Iris and crouched next to her.

“What are you doing? Didn’t you say that you wanted to take revenge?”

“U-Uhmm...” Iris gulped while stammering. She slowly handed Kang-Woo the dagger. “Actually, c-could you... do it for me, S-Sir Kang-Woo? I-I’m fine with just watching.”

She had changed her mind after actually coming face to face with her fears. She averted herself from her trauma that was Fidelio.

“No,” Kang-Woo responded firmly as she handed Iris back the dagger. “You have to do it yourself.”

“U-Urghhh.”

Iris bit her lip as the hands that held the dagger shook.

“If you can’t stab him...”

“Mmrp!! Mmmrrpp!”

Kang-Woo extended his hand toward the chair that Fidelio was bound to. *Clunk*. The chains loosened.

“W-Wait!! I have what you want— Mmrp!”

The loosened chains bound Fidelio once again.

Kang-Woo stared at Iris coldly with eyes devoid of emotion. “... I will unchain him.”

“N-No!”

Iris extended her hands out. She could easily imagine what would happen if Kang-Woo were to unchain Fidelio in this situation.

*‘Once again...’*

Iris would fall into that hell again— no, an even worse hell would be in store for her. Iris lowered herself to the floor and grabbed the hem of Kang-Woo’s pants.

“D-Don’t. I’m begging you. N-No, I beg of you, sir. Please... Please don’t,” Iris pleaded while crying.

Kang-Woo did not waver in the slightest from her desperation. Anyone could beg while grabbing on to one’s pants. Such an act was meaningless.

“In that case...” Kang-Woo caressed the prostrated Iris’s cheek. “Stab him.”

Iris flinched. She trembled while biting her lip.

“Yes, sir.”

Iris stood up while crying. She tightly gripped the dagger that Kang-Woo had given her. She took multiple deep breaths.

*'I-I can do it. No, I have to do it.'*

If she didn't, Kang-Woo would actually release Fidelio. The sound of her clattering teeth echoed within her mind like thunder. She panted heavily, and her heart was beating so hard that it could burst. She shut her eyes tightly, turned to Fidelio, and slowly opened her eyes.

"Haaa, haaa, haaa!"

There was fear. There was a monster. There was a demon where she had opened her eyes to look. Her eyes shook. She could barely face him.

- Your Highness.

The demon's voice echoed inside her head.

- Please do not be sad. This old man will protect you in place of His Majesty and Prince Reynald. She should never have taken his hand.

- This is a lesson.

She heard the demon's cackles. The memories of pain and agony returned to her.

"U-Urgghh!"

Iris bent forward like a bow. With the fear spreading throughout her body like a plague, something extremely tiny showed itself. It had been there this entire time; it had just been buried underneath the fear. It was... hatred.

"You... son of a bitch...!" Iris muttered, her eyes gleaming with bloodlust.

She raised the dagger toward the old man, the hideous monster before her eyes, and stabbed.

Pierce!

"Mmmrp!! Urp! Urppp!!"

*Clatter! Clatter!* The chains binding Fidelio shook violently. Iris could feel Fidelio's squirms through the dagger that had pierced his right thigh.

"Kyaaaaahh!!" Iris screamed.

The unfamiliar and unpleasant sensation of stabbing flesh traveled to her from the dagger, and it made her freeze. She fell on her butt with the dagger still in Fidelio's thigh. Kang-Woo appeared from behind her as she crawled backward.

"Good job," he said as he put his hand on her shoulder to stop her retreat.

"I-It felt so weird. It felt m-mushy, and it was squirming..."

"Yeah." Kang-Woo put his hand on the back of her hand as if soothing her, and slowly guided her hand to the dagger. "You can do it again, right?"

"Yes."

Iris nodded and grabbed the dagger that she had stabbed into Fidelio's thigh. She felt the unpleasant sensation of a struggling living being.

*'I'm scared. I'mscaredI'mscaredI'mscaredI'mscaredI'mscaredI'mscaredI'mscared.'*

Tears flowed down her cheeks. She gripped the dagger and pulled it out. Blood spewed out from Fidelio's thigh and splattered on her.

"Urpp!! Bleeeeeegghhh!!" Iris puked with her hands on the ground.

Kang-Woo lightly patted Iris's back as she emptied her stomach.

"The first time is always the hardest. That's true for everything in this world. Once you get through the first time, it'll be much easier than you think the subsequent times."

"Haaa, haaa, haaa."

"Now, pick up the dagger again."

Iris gripped the dagger that Kang-Woo handed her.

"A-Ahhhhhhh!"

She raised the dagger high again and stabbed Fidelio's thigh. *Pierce*. A chilling sensation traveled up her hands.

*'Aaaahh.'*

Kang-Woo was right. The first time she had done it was hard, but the second time was not as bad.

"Fi... delio...!"

Iris pushed down her fears and pulled out the dagger.

Stab! Stab! Stab!

"Fidelio! Fidelio! Fidelioooooo!!"

She stabbed Fidelio's thigh again and again with all her might.

"Mmrp!! Mrp!"

She could hear Fidelio's muffled screams and see his face dyed with fear.

"Heh." Iris smiled.

The fact that Fidelio was making the face that she had used to make all the time thrilled her.

*'What's happening?'*

She could not understand. No, there was no need for her to understand.

*'It feels good.'*

Iris pulled out the dagger and stabbed Fidelio's thigh again. Kang-Woo gently held her hand.

"You shouldn't be picky," he remarked.

“Pardon?”

Iris turned around to see Kang-Woo smiling at her. For a moment, she felt like she saw the face of a demon on Kang-Woo’s. She saw a dark, boundless abyss.

“A-Aahh.”

Iris trembled. The fear that she had felt for Fidelio all this time felt like nothing compared to true fear before her eyes at this moment.

“Now, don’t just stab his thigh. Try stabbing him wherever you want,” said Kang-Woo.

“Wh-Where I want?”

“Yeah.” The demon gave Iris's back a gentle push. He brought his mouth close to her ear and whispered, “Release as much of your hatred as you want.”

Iris’s eyes turned hazy from Kang-Woo’s sweet whispers. She swung the dagger madly.

“IF ONLY!!!”

Blood splattered as fingers were cut and fell on the ground.

“IT WEREN'T FOR YOU!!!”

Iris stabbed Fidelio's cartilage and twisted the dagger with all her might. The cracking of bones sounded out.

“YOU MOTHERFUCKER!!!”

The accumulation of fear was being converted to hatred. Iris continued to swing the dagger while releasing her hatred. The sensation of cutting flesh no longer felt unpleasant to her, nor the dark-red blood splattering all over her.

*‘I’m not scared anymore.’*

The corners of Iris’s mouth slowly rose. She could finally understand what the thrilling sensation traveling down her spine was.

*‘This is fun.’*

It was fun beyond belief. She felt like she could burst out into laughter at any moment.

*‘I can’t believe I’ve been missing out on something this fun!’*

Iris could now understand why Kang-Woo had stared at her in pity. He had likely been frustrated beyond belief.

“Haaa...” Iris sighed in ecstasy as she stared at Fidelio, who had become a rag covered in cuts.

*‘It’s over.’*

Whoever said that vengeance made one feel empty was a complete dipshit; revenge was sweeter than anything in the world.

“Thank you... Sir Kang-Woo,” Iris said to Kang-Woo, her eyes hazy as if she were high.

Kang-Woo smiled. “What are you talking about? We’re not done yet.”

“Pardon me?”

*‘It’s not over?’* Iris thought.

“We’ve only just begun.”

Kang-Woo bit open his thumb and dripped blood on the bloodied Fidelio.

“Urpp!! Mmmmrpp!”

Then, Fidelio jumped as if having a seizure and his wounds healed in the blink of an eye.

“Wh-Wha...” Iris expressed while wide-eyed.

Kang-Woo picked up the dagger on the floor and handed it to Iris.

“Now then...”

*‘Let’s start over.’*

“The second time will be easier.”

*‘And even more the third time.’*

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A few days passed. *Clack.* Kang-Woo opened the door to a room, and was met with a thick scent of blood.

“H-Hehehehe.”

Kang-Woo could hear a crazy giggle.

“Oh, Sir Kang-Woo~” Iris, who was fully covered in blood, turned toward Kang-Woo and smiled as her eyes gleamed with madness. She walked over to Kang-Woo and asked, “Have I... done well? Have I?”

Kang-Woo smiled brightly and patted her head. “Yeah, you have.”

“Hihi,” Iris giggled in joy and embraced the dagger that Kang-Woo had given her.

There was no longer any fear reflected in her eyes.

Chapter 353 - Escape (1)

“Hehehe,” Iris giggled crazily.

Oh Kang-Woo could see the madness in her eyes.

Kang-Woo sighed with deeply sunken eyes. Her eyes no longer reflected fear of Fidelio, but...

*‘Did I make the right choice?’*

He was conflicted. Even he knew that this was not the best outcome. It might have been better for Iris to live on while suffering from nightmares.

- If I can be freed from this fear... this nightmare... I could even sell my soul to a demon.

Kang-Woo recalled how desperately Iris had begged him while trembling. He closed his eyes. This had been her choice, and what she had wished for.

*'I could have erased her memories using the Authority of Subordination, but...'*

Kang-Woo thought for a moment, but shook his head.

*'It's too dangerous.'*

The blessing of the high elves on Iris had been powerful enough for her to recognize him under the Authority of Stealth. Making a contract of subordination with her would be far too dangerous.

"You're... not afraid of Fidelio anymore, right?" he asked.

"Yes!" Iris answered brightly.

Her radiant smile, despite her being covered in blood, was chilling.

*'Even so...'*

With this, Iris had completely been freed from Fidelio's grasp.

*'This has negative effects in its own right, but... It's at least better than spending the rest of her life being shackled by fear.'*

"Sir Kang-Woo, where should we gouge out today~?"

Iris grinned while staring at Kang-Woo with a chilling glint in her eyes. Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

*'Is this really for the better?'*

He had indeed aimed for this to happen, but he had not expected her to break this badly in the span of just a few days.

*'I guess it goes to show the extent of the fear she had for Fidelio.'*

On top of that, her baseline gentle and kind nature had likely amplified the effects. Just like how the burst of emotion was stronger the more one bottled them up, the bloodlust that had been suppressed underneath her gentle nature plus her fears had set ablaze beyond control.

*'I never thought it'd get this bad.'*

Kang-Woo regretted pushing her so far.

*'I'm sure she'll get better over time.'*

Time could not be rewound. The good news among all this was that Iris was very obedient, meaning that Kang-Woo was able to control her.

*'I think it's about time that we stop.'*

Although Iris had been broken beyond repair, stopping now was better than continuing.

“No, that’s enough.”

“I’m sorry?” Iris asked while wide-eyed as she looked back and forth between Kang-Woo and the unconscious Fidelio. “Umm... What do you mean by...”

“I mean, you can stop now.”

“Oh.”

Iris subtly trembled. She fiddled with the dagger in disappointment.

Kang-Woo smirked and continued, “Revenge isn’t all about stabbing, slashing and breaking, you know? You should be taking back what was stolen from you, one by one.”

“What was stolen from me?” Iris asked in wonder.

“Your power as an imperial princess, and your reputation. They were all taken from you by Fidelio, weren’t they?”

“That’s...”

Conflict glinted in Iris’s eyes. Although it was true that her power as a member of the imperial family had been taken away by Fidelio, he was not solely responsible for her infamy as a witch. Rather, she was more responsible for it because she had vented her stress on her servants.

“Iris.” Kang-Woo caressed the conflicted Iris’s cheek. He asked gently, “It was all Fidelio’s fault, wasn’t it?”

“Ah, yes! O-Of course! It was all because of that human garbage!” Iris energetically answered while furiously nodding.

