

## M. in Hell 381

### Chapter 381 - Monster of the Demonic Sea (3)

The Constellation of Fear screamed in terror as he shook the black blood off of himself with his one remaining arm, but...

[N-No.]

There was no way that he would be able to shake off all the blood that he had been drenched with. The Constellation of Fear reached out to Tai Wuji as his purple eyes shone.

“Why are you making such a fuss?” Tai Wuji frowned as if he could not understand.

It was just some blood; it was nothing for a god to make such a commotion over. However, it did not take long for his question to be answered.

Wriggle, wriggle!

The black blood that the Constellation of Fear was drenched with shook and squirmed like a living organism. And then, countless mouths appeared from it.

“What the...”

They resembled shark teeth. The mouths had no lips, and within the wide mouths were sharp teeth tightly spaced together. Rather than a mouth, it was more apt to describe it as opening the zipper of a bag and seeing countless fangs inside. They did not have tongues nor uvulas, just mouths that existed to eat the prey and teeth to tear the prey apart. The countless mouths that appeared from the squirming black blood began to devour the Constellation of Fear.

[Gyeeeeeeeeehh!! Kyeghh! Eeeeeekk!]

The screams were truly unsightly for a god to make. The Constellation of Fear collapsed on the ground while writhing, crying and despairing. He stretched out his arm, begging to be saved, to get out of the clutches of this monster. His fingers were trembling desperately.

Crunch!

However, even those shaking fingers were eaten up by the mouths of the monster that had swarmed him like an army of ants.

“Kyaaaah! Wh-What the hell is that?” Proserpine, who had arrived after Tai Wuji, shouted in shock after hearing the Constellation of Fear’s screams. She asked while stuttering, “I-Is that the monster Lucifer talked about?”

Tai Wuji did not answer. His eyes subtly shook as he stared at the monster that was eating the Constellation of Fear. Despite having barely any emotions remaining, not even he was able to stay emotionless after seeing what was happening before him. He had never imagined there to be a being that was able to eat a god.

“Fuuu.”

Tai Wuji took a deep breath, narrowed his eyes and concentrated. He had no idea what that monster was, but there was only one thing he needed to do.

*'I can't let any more Constellations die.'*

He could not have cared less about the Constellation of Agony because he had been so incompetent, but that was not the case for the Constellation of Fear. Although his plan this time had failed, he was usually very capable.

Whoooooom.

Tai Wuji drew out Qi from his dantian. However, his dantian was different from those of other martial artists. He had managed to surpass the Profound Realm and reached the Transcendent Realm, practically turning his entire meridian network into a dantian.

The blue light enveloping Tai Wuji's sword grew brighter. Darkness mixed with the blue light, enveloping the sword in dark blue flames.

"Flash," Tai Wuji chanted as he swung the sword.

Fwoosh—!

The mouths that were eating the Constellation of Fear were set ablaze by the dark blue flames. The thousands of black mouths wriggled as they were burned by the flames, and fell away from the Constellation of Fear.

[Hurgh, urgh.]

The Constellation of Fear, having become like a tattered rag, twisted and turned. His translucent body had become even more faint, and even his purple eyes, which were the only vivid part of his body, were also fading.

[A-Arghh.]

The Constellation of Fear fainted before he could even utter a word.

Seeing that, Proserpine frowned. "Is this thing still alive?"

Although it was ambiguous to call a god made up of countless vengeful spirits *alive*, Tai Wuji nodded. In terms of whether his Deific Essence was still intact or not, he was alive.

"What the hell is that?" Proserpine asked while narrowing her *two* eyes.

Although she usually possessed eight eyes, she was transformed into an elf at the moment for a certain reason. Her dreamlike blue-violet braided hair made her look beautiful beyond belief.

"I don't know." Tai Wuji shook his head.

It was a monster that devoured gods in the literal sense. Despite having existed since the era of myths, he had never heard of such a being.

It was only natural. Power had its own unique properties and characteristics, and that was especially true for Deific Essence. Devouring unique powers and mixing them with one's own was like, by human standards, being transfused blood of a different type. No, that was not descriptive enough; it was like being transfused oil instead of blood.

*'There's no way it could survive.'*

Tai Wuji stared in conflict at the monster being burned by the dark blue flames. The monster made of black mucus was flinching as it melted, and seeped into the ground.

“Is it dead?” Proserpine asked while narrowing her eyes.

Tai Wuji could no longer see the black mucus monster that had taken his attack head on.

He clenched his sword in silence, and then answered, “No, not yet.”

Squelch.

They heard something sloshing as if confirming Tai Wuji’s answer. They turned toward the source of the sound.

“Wow.” Kang-Woo’s head, which had been cut off by Tai Wuji, was looking up at them while smiling.

The blood from the severed head connected with that of his body. The headless body slowly stood up and leisurely walked toward the head. It picked up the head and connected it to the neck stump, and then the slash wound disappeared as if two bodies of water combined into one.

“Two more, huh?” Kang-Woo snickered in irresistible joy as he smiled extremely wide.

“An Undead?” Proserpine stared at Kang-Woo dumbfoundedly. There was nothing but an Undead that would be fine even after being beheaded. “No, that doesn’t seem right.”

She shook her head in confusion. She could not feel an ounce of deathly energy from Kang-Woo for him to be an Undead. Forget deathly energy; she could only feel desire so hot that she felt like she was being burned just looking at him.

“It doesn’t seem like we have the leeway to figure out what he is,” Tai Wuji stated calmly as he lowered his stance.

His eyes were no longer dyed with disturbance from when he first saw Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo nodded and replied, “Exactly. We don’t need to waste any more page space saying shit like ‘Wh-Who the hell are you?’, right?”

“Let’s just enjoy the moment,” Kang-Woo remarked.

Kang-Woo stared at Tai Wuji while breathing heatedly. He had realized it as soon as he laid eyes on him.

*‘It’s him.’*

The culprit who had destroyed the space under Sant’ Angelo that was being protected with colossal amounts of sacred power and stole the Demon God’s legacy. Kang-Woo did not have proof, but he was sure, because...

*‘I don’t know.’*

The power of the man in front of him could not be fathomed even after Kang-Woo had opened a Door.

“Yeah, this is more like it.”

Kang-Woo’s heart was beating so hard that it could burst. He had eaten one of the Constellations to the point that the Constellation was in tatters, but Kang-Woo’s hunger had not been sated yet. He wanted a stronger and more delectable prey. His sense of reason was being eaten away by his blazing desire, but he did not care; he decided not to deny them, at least for this moment.

Boom!

He aggressively stomped on the ground and charged at Tai Wuji while turning the Key of the Demonic Sea into a sword. He did not imbue any Authorities into it since he knew that none of the Authorities he possessed would even leave a scratch on the god before him.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Tai Wuji calmly blocked Kang-Woo’s attacks with his sword.

“Mm.” His eyebrows curved after exchanging a few blows. He tilted his head as if he couldn’t understand something, but only for a moment. He returned to his expressionless self and swung his sword while saying in monotone, “Trivial.”

In the eyes of Tai Wuji, a god who had risen to the highest realm of martial arts, Kang-Woo’s swordsmanship was beyond poor, and simply rubbish. Kang-Woo swung his sword horizontally, which Tai Wuji easily blocked by grabbing Kang-Woo’s wrist and twisting it, disarming Kang-Woo. Tai Wuji pointed his sword at Kang-Woo.

“I know.” Kang-Woo cackled and threw himself at Tai Wuji’s sword.

He had never intended to fight with swordsmanship from the beginning. He grabbed Tai Wuji’s blade and cut his hand with it, spewing black blood from his palm.

“Kuh.” Tai Wuji quickly jumped back.

He had seen what would happen if one made contact with that blood.

“Hmm, so we just have to be careful of that blood, right?” Proserpine remarked.

She joined the battle, firing magic spells at Kang-Woo from a distance. Thousands of arrows made of black demonic energy poured down at Kang-Woo, which pierced all over his body like a hedgehog’s quills.

“Yeah, that’s all you need to be careful of. Easy, right?” Kang-Woo replied.

He turned into black mucus. The arrows piercing him all fell to the ground, and Kang-Woo turned back to his original form.

“What the...” Proserpine stared at Kang-Woo incomprehensibly.

He was an immortal monster.

“I see.” Tai Wuji nodded as if he understood. He had figured out a way to face the monster that Lucifer had warned him about. “Proserpine, buy me some time.”

“Okay.”

Proserpine would have normally warned him not to order her around, but she knew that this was not the time. She used all the spells in her arsenal to limit Kang-Woo's movements.

"If you're an immortal monster..." Tai Wuji gripped his sword with both hands and declared expressionlessly, "I just have to annihilate you without a trace."

Fwoosh—!!!

Scorching dark blue flames set Tai Wuji's sword ablaze.

"Heavenly Dragon..."

He raised his arms up over his head. The dark blue flames pouring out from the sword grew larger at an incredible pace. Condensed sword energy several kilometers tall was formed.

"... Flash."

The condensed sword energy several kilometers tall condensed into a single point in an instant. Tai Wuji swung down the sword.

————!

It did not even make a sound. The gruesome destruction continued without end. If it had not been for the black barrier around them, the entirety of Arnan would have been blown away— no, it would have split the entire continent of Aernor in half. The dark blue flames raged as if it would swallow up the entire world whole.

"Crazy son of a bitch! Were you trying to kill me too?!" Proserpine yelled.

She had been partially caught in the dark blue flames, her beautifully braided hair now a complete mess.

"I had it under control," Tai Wuji answered as he turned around.

There was not even a trace of the monster that Lucifer had referred to in the area where everything had been obliterated.

"He's surely dead now, right?" Proserpine asked while looking around.

Tai Wuji nodded. He had annihilated the monster without leaving a single drop of blood. Even if the opponent was an immortal monster, they would not be able to survive this explosion.

"Let's go back."

Tai Wuji turned around and grabbed the ragged Constellation of Fear. Although Kim Si-Hun, the main culprit who had ruined their plan, was still alive, he had a feeling that they should fall back for today.

"Haaa, my hair's a mess," Proserpine grumbled as she tidied her disheveled hair.

Tai Wuji swung his sword in the air.

Crack.

Space itself was split, forming a black Rift. The two of them slowly walked in, and the black Rift slowly closed like an elevator door.

Krrrk!!

Just then, two hands formed in the air and forcibly stopped the Rift from fully closing.

“What...?”

“Wh-What the hell is it now?!”

Tai Wuji’s eyes widened, and Proserpine yelled in shock.

“Where... are you... going?” A stammering voice sounded out.

Black smoke gathered around the two hands in the air. The smoke turned into small drops of blood, which then gathered into black mucus. A head, legs, and torso appeared in mismatched form as if a child had played around with play-doh.

Squelch, squelch.

The mismatched body slowly returned to its normal form, along with the sloppy sounds of mucus. The head that had been attached to the thigh slowly slid up. The eyes, nose and mouth were still not in their right places.

“What the...” Tai Wuji muttered as he unconsciously stepped back.

The thing forcibly keeping the closing Rift open was, without a doubt, the monster that he had just annihilated.

*“That doesn’t mean anything to that monster!! Just shut up and run! Run as far away as possible before that monster devours you all and becomes stronger!!!”*

Lucifer’s screams popped into Tai Wuji’s mind.

“We’re... not... done yet.”

A horrifying monster that looked as if it had been born from the Demonic Sea itself was smiling at him.

“Let’s... play for... a little... longer.”

Chapter 382 - Monster of the Demonic Sea (4)

Oh Kang-Woo’s consciousness was fuzzy. His sense of reason was flickering like a candle that was about to go out.

*‘It’s... not over yet.’*

He couldn’t let it end yet. Kang-Woo added more strength into his hands and forcibly widened the gap in space.

“What the...” said the man across from him.

Kang-Woo could see the shock in the man’s eyes.

*'Who was he again?'*

His consciousness flickered again.

"U-Urghh."

Kang-Woo lowered his head as he held on to his sense of reason the best he could. He could feel the black sea flooding him through the wide-open Door.

*'This is... a bit bad.'*

Kang-Woo barely managed to stay conscious. He thought about why things had ended up this way, but did not have to think for long. After all, he knew this would happen from the moment that he opened a Door.

Kang-Woo could not die while a Door was open. Even if he was beheaded, his heart exploded, was split in half, or even all the blood in his body evaporated, he would not die. Since the power of the flooding Demonic Sea reconstructed his body, he would continue to resurrect unless the entire Demonic Sea itself was annihilated.

*'But...'*

Kang-Woo's consciousness flickered once again. He could not quite remember where or who he was. His consciousness became more fuzzy the more the Demonic Sea reconstructed his body. His sense of reason was disappearing, and his intelligence was evaporating. All that was left of him was endless hunger.

*'More. More, more, more, more. I wanna eat, I wanna eat. I'm hungry. Hungry, hungry, hungry. I haven't eaten all of that spirit yet. That man with the dark blue sword looks good too. Oh, so does that elf next to him.'*

"Haa, aaah," Kang-Woo exhaled.

*Squelch.* The surface of Kang-Woo's body pulsed as if a rock was thrown in a lake. His limbs, head and torso lost their form and turned into black mucus. Countless mouths appeared from the pulsing black mucus.