Kang-Woo nodded with a smile. “Good. Now, it’s time for you to break free from your false charges and get ready to become the empress.”

“Empress...”

Iris blankly stared at Kang-Woo. The word did not seem real. Her father, Emperor Leopold von Arnan, was getting sicker each day. He actually should have died long ago, but he was being forcibly kept alive with magic. Like Kang-Woo had said, Iris would without a doubt become the empress soon.

*‘Empress...? Me?’*

Iris’s heart beat faster. She could not breathe properly; it felt as if a heavy weight was pressing down on her chest.

“It’s... impossible. You know what the people of the empire say about me, Sir Kang-Woo.”

The opinions of the people were actually of no consequence to Iris becoming the empress, since she was the only one who carried the blood of the imperial family. However, the false accusations

against her were almost impossible to break away from. Although there was no proof to such accusations, Iris knew very well how difficult it was to change an opinion that was considered to be the truth by many.

“You can leave that to me,” responded Kang-Woo.

He smiled. He had already thought of a way to wipe her infamous reputation as a witch clean. He turned around to look at Fidelio, who was unconscious while covered in blood.

“Umm... Sir Kang-Woo.” Iris’s eyes shone chillingly as she clenched the dagger. “Shall we... End him now?”

She glared at the unconscious Fidelio with bloodlust. It was a complete flip in attitude from the beginning when she could barely look in Fidelio’s general direction. Kang-Woo stared at Iris with mixed feelings, and then slowly shook his head.

“No,” said Kang-Woo.

“No...?”

“We won’t kill Fidelio.”

“What? Wh-What do you mean we won’t kill him?!” Iris stared at Kang-Woo in bewilderment. Not killing Fidelio was absurd. She bared her teeth, raised the dagger menacingly and shouted, “N-No! I have to kill that human garbage myself!”

Kang-Woo firmly shook his head despite Iris’s crazed defiance. “Iris.”

“Ngh...”

“I told you that we won’t kill him.”

“B-But...”

Iris stared at Kang-Woo as if she were about to burst into tears at any moment. To her, Fidelio was her mortal enemy that had put her through hell. No, not just her, but he had sucked the life out of countless citizens of the empire. Iris could not accept the fact that such a person would not die for his sins.

“F-Fidelio needs to die,” Iris replied cautiously, pleading to Kang-Woo to change his mind.

Kang-Woo smirked and asked, “Really? Why do you think so?”

“Well...” There was no need to even mention it. Iris glared at Fidelio in madness.

“Because nothing else befits the human garbage.”

No matter how Iris thought about it, Fidelio did not deserve to live. Kang-Woo softly laughed at how bold Iris had become after just a few days.

“Do you seriously believe that?” he asked.

“Pardon?”



“If you truly want to take revenge on Fidelio, he shouldn’t end that way.”

“I... don’t understand.”

Kang-Woo tilted his head toward Iris. He patted her head and spoke to her as if he were a teacher teaching a child. “If he dies, that’s the end of it.”

No matter how painfully and miserably one died, it would all end once they died. Their pain, suffering and sorrow would end at the moment of their death.

“Now, think about what you had to suffer in his hands. Didn’t you think every day that you would be better off dead?”

“Ah.”

Iris opened her eyes wide. Kang-Woo was right. She had longed for death in the endless swamp of despair. She had thought that death was the only form of salvation for her.

“Why would you kill him and be done with it?” Kang-Woo smiled widely. Death was nothing. “Keeping him alive would be more agonizing for him.”

Only life was true agony. Iris felt chills running down her spine.

*‘Aaaahh, this person is... truly terrifying.’*

No, she was not even sure if he was human.

*‘It doesn’t matter.’*

Iris couldn’t care less whether Kang-Woo was a human, monster, or even a demon. What was important was that he had saved her and had guided her toward salvation. He had not protected her like Reynald or Kim Si-Hun had, nor had he given her a place to hide behind. He had given her a push so that she would be able to stand on her own two feet.

“Okay. I will do as you say, Sir Kang-Woo.” Iris nodded while staring at Kang-Woo hazily.

“Good. We’ll be busy for a while.”

Kang-Woo needed to eliminate those on Fidelio’s side and form a line of support only for Iris. He needed to reconstruct this broken empire.

*‘Only then will I be able to focus on Lucifer.’*

There was a high chance that people would not fear the advent of the Evil God as much as Kang-Woo hoped in such a situation. People couldn’t care less about an Evil God or a Demon King when their daily lives were already a living hell.

*‘People tremble in fear when they have something to lose.’*

And when that fear turned into despair, the continent would reach the brink of collapse.

“I’ll even give you an opportunity to spend some quality time with Si-Hun, so do your best to earn it,” Kang-Woo expressed while lightly patting Iris’s shoulder.

Since she had fallen in love with Si-Hun, there would likely be no better reward than this.

*'Though I feel sorry for my sister-in-law.'*

Although Kang-Woo felt bad for doing this to Layla, there was no better bait than Si-Hun to have perfect control over Iris.

"Ah..." Iris exclaimed shortly. "I understand. I will do my best."

She smiled while gently grabbing Kang-Woo's clothes. The smile felt awkward for some reason.

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Fidelio regained his consciousness within the room filled with a scent of blood.

"G-Gaaarghh," he groaned unpleasantly through his wrinkled lips. "Kurgh! Hurgh! Huff!"

Fidelio panted heavily as he trembled from the lingering pain.

*'H-He's insane.'*

He recalled the young man with the sharp eyes. He could not describe the man with any other word than that.

*'He and Iris are both insane.'*

No, the man Oh Kang-Woo had already gone far past the realm of insanity.

*'He's a demon.'*

Fidelio swallowed his saliva mixed with blood. His teeth clattered and he shed tears. He felt like he was swimming across an endless sea of nightmares.

*'I have to run away.'*

He needed to get away from that demon's grasp. But how?

"A-Arggh." The chains binding him clattered noisily as Fidelio struggled frantically. "A-Aaaahh."

He twisted around with all his might to get away from that crazed monster's grasp. The chains dragged on his skin, widening his wounds and blood flowing out from them.

"Raaaaaahh!!"

Fidelio was in excruciating pain, but his fear of the demon was greater. Fidelio thrashed about as if he was having a seizure. And then...

Clunk.

"Huh...?"

The chains covered in blood loosened slightly. Fidelio's eyes widened. As he moved left to right, he could feel the chains slightly loosening.

*'F-Finally!'*

He had finally grasped an opportunity. Fidelio thrashed about even more aggressively to bleed more. The ecstasy of being able to escape overtook the pain of his flesh being ripped apart.

*'I have to run away.'*

Before that demon came back... As soon as possible...

*'I have to run!!!'*

Fidelio was freed from the chair.

Chapter 354 - Escape (2)

“Huff, huff!”

Fidelio managed to make it outside of the imperial castle through a secret passageway and was running across a forest.

*'I-I did it!'*

He looked back; there were no pursuers.

*'I did it!'*

A sensation of thrill ran down Fidelio's spine. He smiled as he was hit with an unbearable feeling of ecstasy.

“That crazy son of a bitch...”

Great hatred soon replaced his ecstasy. Fidelio bit his lip and clenched his fists. He recalled how Oh Kang-Woo had commanded Iris to stab him while smiling coldly.

“U-Urghh.”

Fidelio trembled. His boiling hatred was cooled by an even greater sense of fear.

“Shit, shit!”

He anxiously bit his nails and turned to look back at the imperial castle. He had spent years working hard to become the true ruler of the empire in place of that moronic and incompetent princess. He only needed to take a few more steps, but...

*'Just like that...'*

It had been taken away by a brat that had come from who knows where, all too easily.

“Kuh!”

Fidelio bared his teeth and clenched his fists to the point that veins popped out.

*'For now... I have to run.'*

Kang-Woo had massacred the shadow knights that Fidelio had selected and raised with his heart and soul, with just the snap of his finger. Not just that, he had a brother that had faced hundreds of demonic beasts by himself. Fidelio had no chance facing them head-on.

*'I have to wait for my chance.'*

Fidelio's eyes sharpened. Although those two were powerful, there were only two of them; they would be no match for overwhelming numbers.

"I should... make use of the rebel army."

The gears in Fidelio's head turned quickly. Considering the situation, Kang-Woo had most definitely taken Iris's side.

"The fool."

Fidelio couldn't help but smile. He couldn't believe that Kang-Woo had decided to side with Iris of all people. Even if Iris could be easily controlled, it was far too reckless.

*'That's bitch's reputation is far beyond irreparable.'*

With the addition of the false rumors that Fidelio had spread along with her usual behavior, Iris's reputation could not be any worse among nobles and commoners alike. Even slaves badmouthed her.

*'I'll make you regret siding with her.'*

Fidelio bit his lip as his eyes set ablaze with hatred. He was planning on pushing Kang-Woo into the pits of hell by using Iris. Although Kang-Woo had done nothing to the people of the empire, it did not matter.

*'The public are nothing but beasts.'*

The truth did not matter to them; they would believe anything that was exciting and entertaining. Just by letting loose a rumor that Iris and Kang-Woo were in a romantic relationship, the public would spread it all on their own. If Fidelio added a little more spice on top of that, Kang-Woo would become an accomplice to the witch in less than a month.

*'However strong you are... I wonder if you'd still be able to stand with the princess after making the entire empire your enemy?'*

Fidelio smiled while imagining his sweet revenge. Although it was difficult to manipulate the truth, it was more than doable for him. After all, he had done it countless times to get to his current position.

*'When it comes to agitation and fabrication... No one has me beat.'*

Fidelio snickered and once again looked back at the castle. He had ended up getting a horrifying memory from the experience, but he felt like the fear encroaching on his mind was waning as he imagined his revenge.

*'I have to run for now.'*

He had prepared safe houses all over the empire just in case. Fidelio limped away.

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"Fuuu," Fidelio sighed in relief.

He had successfully escaped to the Velen Viscounty located in the southern region of the empire by using a magic circle in a safe house near the capital. Viscount Velen was one of Fidelio's supporters, so there was no place better than this to hide out.

"Have you heard the news?"

"Of course I did. It's been huge for the past few days."

"How could such a thing have..."

The streets were noisy. People were discussing things in all seriousness in bars, markets, and everywhere else.

*'What's going on?'*

Fidelio frowned. He knew very well of the circumstances in Velen; the fact that people who barely had the energy to speak from working their asses off to survive were making such a fuss was highly abnormal.

*'I should figure out what's going on.'*

Fidelio pulled down the hood of his robe and entered a bar.

"Get me a beer and something to eat."

"Yes, sir!" a server boy energetically answered.

He brought out lukewarm beer and thinly-sliced ham.

"Kurgh, ptooeey!!"

Fidelio spit out the extremely salty ham. The boy lowered his head while smiling awkwardly.

Fidelio drank the lukewarm beer and asked the boy, "Has something special happened? The streets are rowdy."

"Something special? Could it be that you still haven't heard the news?"

"What news?"

Fidelio tilted his head in confusion. The boy ran somewhere in a rush and brought over a newspaper.

"It's a scoop among scoops among scoops!"

Fidelio took the newspaper from the enthusiastic boy and read the headline.

[Has Prime Minister Fidelio been supporting the advent of the Evil God all along?]

[Additional evidence discovered of Prime Minister Fidelio's connection to Evil God Lucifer.]

[Prime Minister Fidelio makes an official appearance... "*I will comply wholeheartedly with the investigation.*"]

"What?"

Fidelio's eyes widened. He saw himself on the first page of the imperial newspaper, lowering his head while surrounded by countless journalists.

"Wh-What the hell?"

What in the world was happening? He was connected to Evil God Lucifer? Even though he had wanted to rule the empire, he had never considered something as insane as joining forces with a demon.

"No, that's not important right now."

Fidelio shook his pale head.

*'Why...'*

Why was he, who had been hiding out in his safe house for the past few days, in the newspaper surrounded by journalists?

*'C-Could it be a disguise?'*

Fidelio shook his head. It was beyond the level of a disguise. Although there was magic capable of changing one's appearance, he had never seen one that accurate. Fidelio himself could not tell the difference, so it was no question for other people. He felt as if his doppelganger had appeared.

"Haaa, haaa," Fidelio panted heavily.

Something was going horribly wrong.

*Wham!* The door of the bar swung open.

"All of you! Come outside right now!"

"The broadcast has begun!"

*'Broadcast?'*

Fidelio turned his head. There was only one thing in the empire known as the broadcast; it referred to a special magic tool made to deliver the words of the emperor to the people, and it could not be used without the permission of the imperial family.

"Come to the plaza!" a man shouted.

People swarmed out of the bar. Fidelio stared at them blankly, but then sprang up from his seat soon after.

"I-It can't be."

Fidelio grew pale. The worst possible outcome popped up in his head.

"N-No!" Fidelio shouted as he followed the others to the plaza.

The plaza was already filled with thousands of people. There was a giant crystal orb in the middle of the plaza, and a video feed was shown from the light that came out of it.

[Everyone.]

Fidelio himself was in that video feed.

[I will reveal the whole truth to everyone, right here and now.]

He was kneeling on a platform with a haggard expression, seemingly tired from the long investigation.

“Wh-What the...? What is he trying to do?”

[I had cast brainwashing magic on Princess Iris to control her from the shadows.]

“What?”

[I had also spread false rumors to have her be unjustly branded as a witch.]

“What the fuck... are you... talking... about?”

[On top of that, I had a black mage attack the princess.]

“Y-Y-You...”

[No, that is not all.]

The grave sins that Fidelio had committed left his own mouth.

[It is also true that I have connections to Evil God Lucifer and his forces.]

“S-Stop.”

[No, it is not simply a connection.]

“Stop it.”

[I also had a great part in his resurrection. It was truly an excruciatingly long ordeal.]

“I told you to stop.”

[Oh, why would I help in the Evil God’s resurrection, you ask? Why else but this?]

“Y-You...”

In the video feed, Fidelio sneered as he had his head lowered while kneeling. He continued, [Because I am one of Lord Lucifer’s servants.]

“You motherfuckeeeeeeerrr!!”

At the same time, the kneeling Fidelio stood up.

Rumble—! Crack! Crush!

The chains binding him exploded.

[Pfft, bwahahahaha!!] Fidelio burst out laughing. [Idiotic humans! How could you have been fooled so easily?!]

Crunch, crunch.

Goat horns sprouted from Fidelio’s forehead, and bat wings spread out as they ripped through the skin of his back.

[Even if you have found out the truth, it is already too late!]

Fidelio, who had turned into a demon, raised his arms high and released demonic energy. The imperial guards around him coughed up blood and collapsed.

[This continent will meet its end by Lord Lucifer's hands!]

Fidelio, the demon who had been controlling the empire in the form of a human, stomped aggressively.

Boom!

[Tremble in fear! Fall into despair! Meet your deaths before the great evil!]

Fidelio flapped his bat wings and flew up into the sky.

[The time of the end is near!]

And with that, Fidelio disappeared into a black Rift.

The plaza grew silent. The people could not even mutter amongst themselves from being unable to comprehend what they had just witnessed.

“M-My God.”

“Why did such a thing...”

As time passed, more and more people muttered, and was the trigger for various curses and screams.

“Ah...”

Fidelio's mouth was agape amidst the chaos. He looked up blankly into nothingness with lifeless eyes.

*‘Wha... What is this?’*

The question continued to be posed in his mind over and over again. Fidelio remained trembling while standing still in the middle of the plaza. He could not follow the current situation. An hour passed, and then two, and three; he remained standing in the plaza despite everyone else having left. Only he was remaining in the darkness past midnight.

*Step, step.* Fidelio heard someone walking toward him. He turned to see who it was, and then his eyes widened.

“Y-You...”

It was Oh Kang-Woo, the young man with the sharp eyes.

“Youuuuuuuuuu—!!”

Fidelio's rage ate away at his sanity. He charged at the young man in a craze, but of course...

Bash!

“Kurgh!”



Fidelio, who was about to punch Kang-Woo, was blown back. Kang-Woo walked toward the collapsed Fidelio.

“Sheesh, I can’t believe you were Lucifer’s servant. You really shocked me.” Kang-Woo raised his hands in shock.

Fidelio glared at Kang-Woo in hatred while biting his lip.

“You bastard...! Do you seriously expect people to believe such an absurd lie?!”

“Yeah, I do.” Kang-Woo snickered and aggressively stomped on Fidelio’s head. “After all, people only see what they want to see. They couldn’t care less about the truth.”

Fidelio knew it just as well; people believed anything that was exciting and entertaining.

“Ah...”

Fidelio’s face grew pale. He finally understood what sort of person the human— no, the demon Oh Kang-Woo was.

“You’re...” Fidelio trembled.

Kang-Woo smiled and crouched next to Fidelio.

Fidelio averted his gaze from him.

He did not know how Kang-Woo had pulled off such a perfect disguise, but it was obvious who had won.

“Kill me.”

Fidelio had lost before he could even have done anything.

“Pfft,” Kang-Woo laughed and slapped Fidelio on the back of his head. “What are you, a general who lost after fighting valiantly? You’re nothing but a shitty mutt who ran with his tail between his legs.”

“Kuh.” Fidelio grimaced.

Kang-Woo snickered. “Don’t worry. I told you, didn’t I? I won’t kill you.”

“Are you saying... You’ll let me live?”

“Of course, man.” Kang-Woo nodded with a smile.

He could see a sliver of light in Fidelio’s eyes. He was likely hoping to escape once again.

*‘After all, he escaped once before.’*

*Kekeke.* Kang-Woo suppressed his laughter from bursting out. This was perfect; rather than giving up hope within inescapable despair, it was far more painful to struggle in vain while holding onto hope.

*‘That’s why I set you free.’*

Kang-Woo put his hand on Fidelio's head with a smile. "Did you know?"

"Kn-Know what?"

"That demons... don't have a lifespan."

"...?"

"They don't die, even if they don't eat, drink or sleep."

"What are you... trying to say?"

"Do you know..." Kang-Woo continued in a chilling tone, "What happens when a human turns into a demon?"

"Kurgh! Aaargh!" Fidelio grunted in pain.

Something was flowing into him... something black and impure.

"The brain remembers how it feels to eat, drink and sleep, but the body doesn't."

Because the body was that of a demon.

"Humans that have turned into demons are forever haunted by endless hunger and thirst until they eat and drink something. However, those sensations don't kill them."

No matter how much they wanted to die... No matter how agonizing it was, they could not die.

"Here's a brain teaser for you. If that human who turned into a demon... was imprisoned where no one could ever find them... with their limbs severed... What do you think would happen?" Kang-Woo asked. "They would live forever while suffering from endless hunger and thirst... as if they were in a desert with no oasis... within unending despair."

Fidelio flinched. He looked up.

"Ah..."

He saw a demon with black scleras, golden irises, and horizontal pupils like that of a goat, looking down at him.

"Congratulations, Fidelio."

*'You won't die from old age.'*

Chapter 355 - Uncomfortable Lunch (1)

Oh Kang-Woo was enjoying a relaxing afternoon doing nothing after having to do nothing but work recently. He had his eyes closed on the bed with his head on Han Seol-Ah's thighs as she stroked his head.

"Fufu. Does it feel good?" Seol-Ah asked.

"Yeah."

Seol-Ah giggled as she looked down at Kang-Woo humming every time she stroked his head.

*'How cute.'*

She gulped as she looked down at him. It had been a while since they had enjoyed themselves in Aernor. It felt as if her anxious heart was calming down a little.

*'Kang-Woo.'*

Seol-Ah carefully placed her hand on Kang-Woo's cheek. His warmth traveled up her hand and made her shiver.

*'Kang-Woo, Kang-Woo, Kang-Woo.'*

Flames of passion blazed from within her heart, and her powerful impulses fanned the flames. Uncontrollable obsession made her throat dry. She wanted Kang-Woo; she wanted to monopolize him. She wanted there to be no one but the two of them in the world.

"Haaa," Seol-Ah sighed in delight.

She shut her eyes tight and quelled the flames blazing within her heart.

*'What am I thinking?'*

She shook her head to shoo away the thoughts that even she herself found to be chilling. She was not stupid enough to not know the catastrophe that would ensue if she were to do such a thing.

*'Kang-Woo is doing his best to protect us.'*

She was already unable to be of much help, so she couldn't allow herself to get in Kang-Woo's way.

*'And...'*

Seol-Ah looked at the ring on her left ring finger and smiled in joy. Shivers of thrill spread throughout her body.

"He... Hehehe," she laughed unbeknownst to herself.

Although they could not hold a ceremony due to the situation they were in, they were already engaged. Seol-Ah couldn't hold back her smile as she thought about it.

"What is it?" Kang-Woo asked.

"Nothing. I'm just so happy right now." Seol-Ah smiled, but turned slightly serious soon after, having remembered what had happened recently. "But I was so shocked. To think that kind-looking elderly gentleman was Lucifer's retainer..."

"I was just as surprised. I didn't expect him to be capable of such a thing." Kang-Woo nodded with a serious expression.

Seol-Ah continued in worry, "Will it be alright?"

Her question held many meanings. Evil God Lucifer as well as a demon who served him had appeared, the empire had been run by a demon this entire time, and they had no idea what the

Demon of Prophecy had planned. They had far too many fires to put out before they could eliminate the Demon God's corpse and restore Earth's protection.

"It's okay." Kang-Woo smiled.

It was not because he himself was the Demon of Prophecy or because the Evil God that had appeared this time was a fake. There were many beings in the way of their expedition, such as Demon God Bauli, the Constellations of Evil, Lucifer and Behemoth. Since that was all that Kang-Woo knew, there was likely much more that he did not.

*'But...'*

In the end, he would come out victorious. As it had been for the past ten millennia, he would win once again and always in the future.

"Kang-Woo..."

Seol-Ah smiled as she saw how certain Kang-Woo was. Just hearing him say that it was okay was enough to make the burdens in her heart vanish.

"Don't worry at all, darling."

Kang-Woo turned around while lying down. He stuffed his face between Seol-Ah's thighs and tickled her stomach. The fat on her slender waist was very soft.

"Kyaaaah!" Seol-Ah jumped and lightly smacked Kang-Woo's head. "Jeez, Kang-Woo! What are you doing all of a sudden?!"

She was scolding him, but she was smiling as if she couldn't be happier. Bright laughter filled the room.

"You sure act like a child every now and then, Kang-Woo."

Seol-Ah lightly pinched Kang-Woo's cheeks after he turned back around.

"Do you dislike it?" Kang-Woo asked.

"Not at all," Seol-Ah answered firmly as if telling Kang-Woo not to be absurd. "I love you, Kang-Woo."

Seol-Ah leaned down and kissed Kang-Woo.

"Hehehe," Kang-Woo giggled playfully.

Others would shank him out of jealousy if they saw such a scene, but he didn't care.

*'This is the life.'*

He was not surrounded by tentacles spewing pus nor subordinates crazed with battle. He was not under a red sky nor on arid land. Kang-Woo could not stop the corners of his mouth from rising.

Just then, Seol-Ah clapped her hands together as if she had remembered something. "Oh, right. Kang-Woo, Si-Hun called this morning."

Kang-Woo had been in the middle of formulating a plan to revive the empire with Iris in the morning.

“Oh, is he doing well?” Kang-Woo asked in happiness.

Seol-Ah nodded with a smile. “He joined Layla’s group and has been to many different cities.”

“How did the people react?”

“Fufu. I’m sure you already know the answer to that.”