"What... in the..." someone expressed.

*'No, no. Those three aren't enough. You've been holding it back all this time, haven't you? You haven't eaten until you were fully sated since you've left Hell, right? Let's eat just a little more. Aren't you hungry?'*

"..."

Kang-Woo heard a voice— a sweet and lovely voice.

*'Now, now. Eat, eat, eat. Three is nowhere near enough. Eat some more. Devour this entire world. It's not even your world, right? It's none of your business even if this world ends, right? So, let's eat them all. Humans, angels, demons, monsters, elves, dragons, and gods. Let's eat them all.'*

“...”

Growl.

Horrifying hunger took over Kang-Woo. His vision was getting distorted. He heard the voice once again.

*‘What do you think? Why don’t you... open... another Door?’*

“Y...” Kang-Woo bent forward like a bow and quelled his body that was starting to turn into black mucus. He answered the sweet voice in his head. “You’ve gotta be joking.”

Kang-Woo stood up within the black sea that was flooding him. His disfigured body returned to its normal form. He wondered whose voice he had heard. It was not the Demon God. If it was not him, there was only one other it could have been.

*‘My desire.’*

The essence of demons, as well as the origin of the being that was Oh Kang-Woo. It was likely the voice of his desire that he had allowed to run wild.

*‘It... was you. You were... the Demon of... Prophecy.’*

Kang-Woo recalled what the Constellation of Agony had said to him. He was the being that would bring all worlds to ruin. If he was consumed by the Demonic Sea, would that prophecy be fulfilled?

*‘Well... That will never happen.’*

Kang-Woo chuckled. If that was the case, the universe would have long since ceased to exist.

“What... are you?” someone asked.

Kang-Woo turned toward the voice, seeing a half-dead Constellation of Fear as well as the middle-aged man holding him.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue as he looked at the middle-aged man. “Bro, you said earlier that it was pointless to ask something like that.”

*‘Why do all these characters have the same lines? This is why you get flamed for having a repetitive plot.’*

“Who cares about that?” Kang-Woo raised his right hand. The Key of the Demonic Sea that had been flung away by Tai Wuji returned to him and transformed into a dark red spear. “Enough caring about boring shit like that and let’s have some more fun.”

Tai Wuji’s face stiffened.

He fell into thought as he touched the hilt of his sword, and then threw the Constellation of Fear at Kang-Woo as if to divert the attention of a wild beast by throwing food at it.

“Hah.” Kang-Woo asked while chuckling, “Are you giving him for me to eat so that I’ll give up on you?”



Tai Wuji did not answer.

“Well, fine.” Kang-Woo slowly walked toward the ragged Constellation of Fear and picked him up.

There was a risk of him losing his sense of reason if he were to fight for any longer. Kang-Woo despised things that he could not control. He did not use demonic energy from the Abyss because there were still things about it that he did not know, or Chaos skills because he could still not fully control them. He was not above making gambles if it was absolutely necessary, but there was no need to risk his life when there was no reason to make a gamble.

“Let’s meet again,” said Kang-Woo.

He raised the ragged Constellation of Fear. His mouth split open extremely wide like that of a snake and swallowed the Constellation of Fear whole.

“I will remember you,” Tai Wuji muttered.

Kang-Woo smiled as he rubbed his stomach after devouring the Constellation of Fear. “You won’t be able to forget, even if you wanted to. Because I’ll come find you.”

Tai Wuji turned around and walked into the black Rift. Proserpine was staring at Kang-Woo blankly. He was a monster that she had never seen before, even during the era of myths.

“Ah...” Proserpine trembled slightly as vivid fear and her desires intermixed.

“Proserpine,” Tai Wuji called.

“Yeah.”

She turned around and walked into the Rift as well. Only Kang-Woo remained within the area enveloped by the black barrier.

“Haaah.”

Kang-Woo pounded on his full belly after having devoured the Constellation of Fear. He would take care of the digestion later.

“Disappear.” Kang-Woo used Soul Speech to lift the Demonic Sea barrier.

The black barrier that had been covering the imperial garden melted and flowed into Kang-Woo. The garden that he had fought gods in was back to being full of flowers like the battle had never taken place. It was only possible because the Demonic Sea had absorbed all the impact and destruction.

*‘If it hadn’t been for the barrier...’*

Forget the garden, the entirety of Arnan might have been blown off the face of the continent.

“Hehehe,” Kang-Woo giggled.

The battle had personally been satisfying enough to blow away the disappointment that he had felt when facing the Constellation of Agony.

“Haaa,” he exhaled.

Kang-Woo slowly walked off. The battle had been a success; now, it was time to pay the price.

“Is it over?”

Kang-Woo heard a deep voice. He turned to see Balrog walking toward him in his human form.

“Yeah, it is,” Kang-Woo answered.

“Were you satisfied?”

Kang-Woo smirked. “More or less.”

Balrog approached Kang-Woo and carefully touched Kang-Woo as he stood still. “What a relief.”

Despite saying that, Balrog did not seem relieved in the slightest.

“Did the others find out?” Kang-Woo asked.

“Of course they did.”

It was no wonder; although the area had been protected by a barrier, thousands of wraiths had appeared in the imperial garden. There was no way that Kim Si-Hun and the other party members wouldn't have found out that Kang-Woo had fought a Constellation all by himself.

“What did they do?” Kang-Woo asked.

“I'm sure you can imagine.” Balrog smiled bitterly.

They would most certainly have tried to join the battle if Balrog had not stopped them.

“Thanks.”

Balrog looked down at Kang-Woo in silence, and then carefully lifted him up. Kang-Woo drooped down lifelessly in Balrog's arms like a corpse.

“How severe do you think it will be?” Balrog asked.

“The aftereffects? Who knows...? Worse than molting, probably,” Kang-Woo answered calmly.

However, Balrog knew how hard Kang-Woo had tried to say that as calmly as possible.

Balrog aggressively bit his lip, and black blood trickled down to his chin. He clenched his fists, which were slightly shaking.

“Why did you... fight by yourself?” Balrog asked, despite knowing the answer.

“I told you. Because I couldn't hold back my—”

“Enough of your lies!!” Balrog shouted as if he couldn't hold it back anymore.

Deathly silence fell.

“I know that you've been holding back your desire for a long time. I know that it was getting hard for you to hold it back, and that it had gotten worse after the previous

incident. But even so... If it was you, my king..." Balrog's voice trembled. "You could have... held it in."

Kang-Woo did not answer.

"You could have held it in... but you just didn't."

Balrog lowered his head. He knew why Kang-Woo did not hold himself back. Because Kang-Woo always shouldered everything on his shoulders, even if the weight broke his shoulders. He always moved forward.

"Balrog."

"I know. Yes, I know very well."

Balrog knew that he was just grumbling. It was like a child that was complaining at their father for coming home too late because of work. He knew that, but he couldn't stop himself from saying it.

"It was because of Uriel, was it not? You were worried that we would also end up mangled by the power of a god, just like that angel."

Uriel had faced the Constellation of Agony, and had ended up in such terrible condition that it was a wonder why he had not died. Balrog could tell what his king thought after seeing that.

"That's why... you made an excuse to fight by yourself."

Kang-Woo had fooled himself by making some convenient excuse like that he could no longer hold back his desire.

"My king..."

Balrog raised Kang-Woo and carefully embraced him. As the one who had been by Kang-Woo's side the longest, he knew very well how dangerous opening the Doors was, as well as the unimaginable pain that Kang-Woo would experience after.

Kang-Woo would *only* end up experiencing unimaginable pain because he could control it; if he were to open too many of the Doors to the point that he could not control the massive influx of power, he would be devoured by the Demonic Sea, never able to get out.

"Balrog."

Kang-Woo raised one of his arms that he could barely move with all his might and placed it on Balrog's head. He wondered since when Balrog knew. It might have been from the very beginning, and he was simply just playing along with Kang-Woo's games.

*'Son of a bitch. Why are you so perceptive about stuff like this when you look like even your brain is all muscles?'*

Kang-Woo lightly hit Balrog's head.

"We've lost too much." He smiled faintly and continued, "I don't want to lose anything else anymore."

And with that, Kang-Woo slowly closed his eyes.

Balrog trembled. He gritted his teeth as he looked down at Kang-Woo in his arms. An overwhelming sense of worthlessness weighed down on him. He did not want to become baggage; he did not want to be one of the weights on Kang-Woo's shoulders, but...

"H-Hurgh."

Sounds of sobbing seeped out as Balrog bit his lip. His shoulders trembled subtly. However much he struggled, his king was walking far too ahead of him.

"Hurghhhh..."

Balrog embraced his king while continuing to weep silently.

Chapter 383 - Water Comes Out Of Even a Dry Rag If You Wring It Hard Enough

Boom! Boom—!

The sound of banging on the door rang out.

"Haaa, aahh."

Suppressed groans seeped out from the seams of the door, and then...

"Aaarrggghhh!!!"

The groans turned into terrifying screams.

Clack, clack, clack.

The door handle shook noisily. Balrog stood in front of the door and firmly held onto the handle. He crouched with his back to the door as if he was preventing something from getting out, and clenched his fists hard while listening to the screams through the door.

Balrog lowered his head while biting his lip. His heart felt like it was being carved with a knife every time the screams rang out.

"Kang-Woo!"

Balrog looked up to see a woman running through the hallway. It was Han Seol-Ah, his king's woman as well as the human whom the soul of the Celestial Goddess indwelt.

"You cannot." Balrog extended his arm to stop Seol-Ah from opening the door.

Seol-Ah glared at Balrog fiercely. "Move."

Balrog firmly shook his head.

Rumble.

Suffocatingly powerful energy poured out from Seol-Ah. The unfathomable amount of sacred power weighed down on Balrog.

"Kurgh, cough!"

Balrog grimaced. His muscles expanded as if they would burst. He could barely breathe within the immense pressure, but he still did not move.

"Move..." Seol-Ah demanded.

Twelve wings sprouted from her back. Balrog bit his lip. Her power truly was terrifyingly immense.

*'With power like that... She would be of help to the king.'*

It was an undeniable truth. Balrog was confused, frustrated, and enraged. He had spent the past millennia struggling just to be able to walk alongside his king, but a human that was not even thirty years old had far surpassed him just because she possessed the soul of the Celestial Goddess. He could not help but think that it was unfair.

Balrog gritted his teeth and remarked, "You... cannot pass."

He stood his ground firmly despite being under immense pressure. He could not let her pass, since his king was on the other side of the door.

The light in Seol-Ah's eyes disappeared. Emotion disappeared from her face as she slowly reached for the door handle.

"I told you... that you cannot."

Balrog grabbed Seol-Ah's wrist. Blood vessels were protruding from all over his body, showing how much strength he was using just to move within the immense energy.

Seol-Ah looked down coldly at the crouched Balrog.

"Why? Why am I not allowed to enter when Kang-Woo is suffering that badly?"

"Because... there is nothing... you can do... for him."

"I am confident in healing magic. At the very least, I'll be able to lessen his pain," Seol-Ah remarked while pouring out sacred power and fluttering her twelve wings.

Balrog shook his head with sunken eyes. "No, there is nothing you can do."

"I haven't even tried yet!"

"We have. We have tried everything. Countless times."

After the king had molted, they had tried everything possible to lessen his pain, but it had all been pointless; they had only worsened his condition.

"Stay put. Please, just... stay put," Balrog said desperately.

Seol-Ah lowered her head while biting her lip. She asked with a trembling voice, "Why... Why did Kang-Woo fight on his own?"

The pressure weighing down on Balrog disappeared as Seol-Ah's twelve wings faded.

Balrog sighed. He stared at her for a moment in silence, and then replied, "Like how angels are driven by obsession, demons are driven by desire. I am sure you know what it is like since you have accepted Seraph's power."

"Kang-Woo's desire?"

"Yes."

Balrog looked around. The fact that Kang-Woo still possessed the body of a demon needed to be hidden at all costs, especially from Kim Si-Hun and Gaia's incarnation. Thankfully, the two of them had gone to take care of the thousands of wraiths that had been released from the barrier.

"The king's desire is to battle powerful foes and partake in their flesh."

"Partake... in their flesh?"

*Flinch.* Seol-Ah's expression hardened.

Balrog nodded. "You could say that he craves it."

Seol-Ah's eyes darkened. "So, who was the Constellation that Kang-Woo fought?"

Balrog shook his head. "I don't know."

"Hmm."

Seol-Ah stared at the door while narrowing her eyes. Just then, Balrog saw Lilith quickly running toward them.

"B-Balrog!" She clenched Balrog's collar and shouted sharply, "The king fought the Constellations by himself?! What the hell happened?!"

Lilith was panting heavily, as if she had run here at full speed after hearing the news from afar.

Balrog remained silent.

Lilith clenched Balrog's collar harder as she frowned even more aggressively.

"Balrog. What the hell were you doing while this was happening?" she asked furiously.

Balrog averted his gaze. Lilith burst with rage and raised her hand to attack him, but Seol-Ah stopped her.

"P-Please calm down, Lilith. It apparently couldn't be helped because of Kang-Woo's desire."

"Desire?" Lilith frowned, but not because she was not aware of what Kang-Woo's desire was. She turned to Balrog and asked, "What is she talking about?"