Kang-Woo smirked and nodded. He could already expect how the people of the continent would react to Kim Si-Hun even if Seol-Ah didn’t tell him.

*‘They’d obviously love him.’*

Si-Hun was a hero who had appeared amidst the chaos of the empire. He was extremely handsome, powerful enough to face hundreds of demonic beasts by himself, well-mannered and good-natured. Considering Si-Hun matched almost every single criterion there was to be a hero, there was no way that the people would dislike him.

*‘Especially when...’*

The people were shocked after having just learned Fidelio’s true identity. They were in desperate need of a hero to depend on when their fear of Lucifer was engulfing the continent whole.

“But... There seems to have been a bit of trouble,” Seol-Ah expressed.

“Trouble?” asked Kang-Woo, tilting his head in wonder.

“Yes. There was an incident where a few citizens with weapons in hand attacked Si-Hun.”

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and stood up from Seol-Ah’s thighs. “It wasn’t just a single occurrence, right?”

“Ah... Yes. It apparently happened three times in total as he was going around different cities.”

Seol-Ah stared at Kang-Woo, surprised that he knew.

“Tsk,” Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

He had expected Si-Hun to be attacked while he was traveling around various cities, but hearing that it actually happened displeased him.

“Do you think... it had something to do with Lucifer?” Seol-Ah asked.

“No, probably not.” Kang-Woo shook his head.

It was highly unlikely that the people who had attacked Si-Hun had anything to do with Evil God Lucifer.

“Then why would they...”

“Because powerless citizens weren’t the only people that he saved.”

Si-Hun had not only killed the demonic beasts swarming toward the imperial capital, but the ones rampaging in the party venue as well. Considering that Si-Hun had rescued Fidelio as well as the corrupt nobles that were sucking the citizens of the empire dry, they would naturally hold a sense of resentment toward him.

*‘It’s like if someone stopped a monster rampaging in the National Assembly building from killing the corrupt politicians.’*

Si-Hun would have been praised as a hero for doing so if the state of the empire had been good, but unfortunately, the people of the empire considered the nobles to be no different from demons.

*‘No, maybe worse.’*

The people might think that it was only natural for demons to be that way since it was their nature, but that was not the case for nobles.

*‘The people probably wanted the nobles to have a taste of their own medicine.’*

Whether it be by the hands of demons or by starvation, death was all the same. People likely thought that it would have been better for the nobles whom they resented so much to die with them.

*‘I need to root out the evil as soon as possible.’*

At this rate, there might come citizens who join forces with demons when the empire reaches the brink of collapse. Kang-Woo needed to clean up the empire as soon as possible.

“Oh... I see.” Seol-Ah nodded in understanding.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and continued, “But it’s okay. Most of them think highly of Si-Hun.”

“That’s a relief. We need to make this plan a success as soon as possible... so we can get out of here,” said Seol-Ah while narrowing her eyes.

“Why? You don’t like it here?”

Kang-Woo tilted his head as if he couldn’t understand. They were getting the best treatment here in the imperial palace that one would usually receive in a five-star hotel.

“No, that’s not it.” Seol-Ah leaned her head toward Kang-Woo and sniffed him. “I knew it.” She had felt a strange sense of uneasiness when she had kissed Kang-Woo earlier. She said while pulling on the bed sheet, “You... seem to have been with that princess again today.”

*Rip.* Not only did the bed sheet tear, Seol-Ah was also letting out sacred power without restraint.

*‘Huh? What’s with her all of a sudden?’*

Kang-Woo looked down at his body in confusion. Seol-Ah’s eyes shone coldly.

“You’ve been... with that princess a lot lately, haven’t you? Not just that, she hasn’t been rude to you unlike before.”

“Oh... You see, umm...”

Kang-Woo smiled awkwardly. It was hard to explain to Seol-Ah what had happened between him and Iris.

Seol-Ah’s expression froze. The powerful impulse that she had felt before shook her once again.

“Nothing happened with that princess, right, Kang-Woo?”

“Yes, nothing happened.”

*‘That’s technically not true, but it wasn’t anything that you should be worried about.’*

“Hmm. But why did the princess become so humble all of a sudden lately? She seems to have been staring intently at you as well.”

*‘Hahaha, that’s because I intimidated her after she was getting ahead of herself.’*

“Are you going to be with Princess Iris tomorrow as well?”

*‘Yeah, we’re up to our necks with work to clean up Fidelio’s shit.’*

Seol-Ah’s eyes sank deeply. She muttered as if she was holding something back with all her might, “Okay... You’re busy, so I guess it can’t be helped.” White light shone from her back and formed twelve beautiful wings. “I’m lonely because I haven’t been able to spend any quality time with you lately, but... I’m fine. I can handle it.”

*‘Your attitude says otherwise.’*

“Haaa,” Seol-Ah sighed feverishly. She caressed Kang-Woo’s neck and said, “I love you, Kang-Woo.”

*‘Why are you saying that while caressing my neck?’*

“Uhh, yeah. I love you too, darling.”

Kang-Woo smiled awkwardly. Seol-Ah smiled and stood up; the twelve wings that had been on her back had disappeared before he had realized it.

“I’ll go prepare lunch. You can lie down and rest for a bit longer.”

That was music to Kang-Woo’s ears. Although the imperial palace always prepared lavish feasts, nothing beat Seol-Ah’s kimchi stew.

Kang-Woo said as his mouth was watering, “Okay. Thanks, darl—”

Clack.

Just then, the room door opened.

“Umm... Sir Kang-Woo.” Iris peeked into the room from behind the door and spoke restlessly, “Would you like to have lunch together?”

Kang-Woo momentarily felt as if winter had come in the room. “No, I’m gonna have lunch with Seol-Ah tod—”

“No.” Seol-Ah smiled and continued, “Let’s all have lunch together, Iris.”

## Chapter 356 - Uncomfortable Lunch (2)

Clack, clack.

The sound of silverware hitting echoed in the silent room. Han Seol-Ah, Oh Kang-Woo and Iris sat side by side at a long table that could fit twenty people. Yes, not across from each other, but side by side. Very close together, on top of that.

Three people sitting extremely close together at such a large table certainly was an awkward sight to behold.

“Eat as much as you want, Kang-Woo. If you’re still hungry, I’ve made more,” said Seol-Ah while holding out kimchi stew that she had made by borrowing the palace kitchen.

“Our head chef made this grilled elroy, Sir Kang-Woo,” said Iris while holding out a grilled fish as if not to lose to Seol-Ah.

Seol-Ah slightly pushed away the dish that Iris was holding and remarked, “I’m sorry, but Kang-Woo isn’t a fan of fish.”

*‘No, I’d say I’m a pretty big fan. You make me kimchi stew with saury in it all the time, darling.’*

Kang-Woo kept his mouth shut to prevent the words from leaving his mouth because he was certain that he was better off staying quiet in this situation.

“He was enjoying it quite a lot at the party though,” replied Iris while narrowing her eyes.

Although she had overcome her fear of Fidelio, her twisted personality would not be unwound so easily just because of that. Iris was still domineering toward everyone except Kim Si-Hun and Kang-Woo, but Seol-Ah paid no concern to her attitude.

“My, is that so? He must have forced it down, then.”

“Maybe you just don’t know Sir Kang-Woo that well.”

“Nonsense.”

*Hohoho.* Seol-Ah laughed, and Iris glared at her. Kang-Woo simply lowered his head lifelessly from the war of nerves that was occurring with him in between.

*‘Is this Hell? Did something go wrong while I was crossing to Aernor and end up in the Nine Hells?’*

Kang-Woo felt like he was in the middle of a blizzard. He carefully had a spoonful of the kimchi stew that Seol-Ah had made for him.

*‘Fuck.’*



He could barely taste the delicious kimchi stew. It felt as if he was eating right next to two ticking time bombs.

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

Kang-Woo stared at Iris bitterly. He also held bitter feelings for Seol-Ah for going out of her way to eat with Iris when she could have just refused, but Iris had been the trigger for this misfortune.

*'I thought you fell in love with Si-Hun at first sight. Why do you keep sticking to me?'*

Kang-Woo bit his lip. He wondered if Iris had turned out this way because of the extreme measure he had used to help Iris erase her fear of Fidelio.

*'But still, Si-Hun is far better than me in all aspects.'*

The difference in their looks aside, their attitudes could not be any more different. Kang-Woo had never treated Iris kindly; even in the process to help her overcome her fear, he had pushed her as far down as possible to make her reach rock bottom. He had not consoled her nor empathized with her pain. Rather, Si-Hun had been the one to console her; Kang-Woo had made Si-Hun ask how Iris was doing every single day to have him score some points with her.

*'Si-Hun was doing pretty well.'*

Kang-Woo had once eavesdropped on their call on the communication crystal, and Si-Hun had consoled her with words that would even make a fellow man fall for him. On the other hand, Kang-Woo had criticized Iris about why she had just let herself be beaten up, made her beg him for his help, and all sorts of other shit.

*'So why...'*

"Sir Kang-Woo, please have some of this grilled elroy before it gets cold. I had the head chef procure elroy of the finest quality just for you."

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

Kang-Woo had some of the grilled fish that Iris persistently held out to him. As expected, he could barely taste it.

"See? Look how unwell Kang-Woo's complexion looks," Seol-Ah remarked.

"I'm pretty sure that's because of the red soup that he ate earlier."

"Hmph. It's laughable how you talk about Kang-Woo when you don't know a thing about kimchi stew."

*'What?'*

Were people not allowed to talk about Kang-Woo if they didn't know what kimchi stew was?

*'Mm, is that how it works?'*

It kind of made sense. Kang-Woo tilted his head and thought about the most useless things possible to get as far away from the war of nerves between the two women as possible.

*'Kimchi stew. Kimchi stew. Kimchi stew is delicious. I can never get sick of it. Why is kimchi stew so good when it's just a mixture of kimchi and meat?'*

While Kang-Woo was off in kimchi stew land, the conversation between the two women continued.

"Come to think of it, you must be awfully lonely, Princess Iris."

"Lonely? Me?"

Seol-Ah nodded with a smile. "Since your beloved Si-Hun isn't here."

"My heart ached for you when I saw you bawling your eyes out when Si-Hun left..."

Seol-Ah sighed with her hand on her chest.

Iris raised an eyebrow. "Really? I had no idea."

"You seemed to care deeply for Si-Hun."

"Yeah, since Sir Si-Hun is like a brother to me."

"My, that's the first time I'm hearing of it." Seol-Ah's eyes shone, and she continued, "Then I guess you were quite the brocon."

"Brocon?"

"It's a term for a person who holds excessive love for their biological brother."

"Mm, I don't know about that. I did love my brother, but only as a brother."

Iris and Seol-Ah locked eyes with each other. Kang-Woo thought he saw sparks crackling in thin air.

*'I wonder what the secret to the taste of kimchi stew is?'*

He wondered if there was some sort of hidden truth contained deep within. Kang-Woo continued to stare into nothingness.

Seol-Ah clapped her hands together and smiled radiantly. "My, that's truly a relief, then. Since Si-Hun isn't your actual brother, you don't have to stop yourself from loving him beyond the level of a brother." Seol-Ah nodded in succession. She energetically clenched her fists and continued with good intentions, "Don't you worry, Princess Iris. I will do my best to help so that you two can get closer."

Iris giggled and answered, "Hohoho, there's no need for you to poke your nose into something that's none of your business."

Sparks crackled in the air again.

Kang-Woo grabbed his hair. However much he wanted to think about useless things, this was not the time.

*'I have to put an end to this.'*

This was the first time that he was able to relax ever since arriving in Aernor. Starting tomorrow, his schedule was once again full with cleaning up the evil in the empire, reviving the nation, and all sorts of complicated tasks.