It was absurd that Kang-Woo had fought by himself because he was unable to hold back his desire. If he was unable to control his desire, there was no way that this world would be in one piece. As far as Lilith knew, there was no demon who was in perfect control over their desire like Kang-Woo.

Balrog simply lowered his head in silence.

The lip that he was biting was shaking in frustration. Seeing that, Lilith was more or less able to figure out what had happened.

"Hah," she feigned laughter and glared at Balrog in disdain. She said while suppressing her fury, "Even after getting that new power you call Overlord Armor or whatever, you haven't changed one bit from the past."

Balrog could not raise his head.

“What are you talking about?” Seol-Ah asked while looking back and forth at them, unable to understand.

“Hmph,” Lilith snorted lightly. She swept her hair back and said, “It’s nothing for you to worry about. This is our problem to deal with.”

Her arms fell to her sides lifelessly.

Lilith cautiously asked Balrog, “He opened a Door, right?”

“Yes.” Balrog nodded.

Lilith sighed. This was the second time that she had seen Kang-Woo open a Door. The first time was when he had faced Mammon, and the second time was now.

*‘Though I heard that he had also used it once before I arrived on Earth.’*

Regardless, this was the second time that she had seen it herself.

She felt the same way after the ordeal with Mammon, but she couldn’t help her rage from surging at Kang-Woo, who put his life on the line as if it were some token coin in an arcade. She felt like she was burning from the inside, and she teared up as she bit her lip aggressively.

*‘I should’ve realized it sooner.’*

Whatever the reason, she needed to stop Kang-Woo from acting on his own. If there was no one to stop him, he would continue to try to shoulder everything by himself.

“Argh!”

*Bang!* Lilith stomped on the ground in frustration. Seol-Ah, likely having been influenced by Lilith, also yelled in rage.

Balrog smiled bitterly while looking at the two of them.

He remarked, “I have a request.”

“What is it?” Seol-Ah asked coldly.

“I would like you two to keep silent about this incident even after the king wakes up.”

A heavy silence fell.

Lilith narrowed her eyes and replied, “I don’t think I can do that. I understand how the king feels, but we need to make sure he never does this kind of thing again.”

Although Lilith knew why Kang-Woo had made such a reckless decision to fight a Constellation by himself, she could not let him do such a thing again. If she did, there was no point in her serving him by his side. Even if she were to perish from a single attack of a Constellation, she at least needed to be a shield that could block that one attack. She could not afford to stay as baggage that always needed to be protected.

“I beg of you.”

Balrog bowed deeply. One could feel his strong determination despite him bowing. Lilith stared at him, and then turned around.

“Hmph. I’ll be with the children, so take care of things here by yourself.”

She was referring to Echidna and Halcyon. Balrog smiled faintly as he watched Lilith walking away. Seol-Ah was highly anxious due to Kang-Woo’s endless screams past the door, but Lilith took Seol-Ah with her. Only Balrog remained in the hallway in front of the rattling door.

“Haaa...” he sighed deeply.

He could feel the door that he was leaning on rattling. His king’s screams did not stop. Balrog shut his eyes tight, blocked his ears and lowered his head while praying for the time to pass quickly.

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“Are you really alright?” Balrog asked.

“I told you, I’m fine,” Kang-Woo answered half-heartedly on the bed.

He still couldn’t move because of the side effects, but it was true that the pain had subsided significantly. Balrog sighed as he looked down at Kang-Woo laying on the bed.

“*Sigh.* In that case, please get some rest.”

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and nodded.

*‘He looks like he’ll give me a beating if I fight on my own again.’*

He thought that he should probably bring Balrog along next time to avoid a lecture.

*Click.* Balrog opened the door and left the room. Kang-Woo relaxed on the bed.

“Well, in any case...”

It had been the most fun he had in a long time. Kang-Woo smiled while recalling his battle against the Constellations. Balrog had made Kang-Woo out to be some advocate of self-sacrifice, but it had partly been due to his own personal selfishness as well. Kang-Woo felt much better after his desire to hunt powerful foes and eat them, which had been left unsated for a long time, subsided significantly.

*‘No, that’s not it.’*

Kang-Woo shook his head and smiled. Although it was laying dormant now, he had a feeling that his desire had grown stronger.

*‘That guy...’*

Kang-Woo’s heart beat rapidly when he thought about the middle-aged man with the diagonal slash scar on his face. The feeling of his blood boiling and the impulse of wanting to go after the man right this second was hard to endure.

“Hehehe,” Kang-Woo giggled.

Thankfully, their battle would be inevitable. Even if that man did not take action, Kang-Woo would.



*'I wonder how delicious he is?'*

His mouth was watering already. Kang-Woo relaxed on the bed while looking forward to the day that he would meet the man again.

Clack.

“Umm... Kang-Woo.”

“Oh, darling?”

Seol-Ah entered the room. Kang-Woo welcomed her with a smile, but she did not look very happy.

“How are you feeling?” Seol-Ah asked.

“Well... I can barely move, but I'm not in pain anymore. I'll be back on my feet if I rest for a few days.”

Considering the broken ability that was opening the Doors, side effects of this level were nothing. Seol-Ah sighed in relief.

“I brought you some fruit,” she said as she held up a tray that was filled with fruit sliced to a size easy to eat.

There were also some fruits exclusive to Aernor.

“Thanks.” Kang-Woo smiled while his eyes shone.

He had been wanting to eat something sweet.

“Here, ahhh~”

Seol-Ah grabbed a piece of fruit and brought it close to Kang-Woo. Since Kang-Woo couldn't move at all due to the side effects, he was fed by Seol-Ah like a baby bird.

“Come to think of it, I heard about your desire from Balrog,” Seol-Ah remarked.

“Huh? My desire?”

“Yes. I heard you craved for people's bodies... and were driven by the desire to partake in them.”

“I mean, that's true, but...”

*'Why did she put it so weirdly?'*

Seol-Ah put the fruit tray down on the table and caressed Kang-Woo's body.

“It becomes dangerous for you if you don't act on your desires, just like my obsession, right?”

“Yeah, but I managed to resolve it somewhat this time.”

Although Kang-Woo had not been able to eat the other Constellations, he had managed to devour the Constellation of Fear. Not just that, the battle itself had been very satisfactory.

“It was resolved?” Seol-Ah’s eyes widened as they shook while staring at Kang-Woo. She asked carefully, “Was there... a woman among the Constellations?”

“Oh, there was one.” Kang-Woo nodded.

It had been a beautiful elf named Proserpine.

The light in Seol-Ah’s eyes faded. She muttered something with her head lowered, and then got on the bed.

“Hello...? Seol-Ah?”

Kang-Woo looked up at Seol-Ah in confusion. Seol-Ah looked down at him as her lips quivered.

“F-Fufu. Yes. It must be my fault for being unable to satisfy your desire, right? I understand.”

“No, I don’t think you do.”

“Come to think of it, you can’t move right now, can you?”

Seol-Ah licked her lips.

“Umm, I think there’s been some sort of—”

Click.

As Kang-Woo was about to say that there had been some sort of misunderstanding, he heard the door locking.

“Huh?”

*‘What was that?’*

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“Where the hell is that son of a bitch Oh Kang-Woo?!”

“Oh, Yeon-Joo.”

“Is Kang-Woo in there?”

“Yeah, but he’s sleeping now.”

“Hmph. Step out of the way. Not only did that bastard fly off by himself last time, he —”

“Oh, it’s okay. That’ll never happen again.”

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“Fufu.” Seol-Ah giggled while covering her mouth. “Water comes out of even a dry rag if you wring it hard enough.”

Chapter 384 - It’s Nothing

“Kang-Woo, aren’t you hungry?” Echidna asked as she looked down at Oh Kang-Woo while sitting next to the bed.

Kang-Woo shook his head. “No, not really. Seol-Ah fed me to the point that my stomach almost burst, so I don’t have an appetite.”

Echidna pouted as if she did not like his answer.

“No. You can eat more.”

“What do you mean?”

*‘Why are you the one to decide that?’*

“Hm! I brought tons of stuff from the imperial kitchen!”

Echidna took out a heap of fruit that she had placed next to her feet. There were so many that Kang-Woo felt his stomach hurting just from looking at them.

“No, I seriously am full,” Kang-Woo remarked.

“But I won’t have any other chances to feed you.”

Kang-Woo had been stuck in bed while unable to move due to the side effects of opening a Door for the past few days. The party members were taking shifts to nurse Kang-Woo, who couldn’t even move his limbs. Echidna thought that she wouldn’t have the rare chance to feed Kang-Woo again if she missed this chance, so she started to cut the fruit that she had brought with a fruit knife while snorting.

The fruit that had been the size of Echidna’s palm was being skinned at insane speed and was reduced to the size of a pinky fingernail in a flash.

“Why would you peel a fruit like—”

“I peeled it all!” Echidna said excitedly.

“You sure did.”

*‘The problem is that there’s nothing to eat.’*

Echidna brought the fruit to Kang-Woo’s mouth while her eyes shone brightly. Kang-Woo dodged with just his head since his limbs weren’t moving, but Echidna managed to get the fruit in Kang-Woo’s mouth after much struggle.

“Uuurrghhh.”

“Hehehe,” Echidna laughed as if she was the happiest person in the world.

Kang-Woo felt goosebumps from her smile. In the end, he was freed only after being forced to eat all of the fruit that Echidna had brought.

Click.

“Brat, it’s time to switch.”

Cha Yeon-Joo opened the door; Echidna's shift seemed to have finished. Echidna stared at Kang-Woo as if she was disappointed, but then turned to Yeon-Joo and assumed a weird stance.

"Hello, way of the sword!"[1]

"What?"

Yeon-Joo stared at Echidna in perplexity.

Echidna pouted and turned her head away. "You're no fun, Yeon-Joo."

"Seriously, what even is that?"

Yeon-Joo looked at Kang-Woo in frustration, but Kang-Woo smiled awkwardly as if he did not know either.

"I'll come back next time, Kang-Woo," Echidna said as she walked away from the two dumbfounded people and out the door.

An awkward air filled the room.

"What's with her?" Yeon-Joo asked.

"I dunno. Must be puberty."

"That aside, you look goddamn terrible, Mr. Oh Kang-Woo," Yeon-Joo said as she poked Kang-Woo.

"I'll admit, I did push myself a bit."

"A bit? You call this a bit?" Yeon-Joo glared at him. "You're so goddamn patronizing, you know that? Hm? Are we nothing to you?"

Kang-Woo smiled awkwardly. It was only natural for him to be scolded this way since he had faced enemies that had blatantly barged in, all by himself.

Yeon-Joo sighed. She lowered her head and muttered, "Sorry."

Her clenched fists were trembling. Although she was scolding Kang-Woo, she also knew very well that she would be of no help whatsoever in a battle against gods that possessed Deific Essence.

"Don't worry about it. I get it," Kang-Woo replied calmly.

There was a clear difference in power between himself and his party members, and especially between him and Yeon-Joo, who arguably was the weakest among them. To put it bluntly, she would be of no help; it would be a relief if she wasn't a nuisance.

Knowing that fact better than anyone, Yeon-Joo lowered her head in sorrow. She said sadly, "It wasn't like this when we first met."

She was able to proudly fight alongside Kang-Woo when they had first met, but Kang-Woo had reached heights so high that she couldn't dare reach. Forget standing alongside him, she had become one of the weights on his shoulders.

“Should I... just go back?” Yeon-Joo asked while touching her bracelets. Her voice was so lifeless that it was hard to believe that it had come out of her.

Kang-Woo smirked. “Stop trying to put on airs.”

“What?”

“Well, I guess I’d expect nothing less from a Bronze player.”

“Son of a bitch!”

Yeon-Joo got on top of the bed in fury. She grabbed Kang-Woo’s cheeks and pulled them.

“Urrrrhhhh.”

After the fuss, the two of them got off of each other while snickering.

“Come to think of it, did something happen between you and Seol-Ah?” Yeon-Joo asked.

*Flinch.* Kang-Woo trembled while breaking out into a cold sweat.

“What? What happened?”

“I-I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

Kang-Woo fell into terror while scrunched up. Yeon-Joo stared at the trembling Kang-Woo with her mouth agape.

*‘What the hell? What in the world did she do?’*

This was the first time that she had seen Kang-Woo like this.

“Ah... Whatever the case, get some rest.”

Yeon-Joo sat next to the bed in perplexity, placed her hand on Kang-Woo’s forehead, and slowly patted it.

“What’s up with you all of a sudden?” Kang-Woo asked.

Yeon-Joo shot him a fierce look and said, “Shut up.”

Kang-Woo smirked and let Yeon-Joo pat him.

*‘It’s not bad.’*

It felt completely different to see a mild side from a lioness that constantly growled. Kang-Woo closed his eyes and enjoyed Yeon-Joo’s hands in silence. He slowly fell asleep.

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“Mm?”

Kang-Woo opened his eyes. The room was completely dark. He carefully moved his body and noticed that his limbs, which had not budged until now were moving a little.

*‘I’m slowly recovering.’*

It was a good sign since he had mountains of things to take care of. Kang-Woo used his still stiff limbs to raise himself.

“Lay down for a bit longer, hyung-nim.”

Kang-Woo heard a voice from next to him. He turned his head to see a man so dazzlingly handsome that it looked as if he was shining within the darkness.

Kang-Woo smirked. “Is it your turn this time?”

Kim Si-Hun nodded with a faint smile. “Yes. I just switched in.”

“You guys don’t need to do this.”

“Not at all. We should at least stay by your side until you fully recover,” Si-Hun remarked firmly.

Kang-Woo groaned. He was not used to being taken care of by people; he had mixed feelings about it.

Si-Hun looked down at Kang-Woo on the bed in silence.

*‘You’re gonna stare holes into me, man. Why are you staring so intently and making me uncomfortable?’*

Kang-Woo averted his gaze from Si-Hun, who was staring at him with deeply sunken eyes.

After some silence, Si-Hun stated, “Come to think of it, it’s been a while since we’ve been alone together like this.”

“Has it?”

“Yes, it has.” Si-Hun nodded with a smile and then turned his head to look up at the ceiling. “I met Balrog before coming here.” His clenched fists trembled. “He seemed extremely mad at himself.”

“Hyung-nim.” Si-Hun lightly bit his lip. “There’s this one thing that I keep thinking about.”

“About what?”

“About what would have happened in my life... if I had never met you.”

Kang-Woo could feel the sorrow in Si-Hun’s voice. He replied calmly, “Nothing much would’ve changed.”

He was telling the truth; Si-Hun’s talent had long since been affirmed. Although he had lacked confidence, he would have overcome it by himself and broken through his unfortunate circumstances.

*‘Rather...’*

Si-Hun might not have attained what he should have attained because of Kang-Woo, and because he was forcibly made into Kang-Woo’s Familiar.

“I don’t know about that.” Si-Hun slowly shook his head. “I can’t even imagine a life without you anymore, hyung-nim.”

*‘The hell are you talking about?’*

“Hyung-nim.” Si-Hun slowly reached out and grabbed Kang-Woo’s hand. “Thank you. And... I’m sorry.”

Si-Hun lowered his head, and his shoulders subtly trembled. Kang-Woo remained silent. He could see the overlap between Si-Hun and Balrog; the sight of them trembling due to their powerlessness.

*‘Did he figure it out?’*

The reason why Kang-Woo had fought the Constellations by himself while using his desire as a convenient excuse.

*‘Fuck.’*

It was not even funny. Kang-Woo recalled the day that he had first met Si-Hun when he had forcibly turned the absurdly talented Si-Hun into his Familiar. Si-Hun still did not know the truth; he did not know how their relationship came to be. Seeing Si-Hun weeping because he had not been of any help at all made Kang-Woo curse in his head. It was like a hostage thanking a hostage taker. The unpleasant feeling made Kang-Woo feel sick.

*‘If I knew this would happen...’*

If Kang-Woo had known that he would become this close to Si-Hun...

Kang-Woo shut his eyes tight. It was already far too late for regret. There was no way to fix the relationship that had gotten off on the wrong foot from the very beginning. Kang-Woo frowned aggressively while staring at the weeping Si-Hun.

*‘What the fuck? Why am I feeling this way?’*

Kang-Woo’s head was in jumbles. He would never have felt this way over something like this back in Hell. Rather, he would have been happy about the fact that Si-Hun knew nothing and that he had Si-Hun’s undying trust.

*‘I should be feeling that way, but... Why do I feel so unpleasant?’*

Kang-Woo stared up at the ceiling in silence. His mouth opened before he had even realized it.

“Si-Hun.”

“Yes, hyung-nim?”

“Do you remember the day we first met?”

“Of course I do.” Si-Hun nodded with his eyes open wide. He smiled faintly while recalling the memories of that day. “Back then, I would have never thought that I would become this close to you.”

“Hahaha,” Kang-Woo laughed. However, it sounded extremely forced. “Back then, I...”

Kang-Woo clenched his fists, and he trembled. Vivid fear that he had not experienced even during his battle with the Constellation of Fear took control over him.

“Yes?” Si-Hun waited for Kang-Woo to finish his sentence while tilting his head.

Silence fell. Kang-Woo shook his head while smiling awkwardly. “No, it’s nothing.”

He swallowed the unfamiliar feeling; it was bitter.

Chapter 385 - God of Splendor (1)

Oh Kang-Woo’s limbs began to move little by little, starting from his fingertips. His joints could now move fluidly, and he did not feel any fatigue weighing him down, nor did he feel powerless.

“Hup.” Kang-Woo got out of bed.

He felt light, as if he had taken a hot shower after a workout.

*‘I think my demonic energy control improved again.’*

It could have been because he had reached the brink of death after opening a Door, or it might have been because Han Seol-Ah had driven him to the brink of death(?) afterward. In any case, Kang-Woo’s demonic energy control, which had already been absurdly high, had improved even further.

*‘I guess it was worth it.’*

High risk, high return; he had taken a massive risk, so it was only natural that he was rewarded a corresponding amount in return. Not only that, Kang-Woo had managed to reach the point that he was in because he had risked his life countless times in the past.

*‘Now that I think about it, I must be extremely lucky.’*

Although it couldn’t be explained simply by luck, he had indeed gambled with his life countless times.

“Come to think of it, I wonder how my demonic energy control would be in stat form?”

Kang-Woo was curious. His Demonic Energy stat was currently 167. Although the Demonic Energy stat partially influenced demonic energy control, it was not an exact estimate.

The Demonic Energy stat was more like a quantitative value that reflected the amount of demonic energy that Kang-Woo was able to use freely. Although he suffered from the side effects afterward, he was able to control the massive influx of demonic energy that came with opening a Door. Considering that, his demonic energy control would be far above 167 in stat form.

Riiing.

“Hm?”

Just then, Kang-Woo heard a familiar chime of a bell. A blue window appeared in front of him.

[Quantifying Player Oh Kang-Woo’s demonic energy control.]

[Error. Error.]



[Quantific?? of ???? has fa??ed.]

“The hell is this?”

Kang-Woo chuckled as he looked at the message window in front of him. The broken characters were covering the message window; they were the same characters on his status window.

*‘Does it mean that it can’t be expressed by the System?’*

It seemed like a plausible guess. Kang-Woo was not sure whether to be happy or upset by it. He was happy since he felt like he had become so strong that he had become like a glitched character in an RPG, but that also meant that he might not be able to receive privileges from the System.

*‘Will I be able to get my Tenth Awakening Trait?’*

If Kang-Woo was not able to, he would make the face of the one who had made the System exactly like those broken characters.

*Click.* Lilith opened the door and entered the room. She flinched when she saw Kang-Woo out of his bed. She quickly ran toward him and grabbed his arm.

“You shouldn’t be up yet. Rest for a little longer,” she remarked.

“No, I’m fine now.” Kang-Woo shook his head as he casually moved around.

Lilith touched his arm with a worried expression. “Are you really alright? You’re not pushing yourself again, are you?”

Kang-Woo smirked and answered, “I told you, I’m fine.”

Lilith sighed deeply. “Jeez... You’re making my life so hard, my king. Your life isn’t yours alone anymore, you know?”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that if you die, I’ll die with you,” Lilith replied calmly.

It sounded insane, but not a single ounce of madness could be heard in Lilith’s voice; it was calm as if it was natural.

“That’s a bit...” Kang-Woo slurred.

“Do you think Seol-Ah wouldn’t?” Lilith asked.

Kang-Woo remained silent. Lilith aside, Han Seol-Ah would most definitely choose death gladly without hesitation if Kang-Woo were to die or disappear.

“I’m sure Balrog and Echidna would do the same,” Lilith expressed.

“Come on, I doubt Echidna would.”

“Are you sure about that?”

He was not. Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and nodded. “Okay, fine. I’m sorry.”

Kang-Woo knew that he had many things on his shoulders, as well as that they would all come crumbling down if he were to die.

*'But...'*

Kang-Woo turned his head in sorrow. If a time came when he needed to risk his life again, what would he do? There was no need to even think about it.

*'I would risk my life again.'*

As he always had.

Lilith stared at Kang-Woo sadly. She sighed deeply and shook her head.

"Come to think of it, did anything in particular happen while I was in bed? How's Iris?" Kang-Woo asked.

"She hasn't awakened as an incarnation yet. As for while you were still asleep... Nothing except that Uriel and Michael came to visit."

"Really?"

"Yes. Oh, and Uriel said to tell you to call him as soon as you wake up."

"Got it."

Kang-Woo made a mental note to contact Uriel once he took care of all the urgent tasks. The signs of a high elf's manifestation had been confirmed, so he needed to release information about the Constellations of Evil to the angels to figure out what they were scheming and where.

"Any signs of the Constellations and Lucifer's movements?" Kang-Woo asked.

"None." Lilith shook her head.

Kang-Woo frowned lightly.

*'Maybe I pushed them too far.'*

Kang-Woo would be able to find them only if they made their move, but it was difficult to lay out his next plan since they weren't taking action at all.

"Oh. There was... an odd occurrence," Lilith mentioned.

"Odd how?" Kang-Woo tilted his head.

"Well... The streets of the empire are regaining their vitality. There are more people in the streets, and the frozen economy is beginning to go back to normal."

"Mm."

Kang-Woo frowned. The citizens of Aernor, who had been plunged into fear, regaining their vitality could not be considered strange. It was not like fear could be extended for all of time, and people forgot about such emotions when they were busy enough getting by each day.

*'But...'*

There was no way that Lilith wouldn't know that. If she thought that it was odd, it meant that the fear that had spread throughout the empire was disappearing at an abnormal rate.

"Would it mean that the people's trust in Si-Hun has become that strong?" Kang-Woo posed.

"It's more than possible. After all, rumors have already spread that Si-Hun had taken care of the thousands of wraiths that had appeared at the imperial palace all by himself."

Kang-Woo stroked his chin. He doubted the guess despite posing it himself.

*'I mean, it doesn't matter anymore.'*

The conditions for the high elf's manifestation had already been fulfilled. There was no need to amplify people's fear of Lucifer or to manipulate information anymore. As long as the operation concluded smoothly, there was no need for him to take action.

*'That should be it, but...'*

He felt unpleasant as if he had not wiped after taking a shit.

*'Something's up.'*

Kang-Woo turned to Lilith and said, "Look into that as well."

"Understood." Lilith bowed deeply. "Please don't push yourself and rest a little longer. There might still be some side effects remaining."

Lilith caressed Kang-Woo's arm worryingly before turning to leave.

Kang-Woo smiled and nodded. "Okay."

But of course, he had no intention of resting. After all, he had things to do.

"Haaa. I'll be excusing myself then, my king."

Lilith sighed and turned around. *Click*. The door closed. After being left alone in the room, Kang-Woo did some light stretches and closed his eyes.

*'Let's see.'*

He was already bursting with anticipation. He meditated to see into himself and could see the Constellation of Fear devoured within the Demonic Sea. Unlike the Constellation of Agony, he was not conscious; he was simply floating on the surface, seemingly with no intellect as if he had become a mindless wraith.

*'Hopefully, I'll reach my Tenth Awakening this time.'*

He had only one more level to go to reach 90 and achieve his Tenth Awakening. Even if it had become extremely difficult for him to level up, there was no way that it wouldn't rise even by one level after devouring a god.

*'I'm a bit anxious because of the broken characters earlier, though.'*

However, there was nothing that Kang-Woo could do about it. There was no way that he was able to interfere with the System, which had existed since the era of Titans, a past far before the era of myths.

“Now, then.”

Kang-Woo concentrated. He slowly melted the Deific Essence of the Constellation of Fear.

“Haaa, aaah.”

Sparks ran throughout his entire body. He could feel immense power being swallowed up by the black sea.

[You have absorbed the Constellation of Fear’s Deific Essence!]

[The absorbed Deific Essence is partially lifting the System’s restrictions.]

[Your level cap has risen from 89 to 93.]

[You have achieved your Tenth Awakening. A new Trait will be granted!]

*‘Hell yeah.’*

Kang-Woo smiled. Thankfully, he had managed to avoid a scenario where he was not given a Tenth Awakening Trait. The message windows continued.

[Converting the absorbed deathly energy into demonic energy.]

[Demonic Energy has risen by 5.]

[Demonic Energy has reached 172. You can now use more of the demonic energy from the Abyss.]

“Very nice.”

He had not expected his Demonic Energy stat to rise since the Constellation of Fear used a different form of energy entirely, but it had risen regardless. Kang-Woo opened and closed his fists while smiling in satisfaction. Possibly because he had risen to soaring heights, he could not feel a significant increase in power just because he had acquired more demonic energy.

*‘I’ll still take it.’*

If he was able to use more demonic energy freely, it also meant that he would be able to use more demonic energy when he needed to take risks. It was not bad at all. Not just that, a rise in his Demonic Energy stat had not been his primary goal in the first place.

“Let’s see what my Tenth Awakening Tr—”

Just as he was about to open his status window excitedly, another blue window popped up in front of him.

[You have acquired the Tenth Awakening Trait ‘Deific Essence Usurpation.’]

[As per the Trait, you can obtain a portion of the Deific Essence you absorb.]

[You have not completed ‘Road to Becoming a Demon God’ yet. Downgrading the absorbed Deific Essence.]

“Hm?”