*'I would've just been on my laptop by myself all day if I knew this was gonna happen.'*

Noah's Ark was still left unused in his breast pocket.

"I'll just have them both," Kang-Woo remarked.

He brought the grilled elroy and kimchi stew in front of him. Although it was a ton of food, he was confident that no one could beat him in terms of eating.

Slurp! Munch, munch!

Kang-Woo ate the food as if he were inhaling it. The food was disappearing at an extremely fast pace, and the food that could have easily fed ten people had vanished in a flash.

Clatter.

"Fuuu. Thanks for the food. They were both delicious," said Kang-Woo after putting down the empty dishes on the table.

*'Though I could barely taste anything.'*

"You must've been starving, Kang-Woo. Would you like some more?"

Seol-Ah raised a napkin in a flash and wiped the sauce off of Kang-Woo's mouth.

"No, I'm fine, darling."

"Is that so? Then let's go back to our room. We should continue... where we left off."

Seol-Ah leaned on Kang-Woo while smiling seductively. An extremely warm and soft sensation traveled up his arm.

*'Huh? What were we doing earlier?'*

Kang-Woo searched through his memories. He recalled Seol-Ah whispering that she loved him while caressing his neck, as well as the inexplicable sense of fear that he had felt.

*'You want to continue that? No thanks. I'm scared.'*

"Unfortunately for you, Sir Kang-Woo has business with me today, so that won't be possible," Iris interjected.

*'And what's with you? I told you that we should start tomorrow. I wanna take a break today. No, I'm gonna. I haven't taken a single break ever since getting to Aernor. The Noah's Ark in my heart hasn't even seen the light of day yet. Khadgar... I'm sorry, man. So this is how you felt.'*

Silence fell on them once again. Seol-Ah and Iris, who had been glaring at each other with chilly eyes, turned to face Kang-Woo at the same time.

“Let’s go back to our room now, Kang-Woo.”

“How can we postpone such crucial work for tomorrow? The citizens of the empire are suffering even at this very moment, Sir Kang-Woo.”

Kang-Woo remained silent. He needed to follow one of them, but it was thankfully not a difficult choice to make.

*‘Darling or Iris...’*

One was his beloved darling, who was seemingly implying that they were going to be doing something erotic back in their room, and the other was a princess with a screw loose who was trying to get him to do work that he was planning on doing tomorrow. It was a given who he would choose.

“I promised darling that I would stay with her today, so let’s leave work for tomorrow,” said Kang-Woo as he took Seol-Ah’s hand and stood up.

Iris aggressively bit his lip as she trembled in rage.

*‘For fuck’s sake, since when did you care for the citizens so deeply? Si-Hun will be back soon, so just endure it until then and stop bothering me, lady.’*

Kang-Woo thought that Iris was sticking so closely to him because Si-Hun was absent.

*‘Si-Hun... I need you. Please take this girl away from me. Having two wives isn’t bad, is it? You’re a protagonist, for God’s sake. You shouldn’t stick with just one heroine. I’ll put in a good word with Layla.’*

Kang-Woo’s eyes shone with desperation as he thought about his brother, who was traveling around the empire.

“Hoho, in that case, we’ll be on our way. See you next time, Your Highness.” Seol-Ah waved leisurely while smiling like the victor.

Iris glared at Seol-Ah and then asked Kang-Woo, “Come to think of it, you two are lovers, correct?”

“Oh, yeah. We are.” Kang-Woo nodded.

“Hmm.” Iris looked back and forth at Kang-Woo and Seol-Ah with narrow eyes. “Well, such a relationship doesn’t last forever.”

Iris snorted. Seol-Ah’s face slightly crumpled. She repeatedly opened and closed her fists, and then belt down.

“Oh no.”

“What’s wrong, darling?”

“I dropped my ring by accident.”

“What?”

*'How could you have possibly dropped a ring that you were wearing by accident?'*

“Hohoho. I'm sorry, Kang-Woo. I ended up dropping the precious *engagement ring* that you gave me.”

Seol-Ah smiled brightly and held out the ring that Kang-Woo had given her as if showing it off.

Iris grimaced aggressively as she trembled.

“Well then, Princess Iris.” Seol-Ah approached Iris. “We'll be on our way. I'll do my best to help you so that your relationship with Si-Hun works out well, so you don't have to worry at all.”

Seol-Ah then brought her mouth close to Iris's ear and whispered something. She seemed to have used some sort of divine magic because Kang-Woo wasn't able to hear a word of it.

“Good day, then.” Seol-Ah smiled as she waved her hand.

She dragged Kang-Woo along by the arm and headed out the door. *Slam*. The door closed.

Iris, having been left alone, blankly stared at the closed door.

“Uuu...” She fiercely bared her teeth and grimaced. “Urghhh!”

*Wham!* Iris violently kicked the table. The words that Seol-Ah had whispered into her ear echoed in her mind.

- How dare you have your sights on my Kang-Woo?

“Haaa! Haaa!”

- Know your place, bitch.

“Han... Seol-Ah...!”

Iris aggressively clenched her fists. *Wham!* She kicked the innocent table once again.

Chapter 357 - Supporter

“You're not sure?” Oh Kang-Woo asked.

“Yes... I-I'm sorry, Sir Kang-Woo,” answered Iris while dragging her feet across the ground with her head lowered as if she had committed a grave sin.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and shook his head. “I mean, it's nothing worth apologizing for.”

The first step that they needed to take to revive the empire was to clear out the corrupt nobles that were sucking the citizens dry.

*'It's not as easy as it sounds.'*

The Arnan Empire's current political system was one of a centralized government with the emperor as the centralized power and various nobles managing their respective territories. Kang-Woo was not planning on starting a revolution, so it would be a problem if he just beheaded nobles left and right.

An unmanaged territory was far worse than one managed by a corrupt noble. The weak were not virtuous by nature; they would rip each other apart to take charge of the vacancy left by the noble. Considering the nightmare that nations run over by anarchy faced, punishing all nobles in the current imperial system was insane.

*'I can't deprive the nobles of all their power either.'*

Back when Kang-Woo had just entered the labor force after just coming out of the orphanage, he had heard a middle-aged man shouting in the streets that politicians needed to work without pay.

*'What a fucking joke.'*

There of course needed to be modifications made to a certain extent, but providing people of power with the corresponding level of power and rewards was a necessary evil. There was absolutely no one in the world idiotic enough to do such work without pay.

*'It's the same concept as a class president.'*

There were very few people who actively raised their hands to become the class president. The reason was simple; they were given responsibility and work, but gained nothing out of it. If nobles had all their power taken from them, they would not do the work they were obligated to do.

*'In that case, I'll have to somehow distinguish between the corrupt nobles and the nobles that only use the rights vested in them.'*

The problem was that Iris was not knowledgeable enough about the empire to sort the nobles into those two categories. Although she was not an idiot, she had far too little information to work with due to Fidelio's intentional concealment of such information from her. At this rate, Kang-Woo would not be able to eliminate the corrupt nobles in Fidelio's faction.

"I know a few of them through rumors, but they're nothing but rumors," Iris cautiously remarked.

Kang-Woo nodded. He could not act on simple rumors.

*'I need someone who's knowledgeable about the empire's political landscape.'*

However, such people had either moved over to Fidelio's side or been unceremoniously transferred due to Fidelio's death grip over the empire.

*'Do I have no choice but to ask Fidelio directly?'*

Kang-Woo was reluctant to do so. Fidelio was a clever man; the moment that he found out he held valuable information, he would do anything it took to use it to his advantage.

*'I do have a way to make him talk, but...'*

It was difficult to gain surefire information using such a method. After all, the one who would be saying the information was Fidelio himself; he would be using his own standards to name the corrupt nobles.

*'It would be like gathering a bunch of pieces of shit and asking them who is worse.'*

Kang-Woo was in dire need of someone who knew very well about the empire's political landscape.

“Do you happen to know someone well-versed in this topic?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Mm. Just a second, please.” Iris closed her eyes as if she was organizing the information in her head. She then exclaimed and opened her eyes. “I do.”

“Who?”

“He used to be the imperial head mage. I’m sure he would be very knowledgeable about the situation in the empire.”

“...”

Kang-Woo remained silent. He had a feeling that he knew who the imperial head mage that Iris was referring to.

*‘That perverted son of a bitch is well-versed in politics?’*

He recalled the face of the mage that had almost changed the age rating of the with Layla. Just recalling him made Kang-Woo sigh.

“Haaa.”

Kang-Woo thought for a moment to see if he had any other options, but there was no way that he would think of something so conveniently.

“Let me give him a call and—”

“No, it’s okay.” Kang-Woo shook his head and took out a crystal orb.

Iris became wide-eyed. “You knew about Douglas?”

“Well... I happened to make his acquaintance.”

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly. To be honest, he also welcomed having Douglas as a supporter.

*‘Since there’s no one who knows about high elves better than him.’*

Making Kim Si-Hun the hero of the continent, saving Iris if that could be called saving, and reviving the empire was all to have a high elf manifest in Aernor. A scholar of high elves such as Douglas would no doubt be of great help to their plan.

[What is it?] Douglas’s voice came out of the communication crystal.

Kang-Woo took a glance at Iris. He said, “Douglas.”

*‘It’s time for you to stop watching ero manga and work.’*

\*\*\*

“Y-Your Highness...” Douglas, who rushed to the capital as soon as he received Kang-Woo’s call, froze as soon as he saw Iris. His wrinkled face was filled with regret, guilt and rage. “... I heard about Fidelio.”

The news that he was Lucifer’s servant had already long since spread throughout the continent to the point that even Douglas, who lived alone in the magic tower, heard about it.

"I knew he was a greedy and evil man, but to think he was a servant of the Evil God!" Douglas kneeled in front of Iris and lowered his head. "I'm sorry. I... should have been here to protect you, no matter what happened."

The past never returned. No matter how quickly one regretted their actions, it was already too late. Douglas stared at Iris pitifully. The Iris that he knew was a kind and delicate girl. Even if Fidelio had run away, he expected her body and soul to be broken to the point that it would be impossible for her to get through daily life due to the trauma that Fidelio had inflicted on her.

"No. I'm fine, Douglas," Iris stated.

"... Your Highness?"

Douglas became wide-eyed. Iris, whom he had thought would be in agony from the daily nightmares of Fidelio, looked completely fine.

"Though I still get angry whenever I think of what I had to go through because of that motherfucker."

"Y-Your Highness?"

Douglas flinched from the deep madness and thick bloodlust that he was feeling from Iris. The kind and delicate girl that he knew was no longer there; she had been replaced with a ferocious beast covered in bloodlust.

*'What in the world...'*

How could the girl who used to tremble in fear just from looking at Fidelio in the eyes have changed so much? Douglas stared at Iris in perplexity.

"Her Highness has overcome her fear of Prime Minister Fidelio with her strong will," Kang-Woo informed.

"It's all thanks to Sir Kang-Woo." Iris smiled brightly and embraced Kang-Woo's arm.

"Mm. I'm not entirely certain what happened, but..." Douglas slurred.

He was not sure why Iris, who always used to treat anyone but Reynald bluntly and temperamentally, was so close to Kang-Woo, but...

"I am... truly relieved."

Douglas smiled. It was far better to see Iris happy, albeit a little aggressive, than trembling in fear.

"Thank you for coming back, Douglas," Iris remarked.

"Not at all. I should be the one thanking you for calling back this useless old man who failed to protect you, Your Highness."

Douglas got on one knee and lowered his head. Kang-Woo smiled as he looked at Douglas.

*'Thank God he didn't say that he was going back to his secluded life.'*



Iris had practically no supporters, so Douglas would become a reliable ally as well as her strength.

“More importantly, why have you called me?” Douglas asked.

He had still not been informed of the specifics of the situation.

Kang-Woo handed Douglas the list of nobles of the empire he had received from Lilith and stated, “We would love to throw a party for you if we had enough time, but considering the circumstances, we have to get started right away.”

Although he felt sorry for slaving Douglas away as soon as he came all this way, this was not the time to feel sorry.

*‘I have to get to those damn corrupt nobles before they cut off all ties with Fidelio.’*

As soon as Fidelio was discovered to be the servant of Evil God Lucifer, the nobles of Fidelio’s faction were erasing all evidence of their ties with Fidelio like a lizard cutting off its own tail to escape a predator. They were lowering taxes and distributing goods to the people of their territory in hopes that they would not get caught up in the storm.

*‘I won’t let them get away.’*

There was no way that a human who discovered the sweet taste of desire for the first time would reflect on and atone for their sins in the true sense.

*‘No, even if they do, the sins that they have already committed don’t disappear.’*

They had already dropped countless citizens into the pit of despair. Kang-Woo would not let them act like they had turned over a new leaf.

“Please pick out the nobles that had sided with Fidelio in this list. Oh, even if they didn’t side with Fidelio, please pick them out anyway if they had ever tyrannized the citizens.”

“Mm,” Douglas groaned as if he was in a predicament.

Kang-Woo was worried that Douglas did not know much about the empire’s political landscape as he had hoped, but Douglas had fortunately groaned for a different reason.

“It’s going to be a lot,” Douglas expressed.

“That’s fine.”

Punishing corrupt nobles en masse would temporarily brew chaos, but it was far better than leaving them be.

*‘I’ll punish them to an extent.’*

Considering the circumstances, Kang-Woo needed to be flexible. He knew that wishing only for virtuous nobles to manage territories was nothing but a naive ideal.

“Understood. In that case, I will first pick out the nobles that sided with Fidelio,” Douglas said as he quickly worked through the complex pile of documents as if

proving that he used to be the head imperial mage. "First, Duke Delfio and Marquess Vander. They're the worst of the bunch."

Douglas organized the documents containing the details of each noble at breakneck speed. Viscount Velen, whom Kang-Woo had met on his first day in Aernor, was among the pile of documents for the nobles in Fidelio's faction.

"I've picked out the sons of bitches in Fidelio's faction first," Douglas remarked.

"There are quite a lot," Kang-Woo mentioned.

"... He wasn't a demon for nothing." Douglas sighed and continued, "He either purged or demoted every noble that went against him."

"Are you among his victims?"

"..."

Douglas did not answer, but his silence was enough of an answer.

"How should we deal with these nobles...?" Kang-Woo turned his head toward Iris.

Iris answered without hesitation, "Execute them."

Thick bloodlust emanated from her eyes. Douglas expressed shock, not having expected Iris to make such an extreme choice.

"A-All of them?" he asked.

"Yes. All nobles that have any sort of connection to Fidelio must die," Iris answered firmly, then looked toward Kang-Woo with sparkling eyes like a dog waiting to be praised.

Kang-Woo smiled awkwardly and nodded. "It is a suitable punishment for what they have done."

"... Are you sure it will be alright? Each of their private armies are a force to be reckoned with."

"That doesn't matter." Kang-Woo shrugged.

Kang-Woo's party was so powerful that nothing but a deity would be able to face them. The likes of private armies of nobles were of no consequence to them.

"We should first punish the nobles connected to Fidelio and think about what to do after—"

Clack!

The room door suddenly opened while Kang-Woo was talking. An unbelievably handsome man entered the room.

"Si-Hun?"

"Sir Si-Hun?"

Kang-Woo was left wide-eyed as he stared at Kim Si-Hun. He had heard that Si-Hun would be coming back soon, but he had not expected him to be this quick.

*'Alright, perfect timing, man.'*

Kang-Woo looked down at Iris, who was looking up at him with sparkling eyes. He had been waiting for someone who would be able to pry Iris off of him.

*'Si-Hun.'*

Kang-Woo gave Si-Hun a look and pointed at Iris. This was the perfect chance for him to score some points with Iris. Possibly having understood Kang-Woo's message, Si-Hun approached the group without hesitation.

*'Yes, good! Now, if you embrace Iris and say some shit like "I've missed you, Your Highness," she'll fall head over heels for you!'*

Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction while imagining Si-Hun and Iris's heartfelt reunion. However, unlike what he had hoped, Si-Hun stormed right past Iris.

*'Huh? He walked past her?'*

Grab!

"I've missed you, hyung-nim."

"..."

*'Not me, you stupid son of a bitch.'*

Chapter 358 - Ruining Our Great Work

*'Why me, you dumbass?'*

Oh Kang-Woo turned anxiously to look at Iris. For his plan to succeed, it was a necessity for the hero and the imperial princess, in other words, Kim Si-Hun and Iris, to maintain an amicable relationship.

*'You have to make the high elf take as much of an interest in you as possible, dammit. Do I really have to spell everything out for you?'*

Kang-Woo had discovered from when Iris had seen through his Authority of Stealth that the blessing of the high elves imbued in Iris was considerably powerful. There was a high chance that the high elves would have great interest in the one that they had blessed.

*'Even if they don't treat her like their own child like Gaia does to her retainers...'*

They would at least treat Iris better than other people. Kang-Woo felt as if the ideal hero-princess picture in his mind was falling apart.

*'I might have to... make some aggressive moves.'*

Kang-Woo would have to push a little more aggressively for Iris and Si-Hun's relationship to bloom. Iris already had feelings for Si-Hun, so it would not be difficult to do as long as Si-Hun cooperated.

"Yeah. I missed you too, Si-Hun." Kang-Woo pushed aside his thoughts for now and patted Si-Hun's shoulder. He had actually missed Si-Hun as well after all these weeks. "How did your interactions with the citizens go?"

"They were extremely passionate. Haha, I felt like I'd become an idol or something." Si-Hun scratched his head in embarrassment.

Kang-Woo smirked. *'Cute son of a bitch.'*

No idol could ever compare to Si-Hun in terms of looks, so seeing him so embarrassed was rather cute. Kang-Woo patted Si-Hun's shoulder and turned toward Iris.

"You should greet the princess as well, Si-Hun."

"Oh," Si-Hun exclaimed, having only just realized that he was told to form good relations with the princess. "I apologize, Your Highness. I was so distracted that I failed to see you."

"Hoho. I-It's alright! I already knew that you two are very close." Iris, who had been staring blankly at the two of them, hurriedly smiled and bowed to Si-Hun.

Seeing that, Kang-Woo chuckled. *'Well, well. You got jealous, huh?'*

From Iris's reaction, she seemed to have been saddened by the fact that Si-Hun had come to Kang-Woo before her.

*'I was a bit worried, but it seems it was needless.'*

Her jealousy was good news, especially if it was to the point that she was bothered by the fact that Si-Hun had taken care of his older brother, despite them both being men. It showed the extent of Iris's feelings for Si-Hun.

*'Should I stimulate those feelings a bit more?'*

Kang-Woo approached Si-Hun and lightly hit his shoulder. "I was bored without you around, Si-Hun."

"H-Hyung-nim..."

"I heard you were attacked a few times. Are you okay?"

"Of course."

"Haha! Okay. I'm glad you're unhurt, Si-Hun."

Kang-Woo purposefully flaunted his intimacy with Si-Hun.

"Ngh..."

Like Kang-Woo had thought, Iris was biting her lip in frustration while staring at him and Si-Hun. Kang-Woo smiled widely.

*'Man, I might actually get two sisters-in-law at this rate. I'll have to think of a way to persuade Layla later.'*

"That aside, Si-Hun. I'm sorry to say this as soon as you've come back, but..." Kang-Woo prioritized what they needed to do first and foremost. He handed Si-Hun the documents that Douglas had sorted. "Capture everyone in these documents and bring them to me."

"Me?" Si-Hun expressed.

Kang-Woo nodded. The people of the empire thought worse of the nobles than they did demons. To revive the nation as well as publicize Si-Hun as a hero, Si-Hun himself needed to step up to punish the nobles.

"Who are they?" asked Si-Hun.

"Nobles that sided with Fidelio."

Si-Hun's eyes turned menacing as soon as Fidelio was mentioned. It had been exposed while he was traveling the nation, but it had been such a massive incident that he had also heard about Fidelio's true identity; he was the servant of Evil God Lucifer. The nobles that had sided with him likely did not know that Fidelio was a demon, but their actions had been no different from that of demons.

"... I guess I'll have to head out right away." Si-Hun stared at Kang-Woo in disappointment, his eyes seemingly asking Kang-Woo if he could come with him this time.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and shook his head; he had far more things to do.

*'Moreover...'*

Kang-Woo couldn't be bothered to. It was far too much of a hassle. He was already far too busy to spend any time with his darling, so he did not want to take on any more bothersome work.

*'The little brother is supposed to take on all the chores, Si-Hun. If you've got a problem, just get older than me.'*

"I understand. I will punish them myself." Si-Hun summoned his holy sword while exuding bloodlust.

Kang-Woo shook his head. "No. Bring them to me without killing them."

"Pardon?" Si-Hun's eyes widened in confusion.

"Iris needs to declare their execution herself in front of the people. Oh, since we have to give a speech to let the public know of every single one of their crimes, make sure to record any evidence you find with a crystal."

“S-Sir Kang-Woo?” Iris expressed confusion this time.

Hearing that she needed to give a speech before the citizens, she looked at Kang-Woo anxiously.

“I told you that I would let you take back what’s yours.” Kang-Woo placed his hand on Iris’s shaking shoulders. “Nothing will change from before if you just leave everything to Si-Hun.”

Iris’s image of witch had considerably disappeared after the reveal of Fidelio’s true identity, but there was no way that the people of the empire would amicably view a princess that had been controlled by a demon. Her reputation as a witch had simply been replaced by that of an incompetent princess.

*‘I need to show them that Iris is punishing the nobles personally.’*

Only then would the people praise and acknowledge her.

“I-I’ll do my best!”

“No, that’s not enough. You have to do well. Anyone can do their best.”

“Urgh...” Iris lowered her head in dejection.

Kang-Woo chuckled. “Don’t worry. I’ll help you write your speech and teach you how to present it.”

Kang-Woo had done it many times while he had ruled over Hell as the Demon King. He was very knowledgeable in grabbing people’s attention.

“Okay!” Iris answered energetically.

“I’ll leave it to you then, Si-Hun.”

“I understand, hyung-nim.” Si-Hun bowed and turned around.

Kang-Woo felt a little guilty as he looked at the back of his little brother, who was leaving for business as soon as he came back.

“At least take a break for today,” Kang-Woo suggested.

“I cannot. There’s a chance that some of these nobles are associated with Lucifer. I am not feeling unwell in the slightest, so I will head out immediately.”

“Uhh, mm. Got it.”

“Thank you for worrying about me, hyung-nim.”

“...”

Kang-Woo grew even more guilty.

*‘Ngh. Well, it can’t be helped. He says that he’s fine. I didn’t force him in any way. Yup, yup.’*

“In that case, let us move on.” Kang-Woo handed Douglas the remaining pile of documents. It was the list of nobles that had no direct relations with Fidelio. “Please pick out the nobles that had conducted wrongdoings unrelated to Fidelio.”

“Mm. This is more complicated. Understood.” Douglas nodded and began to sort through the documents. “Marquess Berocca. He runs a large slave market in the northeastern region of the empire. He had no relation with Fidelio because he was so far out along the border, but he is known for his evil conduct.”

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about him. He’s already dead.”

“Dead? Ohh... During the party venue incident?”

“Yes.”

Douglas nodded in understanding and continued to sort through the documents. “Mm, but the nobles with no direct relations with Fidelio are difficult to charge with sins. After all, not many are completely free of sin.”

Douglas picked out a few more while groaning. Kang-Woo picked up the pile and handed it to Iris.

“Princess Iris,” Kang-Woo called respectfully.