Kang-Woo’s eyes widened. He had acquired a Trait that would allow him to take the Deific Essence that he had absorbed as his own. Although the Deific Essence had been downgraded because the quest *Road to Becoming a Demon God* had not been completed yet, the implications of the Trait were highly impactful.

*‘Acquiring Deific Essence means... that I’ll be able to use Divinity.’*

“Finally!”

Kang-Woo clenched his fists. He had experienced firsthand how unfair and illogical a battle against a being with Divinity was while he did not possess Divinity. Although he had managed to overcome the difference with his absurd amount of demonic energy, it did not change the fact that it was an extremely inefficient battle. Kang-Woo stared at the message window with shining eyes.

[You have acquired Lower Intermediate-rank Deific Essence via the Trait ‘Deific Essence Usurpation.’]

*‘Lower Intermediate, huh?’*

It was insanely low, considering he had devoured three Constellations of Evil. It seemed like the penalty for not having completed the *Road to Becoming a Demon God* quest seemed to be higher than expected.

*‘Regardless...’*

Considering how ignorantly he had fought gods so far without having Deific Essence, it was a massive improvement.

Whoooooom!

A foreign power that Kang-Woo had never felt before filled him up. It felt familiar for some reason.

*‘This is...’*

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. It was familiar to the unknown power that had sealed his Ten Thousand Demon Core via the Gaia System.

“A power that can interfere with the *providence*, huh?”

Kang-Woo felt the power of Divinity circulating within him with sparkling eyes.

Slam!

“K-Kang-Woo?”

Before Kang-Woo even had a chance to test it out, Layla barged into his room. Possibly because she had been with the other party members, Seol-Ah, Kim Si-Hun, Cha Yeon-Joo, and the others were behind her.

“What was...”

She was looking at Kang-Woo in disbelief. She seemed to have felt the energy of Kang-Woo acquiring Deific Essence because she was Gaia’s incarnation.

Kang-Woo turned toward Layla. Just then, another message window popped up in front of him.

[A Deific Name most apt for Player Oh Kang-Woo will be granted due to the Player's acquisition of Deific Essence.]

*'Deific Name? Is it like the names Constellation of Agony and Corruption or whatever?'*

Kang-Woo stared at the message with great interest.

*'I wonder what I'll get? It probably won't be Demon God since I haven't completed the quest yet. God of Predation? God of the Demonic Sea?'*

[Granting Player Oh Kang-Woo the Deific Name 'God of Lies.']

"What the fuck?"

God of Lies?

*'What the fuck are you on about?'*

Kang-Woo frowned in displeasure.

*'What do you mean, God of Lies? I've never once lied in my life. What a fucking joke.'*

"Kang-Woo... Did you perhaps... acquire Deific Essence?" Layla asked with a trembling voice.

Kang-Woo nodded without hesitation and replied, "Yes, I have. The system message says that I'm... the God of Splendor."

[Granting Player Oh Kang-Woo the Deific Name 'God of Lies.']

"Haha. God of Splendor... It's a bit embarrassing."

[Granting Player Oh Kang-Woo the Deific Name 'God of Lies!']

"It must be because Lady Gaia chose me as the Protector of Light."

[Granting Player Oh Kang-Woo the Deific Name 'God of Lies!!!']

Kang-Woo looked at the blinding golden light pouring out from himself as if he were in disbelief.

"I never knew... that light was so warm."

Kang-Woo smiled while lightly touching his shining gold body.

Chapter 386 - God of Splendor (2)

"I... I can't believe it."

Layla stared at Oh Kang-Woo dumbfoundedly. Deific Essence was usually an innate quality. It had come to be back when Titans had created gods in the very distant past, to grant them the power to interfere with the providence when taking care of the creations.

There, of course, were Titans such as Demon God Bauli, who had granted Deific Essence to beings to drive all creations to extinction, but it did not change the fact that Deific Essence was granted by Titans.

“Is it that shocking that I acquired Deific Essence?” Kang-Woo asked while tilting his head.

He knew how difficult it was to acquire Deific Essence, but despite that, many enemies around him possessed it. Not just that, some beings who did not innately possess Deific Essence managed to acquire it, such as Lucifer.

“It is. It’s extremely rare for someone who isn’t an incarnation to acquire Deific Essence,” Layla answered as if she couldn’t believe what Kang-Woo was saying.

Kang-Woo’s eyes shone with interest. “Then that means it’s not unprecedented, right?”

“Mm. There have been a few.” Layla nodded with an awkward smile. “There have been less than five occurrences since the era of myths, though.” Layla turned to look at Kim Si-Hun. “Martial God Tian Taihuang, whose soul is within Si-Hun, was one of those occurrences.”

“Really?” Si-Hun looked down at himself in surprise, having heard it for the first time.

Layla nodded. “Yes. Martial God Tian Taihuang was the disciple of Heavenly Dragon Tai Wuji. Since he was a human that the Heavenly Dragon himself raised, it’s not strange that he acquired Deific Essence. However, you’re... different, Kang-Woo.”

As far as Layla knew, Kang-Woo had not been raised or trained by anyone.

“You’ve fought by yourself, risen by yourself, and even acquired Deific Essence by yourself. A case like yours is completely unprecedented,” Layla remarked.

There was no being besides Kang-Woo since the era of myths who had risen to the top from the bottom. He did possess Gaia’s blessing, but Layla knew better than anyone else that one could not acquire Deific Essence simply by being blessed by a god.

“In any case, that means there have been beings that had acquired Deific Essence,” Kang-Woo said.

He smiled and looked away from Layla.

*‘Risen by myself, huh?’* Kang-Woo recalled what Layla had said. *‘Have I risen by myself?’*

He wasn’t sure, since he had possessed the Authority of Predation ever since he had fallen into Hell. No matter how he thought about it, he had not started from the bottom in the truest sense.

*‘But...’*

That did not mean Kang-Woo had risen to where he was now with just the Authority granted to him; he was at least sure that no one else could be like him because he had not *only* acquired Divinity.

*‘I...’*

Kang-Woo possessed a dark, deep, and endless sea within him, which Deific Essence could never compare to. He had been controlling and keeping it in check all this time. A god was nothing before that unending sea; even one of the Titans that had created those very gods had been imprisoned

within the greatest depths of that sea. Kang-Woo had achieved far too much to say that he had risen to the top with someone else's power.

“Hyung-nim.”

Si-Hun was staring at Kang-Woo. His eyes were hazy and filled with sorrow, but only for a moment. Si-Hun hugged Kang-Woo while congratulating him.

Han Seol-Ah approached Kang-Woo and asked, “How did you acquire Deific Essence?”

“Well... I'm still a bit confused right now, so I'll explain in more detail later,” Kang-Woo said to his party members, who had swarmed into his room.

It had not even been ten minutes since he had become the God of Splendor. He was so curious about testing out the power that he did not have the leeway to do anything else.

“Oh... Okay. I understand, Kang-Woo.” Seol-Ah nodded in slight disappointment.

The other party members were also dying to ask Kang-Woo all kinds of questions, but they decided to leave it for later.

Layla said before turning around, “I'll let Lady Gaia know about this.”

Her expression was bright as she said that. Whatever the reason, Kang-Woo becoming the God of Splendor was worthy of celebration since a literal god had pretty much been added to their party. Kang-Woo's existence would become the ray of light that would chase away the darkness that had befallen Aernor after the advent of Lucifer, the Lord of the Flies.

“Okay. I'll leave it to you,” Kang-Woo replied.

“Phew. I honestly still can't believe it,” Layla expressed.

“Haha. I might have become a god, but I'm still nothing compared to Lady Gaia.”

It was more or less the truth since Gaia was far above him in terms of their Deific Essence ranks.

“Not necessarily.” Layla shook her head with a smile. “Those who acquire Deific Essence instead of being born with it barely receive any restrictions from the System. Considering that, you might have more influence over the System right now than Lady Gaia.”

That was the first time Kang-Woo was hearing of this. His eyes shone sharply.

*‘Is that why the Constellations of Evil aren't restricted by the System?’*

He was not sure about that, but the fact that he wouldn't be restricted by the System was welcome news since it would be a problem if he wasn't able to use the power of Deific Essence that he had just earned.

Clack.

The door closed. Kang-Woo sat down in a chair while humming.

*‘Well, then.’*



He used the power of Divinity as his eyes shone like a child opening his Christmas present.

Whoooooom.

A formless energy that could not be detected with any sense spread throughout his body. The Divinity began to naturally mix with the enormous demonic energy within him.

*'Oh, this is pretty cool.'*

It was different from demonic energy, mana, and sacred power. Those three energies usually did not mix, especially demonic energy and sacred power. However, Divinity melted into the demonic energy as if the two energies had been one from the very beginning.

*'In the first place, I can't do anything with just Divinity.'*

Unlike the other energies, Divinity itself did not translate to physical power. Demonic energy, mana, and sacred power were fundamentally the same because the manifestation of those powers resulted in a physical effect. Whether it be using Authorities with demonic energy, creating fire and ice with mana, or creating a spear of light with sacred power, the ultimate result was physical.

To make a comparison, it was like gunpowder. Guns, cannons, and missiles were all different, but they were the same in that they all used gunpowder and brought about a physical result. Although there was mind control magic and Authorities specialized in detection, they were a result of a physical manifestation of energy being used differently.

Condensed demonic energy, mana, and sacred power were also tangible for a similar reason; a mountain of gunpowder became a powerful weapon in its own right without needing to be processed. However, Divinity did not possess such physical qualities.

*'But once the Divinity mixes with demonic energy...'*

Kang-Woo used an Authority to create a dark red spear. The spear that had been made using demonic energy imbued with Divinity contained immense power.

*'I guess it's similar to an enhancer or auxiliary.'*

Kang-Woo lightly swung the spear imbued with Divinity joyfully. Just then, an unexpected result arose.

*'Hm?'*

The spear that was made with demonic energy was enveloped in golden light without Kang-Woo even having intended for it. No, that wasn't the only anomaly.

"What?"

He could not feel the demonic energy at all. Not a single ounce of demonic energy was flowing out of the spear; it was to the point that even Kang-Woo himself had been fooled.

*'What the hell?'*

He looked down at himself in surprise. He bit open his thumb to confirm something. Despite not having used the Authority of Coloring, red blood was flowing out from his finger.

"Hah," Kang-Woo chuckled.

*'It even has an effect like this?'*

It felt as if his active skills had turned into passive skills. Of course, once he willed himself that he did not want to hide his demonic energy, the golden light disappeared, and the dark energy took its place.

“Wow,” Kang-Woo expressed.

*'I guess that's the God of Splendor for ya.'*

Golden light naturally poured out of him without even needing to use Authorities just because Divinity was mixed into the demonic energy. It made his life so much easier.

[Granting Player Oh Kang-Woo the Deific Name 'God of Lies...']

“Let's see. Since I'm the God of Splendor now, I should make some skills that fit the title.”

Kang-Woo fell into thought while stroking his chin.

[The System has identified an error.]

[The detected error does not exist.]

[The Deific Name of Player Oh Kang-Woo is 'God of Lies!']

“No, flamboyant skills might degrade my status as the God of Splendor.”

Kang-Woo turned around after having made up his mind.

[It is 'God of Lies!']

“Let's just go with naturally exuding faint amounts of power.”

Kang-Woo enveloped himself in faint brilliant light and walked off.

[It's God of Lies, you motherf—]

Fwish.

Kang-Woo waved the annoying blue window away.

\*\*\*

A man with a hideous diagonal slash scar on his face was sitting cross-legged in the darkness. He was thinking with his eyes closed.

*'That monster...'*

The terrifying monster looked as if it had been born from the Demonic Sea itself. Tai Wuji's mind was scrambled whenever he thought about that monster, but it was not just the monster's power that was making his thoughts so convoluted.

*'How did he use the Heavenly Dragon Sword Technique?'*

That monster had used the sword technique that he had never taught to anyone else but his disciple.

*'It was laughably terrible, but... It was without a doubt the Heavenly Dragon Sword Technique.'*

Not only that, it was good enough that it couldn't have been performed without someone's teachings.

Silence fell. Tai Wuji turned to look at the boy with blank eyes. "Constellation of Nightmares."

"Mm," the boy replied.

"Check if there is someone with the soul of Tian Taihuang near the monster."

Tai Wuji mentioned the name of the dear disciple that he had raised, taught, and killed with his own hands.

Chapter 387 - Beauty Trap (1)

A man was sitting cross-legged on top of a hill of red sand amidst arid land where no life could be felt. He slowly stood up and unsheathed the sword strapped to his waist. Dark blue flames eerily traveled up from the base to the tip.

"Huup."

Tai Wuji took a deep breath and recalled an image of his enemy. A monster made of black mucus appeared out of nowhere on top of the hill of red sand.

Squelch.

The monster was so disfigured that it looked like Play-Doh squashed by a child. Sharp teeth could be seen within his smiling mouth.

*'He does not die.'*

Tai Wuji fell into thought as his sword blazed with dark blue flames. He was thinking about how to kill the monster that he had seen.

*'He didn't die even after I completely vaporized him.'*

It was impossible; even a god possessing Deific Essence would die if their physical body was destroyed, and the same went for wraiths that possessed a spiritual form like the Constellation of Fear. There was no being that could survive after the physical vessel that held their Deific Essence was annihilated.