“Ah, yes!”

“Please read through these documents and decide how you will deal with the nobles.”

“I understand.” Iris nodded. And then... “Death, death, death.”

She held up the golden seal that symbolized the authority of the imperial family and stamped it on every single document without hesitation. Kang-Woo’s mouth fell open.

*‘What the... I told you to decide after reading through them, young lady.’*

Kang-Woo was about to say something, but sighed while shaking his head. He could not bring himself to say anything since he himself had been the one to make Iris this way.

“Wha...” muttered Douglas all of a sudden, so silently that no one but Kang-Woo could have heard it.

Douglas looked down at a single document, and then took it out of the pile to stuff in his pocket.

Grab.

“Wait.” Kang-Woo’s eyes narrowed after grabbing Douglas’s wrist. “What was that just now, Douglas?”

“Oh, y-you see...” Douglas broke into a cold sweat.

“You’re not trying to pardon a noble just because you have personal ties with them, are you?”

“N-Not at all! I simply sorted it elsewhere because their action wasn’t enough to be considered evil toward the people!!” Douglas shouted.

“Then why did you put it in your pocket?”

“W-Well...”

Douglas’s eyes quivered. Kang-Woo took the document out of Douglas’s pocket.

“Baron Lisanagi,” Kang-Woo read.

Like Douglas had said, the noble was only using the powers vested in him. No, his territory was so small that he did not have much power in the first place, so it certainly was ambiguous to sort him as evil.

“Why did you take him out of the pile, Douglas?” Kang-Woo glared at him while emitting bloodlust.

Douglas trembled, being faced head-on with the bloodlust of the Demon King.

He stuttered, “B- Baron L-Lisanagi is... a phenomenal p-porn artist.” He gulped.

“... Pardon?”

*‘A phenomenal what artist?’*

“He draws excellent porn... H-He is like a god in our industry! H-He mustn’t be sentenced to death!”

“...”

Kang-Woo remained silent, and his eyes flared up.

“For a reason like that...”

*‘For a stupidly pathetic reason like that...’*

The floor of the imperial palace that he was standing on cracked like a spider web with him at the epicenter.

“... You’re trying to ruin our great work?!” Kang-Woo expressed rage as he slammed his fist down on the table.

“Is your brain down in your groin?! You’re thinking about porn in this situation? Hah! You should be embarrassed!”

“M-My apologies.” Douglas lowered his head.

Kang-Woo turned away from Douglas in exasperation.

*‘What the hell is he thinking?’*

He had not expected Douglas, whom he had trusted, to stab him in the back like this.

*‘If only I wasn’t helped by him in the past...’*



Kang-Woo would not have left Douglas be. He turned around while quelling the rage within him.

“I will go get some water.”

He felt he would be unable to handle his boiling blood from spread throughout his body if he stayed here any longer. Kang-Woo opened the office door.

“... Sir Kang-Woo.”

Just then, Iris approached him. She put her hand in his left breast pocket and took out a document that had been neatly folded and placed in there before anyone had realized it. It was the documents containing Baron Lisanagi’s personal details.

“You forgot to leave the document here,” said Iris.

“...”

‘Oh.’

Chapter 359 - Spamming Underplots

The plan to root out the evils of the empire commenced. Kim Si-Hun went to each and every noble of Fidelio’s faction that sucked the citizens of the empire dry, and subdued them.

The nobles tried to stop Si-Hun by arming their knights, soldiers and even the people of their territory, but it was a pointless effort. Si-Hun barged into the territory all on his own, neutralized the citizens who had been forced to fight, and forced out the corrupt nobles.

The other nobles who had heard about Si-Hun’s actions tried to run without putting up resistance or making any excuses, but it was near impossible to run from the extremely fast Si-Hun with exceptionally heightened senses.

Not just that, as if letting out the rage that had been suppressed all this time, the citizens stepped up to help Si-Hun by telling him in real time where the nobles ran to. Hence, the nobles of Fidelio’s faction, who had literally become the public enemy of the entire empire, were soon thrown in jail and could do nothing but wait for the sentence that Iris would give them.

“Fufu. He sure is working hard. I wonder if it’s to make himself look good to you, Master Kang-Woo?” Lilith giggled as she organized the report.

Oh Kang-Woo turned toward her. “How is the progress?”

“They have almost all been captured. The status of the nobles that had been demoted by Fidelio are also being restored.”

“Make sure you keep an eye on them as well. Just because they didn’t take Fidelio’s side doesn’t mean they’re clean.”

“Fufu. After what’s happening right now? Even if they have evil desires, they wouldn’t dare act on them as long as Si-Hun is here.”

"I guess that's true." Kang-Woo nodded. Regardless of whether it was of their own will or someone else's, the nobles would no longer be able to do whatever they wanted. "That aside, have you found out who that woman is yet?"

Kang-Woo recalled the woman who had made the Lucifer Coin prices plummet as soon as it skyrocketed.

Lilith shook her head. "No, not yet. However, I am acquiring more and more informants in Aernor as well. I should be able to gain some information about her soon."

"Really? How did you get informants?"

"Fufu. Would you like to know?"

Lilith smiled widely and turned a portion of her hair to a green tentacle. It wriggled up Kang-Woo's arm while spewing sticky mucus. Kang-Woo turned pale.

"... No."

*'I don't wanna know.'*

"Hoho. Well then, I will be on my way to expand my information network more." Lilith lightly waved her hand and turned around.

Kang-Woo was about to ask who she was using as informants, but decided not to.

*'It doesn't do me any good to know.'*

He felt sorry for the poor victims of Lilith's tentacles, but it was none of his business.

*'As long as it's not me, it's all good.'*

Kang-Woo couldn't care less about who they were. He nodded and turned away from Lilith.

"Oh right, Master Kang-Woo," Lilith mentioned.

"H-Hm?" Kang-Woo flinched and turned back toward Lilith.

"Balrog is coming back today, apparently."

"Oh, really?"

Kang-Woo's eyes shone. Balrog's party, who had been traveling throughout the nation along with Si-Hun, had separated from Si-Hun again to investigate the entire continent.

*'It's been about a month.'*

Time flew by after everything that Kang-Woo had to do.

*'I might as well go out to greet them.'*

Kang-Woo smiled and stood up.

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"Kang-Woo!"

Echidna ran toward Kang-Woo with a radiant smile and jumped into his arms. As if proving that she was a dragon, she was squeezing his waist with immense force despite her small stature.

*'You're gonna break my spine, Echidna.'*

Kang-Woo chuckled and patted Echidna's head. "How've you been?"

"Hm! Hm! Kang-Woo! Kang-Woo!"

Echidna was breathing heavily with her face buried in Kang-Woo's embrace, having no leeway to answer.

*'Since when were dragons a breed of dog?'*

Echidna was taking in Kang-Woo's scent to an excessive degree. She rubbed her nose around Kang-Woo's solar plexus area and shouted happily, "Hm! Sniffing Heaven [1]!"

*'What the hell does that mean?'*

Kang-Woo tilted his head from the unfamiliar phrase. Balrog walked up to him before he had a chance to ask Echidna what it meant.

"Have you been well, Master Kang-Woo?"

"Yeah. And you?"

Kang-Woo waved at Balrog happily. He couldn't help but smile for some reason after seeing Balrog after a month.

"U-Urgh! M-Move!" Halcyon yanked away Echidna, who had been rubbing her face on Kang-Woo.

He looked like a frail girl on the outside, but he was an ancient demonic beast; he was far stronger than the princes of Hell in terms of physical strength, so there was no way that Echidna would be able to handle such power.

"Ack!"

Echidna glared at Halcyon after being thrown back. Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and lightly conked Halcyon's head.

"What do you think you're doing?" Kang-Woo scolded.

"Hng..." Halcyon became teary-eyed as he grabbed his forehead.

Kang-Woo walked past him and grabbed Echidna's hand to help her up. He lightly brushed off the dirt on her butt and asked, "How did it go?"

"I was lonely because you weren't with me," answered Echidna.

"No, not that. Did you manage to find anything?"

*'I don't really have my hopes up, though.'*

Kang-Woo had told them to find clues regarding the Demon God's corpse, but it had been nothing but an excuse to send them away to prepare a stage for Si-Hun so that he could monopolize the achievements.

"Well, I didn't really have my hopes u—"

"We did find something a little suspicious," Cha Yeon-Joo interjected.

"What?" Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. "Something suspicious?"

Yeon-Joo shrugged. "I'm not really sure. I didn't really see anything off about it, but Balrog thought it was a huge deal."

Kang-Woo turned toward Balrog. Balrog slowly closed his eyes and took something out of his pocket. It was a box the size of a palm; Kang-Woo opened it.

"Sand?" It was red sand. As Kang-Woo was about to ask what was so special about it, he suddenly froze. "This is..."

"Yes, you are correct." Balrog nodded. "It is dirt from the Nine Hells."

Kang-Woo scooped up the red sand from the box and licked a little of it. He detected the bitter taste of blood and a minuscule amount of demonic energy within it. It was the dirt that made up the land of the Nine Hells.

"... Fuck."

Kang-Woo frowned. His head was in jumbles. Why would dirt containing demonic energy exist in Aernor?

"Where did you find this?"

"A town in the northern region of Aernor."

"A town?"

"I say town, but... it was not one inhabited by people. It had become a ruin as if it had been attacked by monsters."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. He touched the red dirt in the box again.

"Were there any demons or demonic beasts in the area?" he asked.

"None," answered Balrog.

"How far was the dirt spread?"

"About a hundred meters."

"And nowhere else?"

"Yes, but the demonic energy itself was spread throughout the town."

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent. A ruined town and the affected area spanning over about a hundred meters... There was extremely little information, but there were not many possibilities to choose from.

“... Someone must’ve performed a summoning ritual,” Kang-Woo surmised.

There was a good chance that the residents of the town had become sacrifices of the summoning ritual that the Demon Cult used to perform on Earth.

Yeon-Joo grimaced and asked, “Does that mean there’s an organization like the Demon Cult here as well?”

Kang-Woo shook his head.

*‘The Demon Cult... The likes of the Demon Cult...’*

He firmly replied, “The Demon Cult couldn’t do something like this.”

Yeon-Joo frowned as if she couldn’t follow. “What do you mean? The Demon Cult bastards sacrificed people to perform summoning rituals all the time.”

“That’s where you’re wrong.” Kang-Woo continued with sunken eyes, “The Demon Cult made considerable investments for just one summoning ritual.”

However, not once had the land of the Nine Hells been transported, nor had the summoning spanned a hundred meters, not even when Balrog had been summoned.

“But these guys managed to perform such a large-scale summoning by using people from a mere town as a sacrifice,” Kang-Woo remarked.

There would be a few dozen people, at the very least, in a town located near the border of the empire, and it would not exceed three hundred.

*‘Especially if there hadn’t even been a single report regarding the incident...’*

It meant that the town had been an extremely small one with not even a governing lord.

*‘With such a small number of people...’*

They had succeeded in such a large-scale summoning with regular people who farmed for a living in a remote town as sacrifices, not even Players or other powerful individuals. Not even Kang-Woo would be able to do such a thing.

“...”

Kang-Woo licked his lips. The bitter taste of blood from the red dirt lingered in his mouth. His boiling blood traveled throughout his body. *Ba-dump, ba-dump*. His heart beat rapidly. He felt anxiety, uneasiness, displeasure, and...

“Interesting.”

Kang-Woo smiled. Shivers of thrill ran down his spine. He had not gotten this feeling in a very long time. His demon instincts were stirred. An unknown enemy... A prey that was hiding within the darkness, waiting to strike... The desire to find and devour that prey made Kang-Woo’s blood boil.

*'I wonder who it could be?'*

He had no idea; he had nowhere near enough information.

*'Well, it doesn't matter.'*

Kang-Woo smirked and cooled down his boiling blood. It did not matter who it was, what they were planning, nor how much power they were amassing.

*'Besides...'*

Kang-Woo would come out victorious in the end. He had always done so, and would continue to do so in the future.

"Is that all that you've found?" Kang-Woo asked.

"Yes. We were not able to find anything else," answered Balrog.

"Mm. Let Lilith know later so she can investigate it as well."

"As you command."

Balrog bowed deeply. Kang-Woo fell into thought as he looked down at Balrog.

*'I want to head to that town this instant, but...'*

Kang-Woo had things that he needed to do. He let go of his desire and shook his head.

*'If Balrog says that he wasn't able to find anything else...'*

Kang-Woo wouldn't be able to find anything either, even if he went. Focusing on the task at hand was the right call.

*'Although it's almost coming to an end.'*

Making Si-Hun the hero of the continent, returning the authority of the imperial family to Iris, reviving the empire, and giving the people something to lose...

*'I'm still one step short.'*

Si-Hun lacked just one decisive factor that would not be supplemented just by subduing corrupt nobles and saving citizens from demonic beasts.

*'Si-Hun lacks legitimacy.'*

To the people of the empire, Si-Hun was literally a hero who had fallen from the sky. He was being praised at the moment because he had accomplished such incredible feats, but there were bound to be people who would criticize him for that factor. It was only natural, since Si-Hun was not a citizen of Arnan. To make a comparison, it was as if a national crisis in Korea had been resolved by a foreigner who had appeared out of nowhere.

*'He'd be treated the same way as General MacArthur.'*

Although General Douglas MacArthur was considered a hero among Koreans, he was not as famous as Korean heroes.

*‘Anyway...’*

Although Si-Hun was being sufficiently treated as a hero at the moment, there was a way to have him be hailed even more as a hero.

*‘A way to resolve Si-Hun’s legitimacy as well as raise people’s opinions of Iris at the same time.’*

“Layla, I have something to tell you,” said Kang-Woo.

“Ah, okay. What is it, Kang-Woo?” As Layla was thinking hard about what she had heard about the summoning, she turned her head as Kang-Woo suddenly called her.

“Well, I have to ask for your understanding, to be more exact.”

“My understanding?”

Kang-Woo grabbed Layla’s shoulders and continued, “I want Si-Hun and Iris to be engaged.”

Chapter 360 - Engagement Announcement

“Pardon?” Layla stared at Oh Kang-Woo wide-eyed, unable to understand the out-of-the-blue statement. She stuttered, “Wh-What do you mean?”

“I’m not talking about a real engagement,” Kang-Woo mentioned.

“Oh.” Layla fell into thought for a moment with her hand on her chin, and then nodded as if she understood what Kang-Woo meant. “You must be thinking of solidifying Si-Hun’s foothold in the empire by announcing his engagement with Iris.”

She had been able to figure out Kang-Woo’s intentions with ease.

“Correct.” Kang-Woo nodded.

Marriage was an excellent political move; it had been used many more times in history for political purposes rather than for love, especially among those in power.

Kang-Woo said, “Si-Hun lacks legitimacy at the moment.”

“I get what you mean,” Layla agreed.

Kim Si-Hun was already considered a hero by the majority of the continent, but his announcement of engagement with the imperial princess would consolidate his position even more.

“But wouldn’t that make the other nations wary of him?” Layla asked.

Si-Hun needed to be the hero of Aernor, not the hero of the Arnan Empire. His engagement with Iris might be a bad move in that aspect, since the fact that he was not affiliated with any nation at the moment was a weapon in its own right.

“Mm,” Kang-Woo expressed. It was a valid argument, but... “Although there are other nations in Aernor, the Arnan Empire’s status is far larger than any of them.”

It was easy to see, considering the entire continent was using the currency known as the Arnan.

“Also, it isn’t just for Si-Hun to be acknowledged by the people of the empire,” Kang-Woo added.

“You’ve even thought about the high elves.”

“Yes.”

As long as Iris was blessed by the high elves, it was fair to assume that she had more of a connection with them than anyone else.

“From the perspective of the high elves, they would want nothing more than Si-Hun and Iris to get together,” Kang-Woo said.

High elves were beings of godhood that possessed Divinity, so they likely possessed intelligence just like Gaia. Kang-Woo did not know how much interest they had in the matters of Aernor, but they probably would not think negatively of the matrimony between the one that they had blessed and the savior of the continent.

“Have you told Si-Hun and Iris?” Gaia asked.

“No, not yet.”

“I’m fine with it as long as Si-Hun is okay with it as well. I would have qualms about it if it were an actual engagement, but... It’s fake anyway.” Layla smiled gently.

*‘She sure gets it.’*

No matter how Kang-Woo looked at it, Layla was far better than Gaia. Kang-Woo smiled and bowed to Layla.

“Thank you very much for understanding.”

As long as he acquired Layla’s approval, the rest was easy. Si-Hun would do anything that Kang-Woo asked of him, and Iris had feelings for Si-Hun.

*‘They can take this chance to get closer to each other.’*

Kang-Woo felt sorry for Layla, but the ultimate goal was for Iris and Si-Hun to get together for real. Iris’s current mental state was highly unstable, and there was nothing better to heal the mind than getting together with the one you love.

*‘I feel bad for her too.’*

Although it had ultimately been Iris’s choice, Kang-Woo felt guilty about pushing her to the point that her mind had completely broken. There was no better opportunity than this to get rid of the nuisance that had been bothering him lately as well as to atone for his actions.

*‘Si-Hun, a protagonist has gotta have at least two heroines. She’s a bit loco, but I’m sure you can make it work.’*

Kang-Woo headed to the imperial palace while smiling in satisfaction.

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“An... engagement?”

Iris’s eyes shook. She was reacting more strongly than Layla.

*‘No wonder.’*

It was only obvious since she had feelings for Si-Hun. She was likely cheering inside her head.

“I say engagement, but it’s not a real one.”

Kang-Woo gave her a short explanation. He naturally could not tell her that it was to manifest a high elf, so he told her instead that it was necessary to revive the empire.

“Oh...” Iris expressed.

Kang-Woo smirked and put his hand over her shoulder. “You don’t have to be so disappointed.”

“Pardon?”

“Although it’s fake, you’ll be engaged to each other. You’ll have far more opportunities to be together, just the two of you.”

They needed to be together very often to fool everyone around them.

“Let’s try to make the fake engagement into a real one. I’ll help you the best I can,” Kang-Woo said with a smile.

Iris fell silent. She seemed to be confused by the sudden suggestion of an engagement, especially since it was a fake one.

“What did... Sir Si-Hun say?” she asked.

“He’s okay with it. He said that his heart was pounding from the fact that he would be engaged with you, even if it is fake.”

Kang-Woo did not forget to add some MSG. Iris’s gaze wavered even more.

“His heart... pounded?”

“It means that Si-Hun has at least some feelings for you.”

Si-Hun had actually said nothing of the sort, but it didn’t matter. Kang-Woo needed to do at least this much to act as the cupid that would progress their stagnant relationship.

“I see.” Iris lowered her head, conflicted.

Kang-Woo smiled brightly and cheered Iris on. “From what I see, you two suit each other very well. Don’t be too disappointed that it’s fake and do your best. Anyway, save it as a surprise announcement for the people around the end of your speech.”

Iris stared at Kang-Woo, who stood up to leave, with mixed feelings and then asked, “Umm... Sir Kang-Woo.”

“Hm?”

“I would like to ask you something.” She averted his gaze while twiddling her fingers. “If I become engaged to Sir Si-Hun... Will my time with you lessen?”

“I guess it would, yeah.”

Regardless of whether it was true or not, everyone in the empire, nobles and commoners alike, would think that Si-Hun and Iris truly were engaged. If Iris were to stick to Kang-Woo in that situation like she was as of late, bad rumors were bound to spread.

“Well, it’s nothing but good for you, since you’ll be able to spend that much more time with Si-Hun.”

Kang-Woo lightly patted Iris’s shoulder and turned around. *Clack*. He opened the door and left the room.

Iris, who was left in the room by herself, stared at the closed door in silence. *Crunch, crunch*. She temperamentally bit her fingernails while continuing to stare fixated at the door.

- Hohoho. I’m sorry, Kang-Woo. I ended up dropping the precious engagement ring that you gave me.

Han Seol-Ah’s laugh suddenly fluttered in her ears.

*Crunch!* Blood flowed down from the fingernail that she was biting.

“Engagement.”

Iris stood up as she swayed. She continued to say that word repeatedly in madness.

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“Now, don’t be nervous. You memorized the speech, right?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Yes, in full,” Iris replied.

“Just be confident.”

The day that Iris would sentence the nobles that Si-Hun had captured arrived. The plaza was filled with people who had come to watch the ruling, and the broadcast that had been used during the Fidelio incident was also on. Iris looked down at the plaza anxiously, and then slowly walked forward.

“Look! It’s Princess Iris!” someone yelled.

However, the reception was not great.

“Tsk. What could a princess that was controlled by a demon possibly do?”

“Anything but an innocent ruling...”

Everyone gathered in the plaza was looking up at Iris with worry and uneasiness. Iris shut her eyes tight.

*‘I’m not scared.’*

She clenched her fists.

*'This is nothing compared to back then.'*

Iris slowly opened her eyes and opened her mouth in front of the magic tool that amplified sound.

"Citizens of the empire." Iris continued, "I am... an incompetent princess."

Deathly silence fell. Everyone looked up at her in confusion, not having expected the princess herself to say such a thing.

"I was deceived by a demon in human clothing, and simply watched as the empire grew diseased."

The mumbles among the people grew louder.

"I will not make excuses." Iris raised her head high. "I was incompetent and powerless. I abandoned my duty as an imperial princess and averted my eyes from my suffering subjects. But no longer. No longer will I avert my eyes from my duty."

Iris extended her arm toward the nobles tied up in the plaza and shouted firmly, "I will make the parasites that have plagued the empire until now pay for their crimes!" She yelled toward the imperial guards, "Death to these parasites!"

The plaza fell silent for a moment, and then...

"Waaaaaaaahhh!!!"

The people gathered at the plaza cheered at Iris's completely unexpected decision.

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"It's going very well."

Kang-Woo smiled as he looked down at the cheering citizens. They were all cheering for Iris, whom they all thought to be an incompetent princess, personally sentencing the corrupt nobles to death.

*'It's usually unthinkable.'*

No matter how grave a crime nobles committed, they were usually never executed unless they had instigated a rebellion. They were usually exiled or put under probation.

*'I'm sure there would be backlash from other nobles, but...'*

It did not matter since they had Si-Hun. As long as he stood by Iris's side, the nobles could not complain in any way. The execution progressed smoothly. The nobles who had not expected to be sentenced to death were noisy, but they were all soon beheaded.

"Waaaaahhh!!!"

"All hail Princess Iris!"

"All hail Sir Kim Si-Hun!!!"

The people gathered at the plaza cheered while shouting Si-Hun and Iris's names every time a noble was executed. Si-Hun, who was standing next to Iris, waved at the people while smiling awkwardly.

"And... I have something else to say to you all," Iris mentioned.

Kang-Woo's eyes shone.

*'Oh, she's finally announcing it.'*

The engagement between Si-Hun and Iris, the final step of the hero plan that he had come up with ever since hearing about the legend of the high elves, was about to be announced.

"I, Iris von Arnan, have promised to marry the hero that had saved the empire from crisis."

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!"

*'Jesus, look at that reaction. They're going wild when the hero's name hasn't even been mentioned yet.'*

"The name of the hero whom I will be spending the rest of my life with is..." Iris slowly turned her head. "... Oh Kang-Woo."

*'Mhm. Yeah.'*

"Huh?"

*'What? Oh Kang-Woo?'*