*'In other words...'*

The source of his power did not come from his physical body, but someplace else.

"Huuu," Tai Wuji sighed deeply.

No matter how much he guessed what the reason could be, it was meaningless unless he thought of a countermeasure.

*'He does not die.'*

Not only was he unkillable, but the monster possessed a weapon so powerful that it could easily tear apart protection made with Divinity.

*'How about sealing?'*

Tai Wuji shook his head. The monster had devoured the Constellation of Fear whole; there was no way that he could seal such a monster. They would need as much power as what Seraph had used to seal the Constellations of Evil at the cost of her own Deific Essence, but there was no one among the Constellations with that powerful of a sealing ability. The monster couldn't be killed, ignored, or sealed. There was practically no way to deal with him.

*'No, wait.'*

Tai Wuji narrowed his eyes and recalled the memories of his battle against the monster again.

"Why did he fall back?"

He had not thought about it because of the state of things at the time, but the monster had surely avoided a battle against him.

Tai Wuji frowned. He couldn't understand why a monster crazed enough to swallow the entire world whole would suddenly fall back.

*'Because I used the Constellation of Fear as bait?'*

That was a possibility; Tai Wuji had planned to escape from the monster while he was focused on the Constellation of Fear. However...

*'He fell back too easily.'*

The monster had accepted Tai Wuji's offer as if he had been waiting for it. Thinking about it in hindsight, it was certainly strange.

"He may not be completely immortal."

Tai Wuji shook his head again. There was no way to describe someone who could survive their entire physical form being vaporized as other than completely immortal. That was likely not the issue.

*'Maybe...'* Tai Wuji gripped his sword handle in deep thought. *'... It is his mind that isn't completely immortal.'*

The monster had initially possessed full intelligence, but after he had regenerated just from a single drop of blood, Tai Wuji could only feel madness from the monster.

*'His mind is degraded the more he regenerates.'*

If that was the case, the monster's incomprehensible actions made sense.

*'He was weaker than me in all aspects.'*

Tai Wuji was sure of that one thing. It would be no issue for him to kill that monster multiple times over if he wanted to, but he had fallen back regardless because the monster did not die.

"His mind..."

That was likely the key to facing that monster. Tai Wuji fell into thought again while gripping his sword. He recalled the monster again and again, analyzing the monster's gaze, actions, speech, and voice with his transcendent senses. Tai Wuji opened his eyes after some time, shining sharply.

*'I'm sure of it.'*

The more the monster regenerated, the more he lost control over himself. Madness and desire would take the place of his degraded sense of reason and intelligence.

A smile appeared on Tai Wuji's expressionless face. The monster was not unkillable; even if it was an immortal being that would endlessly regenerate, there was a limit to it.

*'His weakness is his mind.'*

He gripped his sword tighter. The vanity he had felt when facing the monster as if he was looking into an endless abyss, had disappeared. Since he had figured out the monster's weakness, there was only one thing he needed to do next.

"If his mind is his weakness..."

Tai Wuji would just need to kill the monster over and over again until his mind was destroyed, reducing him into nothing but a mindless beast.

Fwoosh.

The dark blue flames enveloping the sword flickered. The imaginary monster made of black mucus in front of Tai Wuji bared its teeth. He swung his sword at the monster, slicing it up into dozens of pieces, but it regenerated in a flash.

"Huuu," Tai Wuji inhaled.

He drew out Qi from his dantian and swung his sword again, slicing the monster countless times. The monster repeated the cycle of being slashed and regenerating. A small amount of the monster's blood got on Tai Wuji while he was swinging his sword.

Crunch!

Excruciating pain traveled from where the blood splashed. Although the enemy had been made using Tai Wuji's imagination, the injury he had suffered was real. Enemies created using his transcendent senses were both imaginary and real at the same time, at least to Tai Wuji himself. If he allowed himself to be attacked by the imaginary enemy, his brain would register the attack as real and inflict injury on his body. If he allowed himself to be fatally wounded, he would die.

"Hup."

Tai Wuji cut off the portion of his body with blood splashed on it without hesitation. If he did not do so, that blood would feast on him endlessly. The blood containing countless teeth fell to the ground. Tai Wuji scanned the monster after widening the distance; the monster was still moving fine.

"Heavenly Dragon Rampage."

The countless slashes tore the monster apart. An endless cycle of death and regeneration continued. The monster's movements slowly turned simple. Its sense of reason had disappeared, and only madness remained.

Kiihhh...

The movements of the monster with no intelligence were simple. It began to eat everything around it, driven by madness.

Fwoosh!

Dark blue flames set the monster ablaze. The monster that had lost its reason began to devour itself. It broke down and collapsed.

Tai Wuji sighed deeply.

He sheathed his sword and lifted the concentration that he had maintained to the point that his brain was overloading. The collapsing demon disappeared from before his eyes.

“It’s not easy.”

Tai Wuji looked down at himself. He was covered in wounds. It was certainly difficult to kill an endlessly regenerating immortal monster without rest.

*‘I need an easier way to gnaw at his mind.’*

Tai Wuji narrowed his eyes.

“Tai Wuji.”

Just then, a boy with blank eyes approached him while dragging his feet. Tai Wuji turned around. In the boy’s hand was a black object pulsing as if it was alive, the Demon God’s legacy.

“What is it?” Tai Wuji asked.

“The Demon God’s legacy is absorbing fear.”

“What?”

Tai Wuji frowned. The Constellation of Fear’s plan had failed; fear was surely directed at Lucifer instead of the Demon God.

“What happened?” Tai Wuji asked.

The boy shook his head. “I don’t know.”

Tai Wuji remained silent. If the Constellation of Nightmares did not know, there was no way for him to know.

“But there are traces of interference,” the boy mentioned.

“Interference?”

“Yeah, but I don’t know who.”

Silence fell. Tai Wuji took the Demon God’s legacy that the boy handed him. The pulsing darkness was aggressively absorbing the negative emotions spread throughout the continent.

*‘I don’t know what happened, but...’*

The growth of the Demon God's legacy was a good thing. Tai Wuji placed the Demon God's legacy in his pocket.

*'I have one more card to play against that monster now.'*

Not even that monster would be a match for him once the Demon God's legacy was perfected.

"And I finished investigating the human that possesses Tian Taihuang's soul," the boy remarked.

Tai Wuji's eyes brightened. "Who is it?"

"Kim Si-Hun."

"By Kim Si-Hun, you mean..."

"Yeah. Gaia's retainer. The same as Oh Kang-Woo."

Tai Wuji remained silent as the gears in his head turned at a rapid rate. The monster posing as Gaia's retainer, and the human that had inherited Tian Taihuang's soul... It was by no means a coincidence that they used the same martial arts.

*'This is...'*

Tai Wuji lightly clenched his fists. He could strongly feel that there was something about it that would be able to affect the monster's weakness, his mind.

*'Not bad.'*

Tai Wuji nodded expressionlessly. His bitter loss had been a blessing in disguise, as he was gaining clues to victory one by one.

*"You won't be able to forget, even if you wanted to."*

The monster's voice echoed in Tai Wuji's mind. Thick bloodlust poured out from Tai Wuji.

*'Of course...'*

He never intended to forget in the first place. He had been sharpening the blade of revenge in his mind all this time. Tai Wuji passed the boy and walked down from the hill of red sand as he organized the plan that he had thought of.

*'To make contact with Kim Si-Hun, I have to divert the monster's attention.'*

However, that was easier said than done. Tai Wuji fell into thought as he walked.

"Hm?"

Just then, a woman came into his view. It was Proserpine, the elf with braided blue-violet hair, the god of succubuses, as well as the being with the Deific Name *Constellation of Lust*. She was blankly staring into nothingness.

*'She's been like that ever since back then.'*

After meeting the monster, Proserpine was killing time while postponing her mission to infiltrate the ranks of the elves.

“What is it?” Tai Wuji asked in a low voice.

Proserpine looked away from the nothingness and at Tai Wuji. She snorted and turned away. “None of your business.”

“I don’t think you have any right to say that when you’re acting in a way that makes it my business.”

Proserpine bit her lip. She looked away from Tai Wuji and stared into the blank space again. Her thoughts were full of the terrifying monster.

*‘Who could it be?’*

Ba-dump, ba-dump.

Her heart beat rapidly. An inexplicable feeling of fear and desire intertwined whenever she thought of the monster.

Proserpine sighed heatedly.

Just like the suspension bridge effect, her fear of the monster was turning into feelings of love as more time passed.

*‘I want to...’* Proserpine licked her lips as she grew more aroused. *‘... Have a taste of him.’*

The goddess of lust recalled the monster as her eyes filled with desire.

“Hah,” Tai Wuji chuckled as he stared at Proserpine. Then, he thought of an idea. “I have a favor to ask.”

“Hm? What favor?” Proserpine frowned in annoyance.

Tai Wuji explained his plan.

“So you’re telling me to divert that monster’s attention, right?” Proserpine confirmed moments later.

“Yes.”

“Hmm.”

Proserpine’s eyes shone. Her initial annoyance was nowhere to be found, replaced with anticipation to the point that she was panting heatedly.

“Do you think you can do it?” Tai Wuji asked.

“Do you even have to ask?”

“He is strong.”

Tai Wuji would be able to, but Proserpine couldn't face that monster by herself.



“Fufu,” Proserpine giggled. “Who do you think I am?”

She slowly stood up and released lustful energy. Her blue-violet hair soared into the sky and turned into squirming black tentacles. Her skin was split, revealing eight eyes. She smiled seductively as she licked the pus flowing out the ends of her tentacles.

“Why would the goddess of lust fight with her fists? I’ll seduce that monster with my unparalleled beauty.”

Chapter 388 - Beauty Trap (2)

It had been a week since Oh Kang-Woo had become the God of Splendor. Since then, Kang-Woo has focused on getting used to controlling the power of Divinity.

“Huuu,” Kang-Woo took a deep breath.

He slowly raised his right arm, and the Key of the Demonic Sea began to turn into a shining golden sword. Satan would not be able to close his mouth from the shock if he were to come back from the dead and see this. After all, it was a replica of Satan’s Hell Armament *Wrath* except that it was shining gold. No, its form wasn’t the only similar thing.

Crack!

Space itself was severed along the path of the sword’s swing and then closed back up. The demonic energy mixed with Divinity had torn apart space itself. Not only did the two swords look the same, but the energies that they exuded were also almost identical. No, since it contained Divinity, Kang-Woo’s sword contained far more energy than Satan’s Hell Armament.

*‘Well, even so... It wouldn’t be of much use against that guy.’*

Kang-Woo smirked. No matter how powerful the sword was, the Constellation of Despair possessed martial arts that Kang-Woo could not surpass. He would not be able to win with weapons.

“It should be about time he took action.”

Kang-Woo transformed the Key of the Demonic Sea back into a ring. He had no intention of avoiding a fight against the Constellation of Despair just because he didn’t stand a chance in a battle with weapons. Rather, he could barely sleep from the anticipation of being able to fight him soon.

*‘It was so fun.’*

Kang-Woo’s battle with the Constellation of Despair had been so fun that the desires he had been suppressing until now felt like they had been nothing. He had realized his limit; he had used every ounce of his strength and even went as far as to open one of the Doors, but he couldn’t even imagine defeating the Constellation of Despair.

“Haaa,” Kang-Woo sighed ecstatically.

His heart was beating like crazy. How long had it been since he had faced an opponent that he had an utterly miniscule chance of winning against? It was only the third occurrence, the first being when he had first fallen into Hell, and the second time being when he had first met Bael.

“For God’s sake, this is driving me insane.”

Kang-Woo tightly held his trembling hands into a fist. It felt like he was in love at first sight. The desire that had been lit within him was blazing to the point that he could barely handle it. Kang-Woo thought about the Constellation of Despair's face like some lovesick teenage girl.

Balrog was misunderstanding something. He thought that Kang-Woo had reluctantly fought against the Constellations by himself for the sake of his comrades under the guise that he couldn't hold back his desire.

"People would think I'm a fucking saint if they didn't know any better."

Kang-Woo snickered. It was partly the truth; he did not want to see Kim Si-Hun, Han Seol-Ah, Balrog, and all of his other party members getting hurt. He did not even want to imagine them dying. However, he did not reluctantly stand on the battlefield by himself like some shonen manga protagonist; he was not that kind of person.

*'You could say that two of my objectives overlapped, or that it was like killing two birds with one stone.'*

Kang-Woo wanted to fight against a Constellation of Evil, and he wanted to experience his limit. He wanted to let his blazing desire take control and rampage to his heart's content. He could have held it in, but he didn't.

It was just like going on a diet. People knew that they wouldn't die even if they didn't eat unhealthy foods, but they let their desire take control over them and eat to their heart's content. It was not that they weren't able to hold themselves back, but because they purposefully didn't.

Kang-Woo was the same. He wanted to eat until his stomach burst as a reward for suppressing his desire for all this time. That was why he had fought a Constellation of Evil by himself, unencumbered by anything or anyone, to devour to his heart's content.

*'Because there will be times in the future when I don't want to hold myself back but have to.'*

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly. He knew that the time would come, and he had already made up his resolve for the day.

*'One day...'*

A time would come when there would no longer be prey that he would be satisfied with. Battles full of madness and desire that would drive him to his utmost limit would cease to exist. He was not talking about world peace; one day, he would become so powerful that there would no longer be any enemy that would be able to fire him up.

*'I think it took me about three or four years to get to this point.'*

Kang-Woo recalled the day that he returned to Earth after his power was sealed by the Gaia System. It had not even been five years since then. In that short time, he had grown absurdly powerful to the point that his past self back when he ruled over the Nine Hells felt cute.

Although Kang-Woo had received help from the System and had come across several lucky occurrences, it had been ultimately all him. Even now, he was getting stronger at an uncontrollable rate.

*'The Demonic Sea is getting bigger.'*

Kang-Woo had already devoured three Constellations of Evil. Even after his return to Earth, he had easily devoured over thousands of demons and demonic beasts. No, the deciding factor was that he had devoured one of the three corpses of the Demon God. It would have been weirder if the Demonic Sea had not grown larger.

*'No, it's not just that.'*

Kang-Woo looked down at himself with sunken eyes. He had come to learn something new after acquiring Deific Essence.

*'Even if I don't use the Authority of Predation...'*

The Demonic Sea was expanding all on its own as if space itself was expanding. Kang-Woo was confident that he would be able to control the endlessly growing Demonic Sea since his demonic energy control was also rising.

*'The problem is that at this rate...'*

There would no longer be any prey that would be able to fire him up. His desires would not be sated, and he would only be left with an endless void. He was already prepared for it and was even confident that he would be able to endure it. He just wanted to, at the very least, experience things that would give him stimulation and allow him to reach his limits a few more times.

*"You know, my king..."*

Kang-Woo recalled Lilith's voice. She had once said this to him in an extremely angry voice.

*"You're like a moth to a flame."*

He had no idea where she had learned a phrase like that when moths didn't even exist in Hell. He couldn't help but laugh.

*"I can't argue with that. I did manage to get through a lot of life-threatening moments."*

Back when the Demonic Sea had first been formed, Kang-Woo had been on the boundary between life and death every millisecond of each day. Even after he had formed the Ten Thousand Demon Core to be able to contain the Demonic Sea, he had willingly put himself on the brink of death several times through the repeated use of molting. After getting used to molting, he began to open the Doors entirely. He had managed to just barely survive so many times that he would not be able to say anything even if Lilith were to slap him.

*'Well, even if I were to redo things...'*

Kang-Woo would not change a thing.

He lightly shook off the dirt on him and turned around. After coming out of the forest that he had gone in to train, he headed to the imperial palace.

*"Ah, Kang-Woo!"* Seol-Ah greeted him with a smile as soon as she saw him and walked up to him. *"Are you done with your training?"*

“Yeah.” Kang-Woo nodded.

His training to be able to use Divinity was mostly complete. It had not been that difficult since Divinity acted like an enhancer or auxiliary to another form of energy, so all he needed to do was check how much stronger his attacks became.

“Where are Si-Hun and Balrog?” Kang-Woo asked.

“They’re still training.”

“Still? They’ve been at it since dawn.”

After the previous incident, they had been abnormally obsessed with training.

“Well...” Seol-Ah slurred as she smiled bitterly.

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

*‘I should have a word with them.’*

Although he was not one to talk, training to abnormal degrees was not good for one’s body. They would do better to train in moderation.

“Huh? You’re back, Kang-Woo?” Cha Yeon-Joo said as she walked toward him.

Her hair was also damp as if she had been training until just now. Her hair, wet with sweat, clinging to her nape looked oddly sexy.

“What?” Yeon-Joo glared at Kang-Woo.

She covered her chest, misunderstanding Kang-Woo’s gaze.

Kang-Woo chuckled. “There’s nothing for you to even hi—”

Bash!

Yeon-Joo kicked him in the balls at the speed of light. Kang-Woo was able to dodge, but he purposefully got hit since he felt like dodging would be a bad idea.

“Ack!” Yeon-Joo was the one to collapse instead of Kang-Woo while grabbing her shin. She glared at Kang-Woo fiercely. “You goddamn monster..”

Yeon-Joo bit her lip in frustration after seeing that Kang-Woo was perfectly fine after being kicked in the balls. Rather, Seol-Ah was far more shocked.

“A-Are you okay, Kang-Woo?!” Seol-Ah reached out to him in pallor.

Kang-Woo bent his hips backward to dodge her hand. “I’m fine, darling.”

*‘Rather, it won’t be fine if you touch it.’*

“My, you’re back earlier than expected. I thought you would come back a little later.” Even Lilith had come out to see him.

“Divinity was easier to control than expected,” Kang-Woo answered while shrugging.

Yeon-Joo spat on the ground. “That aside, your Deific Name *God of Splendor*... What’s up with that?”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“I thought you’d become something like the *God of Lies* because you lie every chance you get.”

“What do you take me for?” Kang-Woo shook his head at the absurdity.

There was no way he was something like the God of Lies.

Riiing, riiing.

*‘What the fuck is it this time? Give it a rest already.’*

Kang-Woo swiped away the blue window in front of him without even looking at its contents.

“But honestly, I still can’t believe you’ve become a god... You look the same as always,” Yeon-Joo remarked as she scanned Kang-Woo from head to toe.

The overpowering pressure that one would feel from a god could not be felt at all in Kang-Woo. No one would have been able to tell that Kang-Woo had acquired Deific Essence or whatever it was if it hadn’t been for Layla.

“I mean, gods are different from our notion of them,” Kang-Woo responded with a smile.

Omnipotent gods that one normally associated with the word *god* were different from gods that possessed Deific Essence. They were not omnipotent or omniscient; they simply possessed the unorthodox power known as Divinity.

“So, does our great God of Splendor plan on choosing any apostles?” Yeon-Joo asked.

“Why? You wanna be one?”

“Can I become as strong as Kim Si-Hun if I become an apostle?”

“You’ll have to call me oppa in exchange.”

“Fuck off. Forget it.” Yeon-Joo turned her head while grimacing in disgust.

Kang-Woo snickered. To be honest, he had no idea how to make someone his apostle. No, even if he could, he had no intention of making anyone his apostle.

*‘Besides, it’s not like Yeon-Joo will become as strong as Si-Hun even if she becomes my apostle.’*

Si-Hun had not become that powerful because he was Gaia’s retainer. His talent far exceeded even that of Kang-Woo.

*‘If any of them were to acquire Divinity after me, it would be Si-Hun.’*

Kang-Woo smiled while thinking about Si-Hun.

“Right, Master Kang-Woo. Could you tell me about those Constellations of Evil in more detail? I can’t seem to get a lead on them,” Lilith asked.

Kang-Woo nodded and answered, “The man known as the Constellation of Despair was a middle-aged man with a large diagonal slash scar on his face.”

He slowly explained everything about the Constellation of Despair whom he had seen that day.

“Didn’t you say that there was a woman as well?” asked Seol-Ah, who had been listening in silence, her eyes narrowing.

Kang-Woo nodded. “Yeah. Her name was Proserpine, but I don’t know what Constellation she is.”

“Hmm.” Seol-Ah looked at Kang-Woo with sunken eyes. “Was she pretty?”

“Oh, yeah. Extremely pretty.” Kang-Woo casually nodded.

The Proserpine whom he had seen back then had possessed blinding beauty.

*‘First and foremost, she’s an elf.’*

It was an irrevocable rule that elves needed to be beautiful.

*‘But why are succubuses so fucking...’*

Kang-Woo was getting a headache just thinking about it. He trembled as his trauma came back to him.

“She was pretty?” Seol-Ah asked.

“That’s the first I’m hearing of it,” Lilith stated.

“Hmph, I guess her mid was pretty strong, unlike a certain person,” Yeon-Joo remarked.

*‘Huh?’*

The three women were glaring at him quite fiercely.

“No, I mean...” Kang-Woo looked at the three women as if he was being falsely accused.

*‘What’s wrong with calling a pretty woman pretty?’*

“She was pretty, but—”

“Hohoho, that’s no question.”

Just as Kang-Woo was about to continue, a woman’s voice cut him off. Kang-Woo turned to the source of the voice, and saw...

“No.”

... Tentacles. Black tentacles coming out from all over the body, eight eyes, and green pus flowing out from the ends of the tentacles.

“What?”

*‘Who the fuck are you?’*

Kang-Woo stared while trembling at the woman who had appeared out of nowhere.

“K-Kang-Woo...?” Seol-Ah stared at him with shaking eyes. She continued in pallor, “Is your fetish... N-No, such a thing...”

Tears were gathering at the corners of Seol-Ah’s eyes.

“No,” Kang-Woo remarked.

*‘I don’t have that kind of fetish.’*

“Hah! Master Kang-Woo! What about that unsightly bitch is pretty?” Lilith yelled nonsensically.

“She’s not pretty,” Kang-Woo said.

“Please take a good look! Her tentacles are black!!”

“I said she’s not pretty.”

“Hmph, her tentacles are dry, and there’s no gloss to them whatsoever! And most of all...!”

“Fucking listen to me.”

“She only has eight eyes!!”

“No shit.”

Chapter 389 - Beauty Trap (3)

“Hmm. You look surprisingly normal usually. I can’t believe you’re the same monster as back then.” Proserpine scanned Oh Kang-Woo from head to toe while licking her lips with her snakelike tongue.

She could no longer see the hideous monster that looked as if it had manifested straight out of a nightmare. Rather, he was faintly exuding golden light, as what one would normally expect from the Protector of Light.

*‘But...’*

Proserpine smiled widely. She knew very well that the monster had only become the Protector of Light by deceiving Gaia. She had seen with her own eyes the hideous and terrifying monster hidden under that unattractive human shell.

*‘Really...’*

Proserpine trembled. She couldn’t forget about it no matter how much she tried. The monster made of viscous mucus, and the countless mouths deep within the darkness... The image of the monster

that looked as if it had been born from the Demonic Sea that the Demon God had searched desperately for back in the era of myths had been engraved into her brain.

“Haaa,” Proserpine exhaled heatedly.

She became aroused. Although she had been granted Deific Essence by the Demon God, she was a succubus in nature; one so powerful that she was known as the goddess of lust. She had been forgotten among the succubuses because she had been sealed by Seraph for a long time, but her instincts did not go anywhere.

*‘I’m sure it would feel wonderful... if I make love to that monster.’*

Succubuses charmed their prey with their unparalleled beauty and illusion magic to make their prey fall in love with them. The slow extraction of life force from the prey that was madly in love with them was how succubuses hunted. The stronger the prey, the more life force they possessed. Considering that, there was no better prey than the immortal monster in front of her.

*‘I’ll be able to feast on high-quality life force for the rest of my life.’*

Since the monster possessed abnormal regenerative capabilities, he would also possess infinite amounts of life force. Proserpine felt as if she had found an endless spring. She stared in arousal at the monster in human skin. She needed to make that monster fall in love with her to be supplied with infinite amounts of life force, and that was her specialty.

“Hmm. What do you think? This is my true form.” Proserpine swept back her black tentacles while smiling seductively. Kang-Woo frowned miserably. “Fufu. You seem to be lost for words at my beauty.”

“... I certainly am lost for words.” Kang-Woo grabbed his forehead as if he was having a headache.

He was left so whiplashed that he was lost for words.

*‘Why tentacles again?’*

Chilling fear traveled down his back as he recalled his trauma.

“Urgh!” Lilith bit her lip anxiously.

She had ridiculed Proserpine, but Proserpine was so blindingly beautiful that even Lilith was getting concerned.

Lilith pulled on Kang-Woo’s arm and said, “Master Kang-Woo. I can’t stand this.”

“Wh-What?”

Lilith proudly walked forward and turned back to her true form. Squirring green tentacles and eighteen eyes appeared.

“... Huh?” Proserpine stared at Lilith in bewilderment.

She had never expected there to be another succubus by the monster’s side.

“L-Lilith?”



“Th-That’s Lilith?”

Han Seol-Ah and Cha Yeon-Joo were left in shock after seeing Lilith’s true form for the first time. Lilith glared at Proserpine while covering her mouth with one of her green tentacles.

“How dare you covet my dear husband?” Lilith remarked.

“Hmph. I don’t know where a bitch like you came from, but this is none of your business. Why don’t you scurry off somewhere else?” Proserpine said back.

Their bloodlust clashed in midair.

“...” Kang-Woo was left with his mouth agape, dumbfounded. He groaned in despair.

“Two tentacles...”

He trembled. Just seeing those sticky tentacles caused his heart to beat aggressively and leave him in pallor.

“Not one, but two...”

Kang-Woo wept while staring at Lilith and Proserpine confronting each other. He felt like he had come back to the Ninth Hell.

“... Kang-Woo.” Seol-Ah became teary-eyed while looking at Kang-Woo. “Was that... the case?”

*‘What? What’s the case?’*

“Was I... not your type of woman?”

*‘What?’*

“What in the world are you talking about?” Kang-Woo stared at Seol-Ah in confusion.

It was as if she was asking if his type of woman had been someone with tentacles this entire time.

“Of course n—”

“I’m sorry for hiding it all this time, Seol-Ah.” Lilith grabbed Seol-Ah’s arm in sorrow. She continued as her tentacles squirmed, “What Master Kang-Woo truly loves are... these tentacles.”

*‘It’s not.’*

“I didn’t have the heart to tell you all this time because you can never have them,” Lilith remarked.

“N-No way...” Seol-Ah slurred.

*‘I said it’s not.’*

“What the hell are you talking about?” Kang-Woo glared at Lilith in frustration. “When did I ever say that I liked tentacles?”

He needed to hammer the nail in the coffin this time for sure.

"I hate tentacles. Those multiple eyes and the pus coming out from all over your body are nothing but hideous to me." Kang-Woo continued while grabbing Lilith's shoulders, "So, please... Please stop. You're far more beautiful in your Kurosaki Yurie form."

"..." Lilith's expression stiffened. She became teary-eyed and lowered her head. "R-Really?"

"Yeah."

*'I swear on my mother's life. I mean, I'm an orphan, but yeah.'*

"Hmph, don't lie." Proserpine snorted.

"Excuse me?" Kang-Woo said.

*'Who are you to judge whether I'm lying or not?'*

"This is nothing but a facade you're putting on, isn't it? There's no way a monster like you would like the form of ugly humans."

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent and then looked toward Yeon-Joo. Lilith and Seol-Ah aside, Yeon-Joo barely knew anything about the truth.

"... Facade? What is she talking about?" Yeon-Joo asked while frowning.

"She seems to know about my past," Kang-Woo replied without hesitation.

"Oh."

She had completely forgotten that Kang-Woo had been a demon before he had become the apostle of the God of Heroes.

Yeon-Joo muttered as if she couldn't even imagine it, "... Right. You spent ten millennia in Hell."

Ten millennia was such a long time that she couldn't even imagine what it would be like.

"But wouldn't your tastes change if you lived that long?" Yeon-Joo asked while tilting her head.

Kang-Woo cursed unbeknownst to himself. Even if he were to live for a hundred millennia, the day that he would be into tentacles would never come.

"..." Seol-Ah's face froze.

She replayed Yeon-Joo's words inside her head.

*'If Kang-Woo has lived for ten millennia...'*

It wouldn't be strange at all for his values to change. He might find Lilith and Proserpine, whom Seol-Ah found to be hideous, to be beautiful beyond belief.

*'He was also married to Lilith.'*

Seol-Ah's doubts grew larger. Kang-Woo had spent almost a millennia with Lilith. There was no way that they would have been together for that long if he hated her. Seol-Ah bit her lip anxiously while having no idea about Kang-Woo's circumstances back then. The fear of Kang-Woo being taken away from her by someone else spread throughout her body.

*'No.'*

Seol-Ah shook her head in pallor. Just the thought of Kang-Woo ending up with another woman made her feel nauseous. Her vision blurred, and an unbearable thirst suffocated her. Seol-Ah slowly turned to look at Proserpine, and the light in her eyes disappeared.

*'She... has to die.'*

Proserpine was trying to take Kang-Woo from her. She couldn't be left to live. She needed to die in the worst possible way so that she could never covet Kang-Woo ever again. Seol-Ah needed to make her struggle under immense regret and despair.

"Well, whatever the case, I have no interest in you, so bring me the other guy," Kang-Woo said while shaking his head.

It was true that he had no interest in Proserpine. Although she was a Constellation of Evil, she was the same as Lilith; she was not specialized in combat.

*'I guess there's meaning in that I can absorb Deific Essence from her, but...'*

She did not look appetizing in the slightest compared to the Constellation of Despair.

*'Anyway...'*

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes sharply. Whatever the reason was, a Constellation of Evil coming here of their own accord was something to welcome.

*'Since I'll be able to squeeze some information out of her.'*

Kang-Woo lightly rolled his feet. An immense wave of golden energy pulsed from him and surrounded everything. Even if Proserpine was not specialized in combat, a battle against one that possessed Deific Essence could level the entire imperial capital if he did not put up a barrier.

"Come on, what's wrong? You're scaring me," Proserpine said seductively while winking at Kang-Woo. She turned to look at Lilith and said confidently, "Is it because of that succubus? Fufu, if that's the case, there's no need to worry at all."

Lilith was also extremely beautiful, but she could not be compared to Proserpine herself. No, it wasn't only an issue of looks.

"If you make love to me once... I'll bestow you with pleasure that you'll never be able to forget."

Proserpine slightly lowered her clothes to show off more of her purple shoulders and cleavage.

“... Urp.”

Kang-Woo almost vomited out the kimchi stew that he had eaten this morning from Proserpine’s seduction.

*‘Fuck.’* He couldn’t stand it much longer. *‘I’ll just apprehend her and squeeze all the information she has.’*

Kang-Woo shook his head as if he was sick and tired of this and extended his right hand, turning the Key of the Demonic Sea into the form of *Wrath*. He grabbed the two-meter greatsword with one hand with ease.

“... Hm?” Proserpine’s eyes widened. She could feel Kang-Woo’s clear hostility toward her. “Hmm. You’re quite shy.”

Proserpine looked at Kang-Woo as if he was cute while smiling widely.

“Shy, my ass,” Kang-Woo responded.

He leaped toward Proserpine and swung the Key of the Demonic Sea down at her head. Proserpine’s head split into two.

“...” Kang-Woo frowned and clicked his tongue. “A clone, huh?”

There was no way he would be able to kill a god that possessed Deific Essence with one strike, nor would Proserpine be immortal like Kang-Woo when he opened the Doors.

“... I can’t believe you attacked me.”

Proserpine, whose head had been split into two, turned into black tentacles. Her face, which appeared amidst the tentacles, was dyed in shock, but only for a moment.

“Fufu. How interesting.” Proserpine licked her lips in delight and said ecstatically, “You’re the first man to ever reject me.”

She stared at Kang-Woo in anticipation as if she was thinking joyfully about how to make him hers.

“I’ll make you mine, no matter what.”

Proserpine burst into laughter. The black tentacles melted into the ground and disappeared.

“...” Seol-Ah stared at the disappearing clone while clenching her fists. “You’re going to... make Kang-Woo yours?”

Chilling bloodlust lingered around her eyes. She bit her lip while gritting her teeth.

Chapter 390 - I Will Show You The Truth

“... What the hell just happened?” Cha Yeon-Joo muttered.

Proserpine had appeared and then disappeared in a flash, Lilith had revealed her true form for the very first time, and Oh Kang-Woo’s fetish that he had been hiding all this time had been exposed. Yeon-Joo’s head was hurting from overload.

“No, I’m not into tentacles.” Kang-Woo flicked the panicking Yeon-Joo on the forehead.

“Ack!” Yeon-Joo shouted while gripping her forehead.

Kang-Woo ignored her and stared at the area where Proserpine had disappeared from.

*‘I don’t know what she was thinking to confront me like this, but...’*

It was great for him.

*‘Even if it was a clone, a part of it must have been connected to her main body to an extent for her to be able to control it.’*

It was the same concept as radio waves. Kang-Woo placed his hand on top of the area where the black tentacles had melted down. He could feel traces of Proserpine’s demonic energy. He smiled.

*‘This is more than enough of what I need to reverse track Proserpine’s location.’*

Of course, it would be impossible within normal standards. Proserpine specialized in non-combat magic like Lilith, and she had perfectly prepared for the possibility of being reverse-tracked. However...

*‘I can do it.’*

Kang-Woo’s level of demonic energy control was far above logical limits. No matter how thoroughly she had prepared to conceal her whereabouts, as long as she had shown herself to him, it would be impossible for her to avoid his trace.

*‘Rather, her preparations have made it easier for me.’*

Proserpine was likely thinking that there was no way Kang-Woo would be able to trace her, which was good for him. Having the upper hand in information meant that he would have the initiative. Considering how important it was to possess the initiative in combat, Proserpine’s error had granted Kang-Woo a priceless chance.

“... North.”

Kang-Woo slowly opened his eyes. The demonic energy connected via Proserpine’s clone was pointing north, at an area not far from Sant’ Angelo.

*‘They’ve been right under our noses.’*

He had never expected them to have been hiding out near the stronghold of the angels. The flow of demonic energy was suddenly cut off at a certain point. The trace of demonic energy disappeared as if space itself had been severed.

*‘Tch. A barrier, eh?’*

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and took his hand off the ground. He had reverse-tracked demonic energy the length of about half of the entire continent, but he was not tired in the slightest.

*‘That’s a bit of a problem.’*

The fact that he had no idea what the area being protected by a barrier was like inside was fairly bothersome. It was completely different from when Kang-Woo had faced the Constellations of Evil at the imperial palace; the enemies had invaded his home turf back then, but this was the complete opposite. He needed more information.

*'It would be difficult to ambush if the area is protected by a barrier that severs space itself.'*

Although Kang-Woo had the initiative, he would not be able to ambush them.

"Hmm." He crossed his arms and fell into thought.

Kang-Woo wanted to reach his limits and feel stimulation. The desire to devour the man known as the Constellation of Despair right this second was making him restless.

*'But...'*

That did not mean that he could barge into enemy lines with no plan at all. Wanting to feel stimulation and acting recklessly were completely different things.

*'I'll have to make a stage where I can fight him to my heart's content.'*

Everything else would only become a nuisance to him.

*'I need bait that will allow me to figure out the extent of their forces.'*

Kang-Woo needed a scout of sorts. It was easier said than done; if they were too weak, they would not even be able to figure out the extent of the enemy's forces. He thought of Kim Si-Hun as the perfect candidate, but he did not want to use Si-Hun as bait. He could not use Vernaak's undead demonic beast army either since their numbers had diminished severely after being used for the imperial palace attack.

*'... Maybe the angels.'*

Kang-Woo could not think of anyone better. He turned around after organizing his thoughts and saw Lilith, who was sulking after returning to her human form, Yeon-Joo, who was staring at him with conflicting thoughts, and...

"Darling?" Kang-Woo called.

"Ah, yes?" Han Seol-Ah, who had been mumbling something with her head down, looked up. She approached Kang-Woo while smiling as kindly as usual. "What a strange woman she was. There's no way you would be seduced by another woman, Kang-Woo."

"Well, you're right about that."

*'Especially if that woman is a tentacle monster.'*

"Hehe. Right?" Seol-Ah hugged Kang-Woo tightly with a smile.

Kang-Woo smirked and turned to Lilith. "Lilith. I found their whereabouts."

“Did you track her using the trace she left behind?” Lilith asked with shining eyes.

Kang-Woo nodded.

“What should we do? Should I direct my information network there? Or should I go there to investigate myself?” Lilith asked.

“No, it would be pointless. The place is protected by such a powerful barrier that its interior can’t be investigated.”

The barrier was powerful enough to sever space itself, so it was far too dangerous even for Lilith to investigate inside.

“Then...” Lilith slurred.

“I’ll be going to Sant’Angelo for a bit.”

“Ah,” Lilith expressed and then nodded with a wide smile. She seemed to have figured out Kang-Woo’s intentions. “I understand. In that case, I will let Balrog and the children know so that they’re ready to depart at a moment’s notice whenever.”

“Make me a Gate that connects to the northern region of the continent first. That’s where they are.”

“I understand.” Lilith nodded.

Kang-Woo separated from Seol-Ah, who was hugging him. “I’ll be back in a bit, darling.”

“...” Seol-Ah expressed anxiety for a short moment but then nodded. She grabbed Kang-Woo’s hand with a worried expression and continued, “Okay, Kang-Woo. In exchange, please promise me that you won’t face the Constellations by yourself this time.”

Kang-Woo nodded with a light smile. He had never planned to act alone from the beginning.

*‘After all, I doubt there would be only Constellations in that barrier.’*

The Constellations of Evil had summoned ancient demonic beasts to attack Sant’Angelo. It was foolish to think that they did not have an army. Kang-Woo needed comrades who would be able to get rid of the nuisances so that he would have his alone time with the Constellation of Despair.

“I promise.”

Kang-Woo nodded and turned around. *Boom!* He jumped into the air and shot toward Sant’Angelo with an explosive sound.

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“Haaa, haaa,” Si-Hun panted heavily.

His body felt heavy as if he was being weighed down by massive boulders. He caught his breath and lifted his head.

“Huff, huff.” Balrog was also panting heavily while drenched in sweat.

The two of them had been training aggressively since dawn, so they were borderline exhausted.

“... Let’s stop here for today,” Si-Hun suggested.

“No, not yet.” Balrog shook his head and stepped forward.

He lost his balance and swayed to the side. Seeing that, Si-Hun slowly shook his head.

“We can’t do anymore. You know that.”

“...” Balrog remained silent.

He collapsed to the ground and slowly caught his breath. It looked like he was trying to train some more after taking a short break.

“Balr—” Si-Hun was about to call Balrog to say something, but stopped himself and turned away from him.

*‘I wonder if hyung-nim is back?’*

He had heard that Kang-Woo had gone to a remote mountain to train how to use Divinity. Si-Hun wiped off his sweat with a towel and gulped down some water.

“Kaaah.”

There was nothing more refreshing than a cold glass of water after training all day from dawn.

“...”

However, that refreshing feeling only lasted for a moment. Si-Hun’s expression turned grim again. He looked down at his hands.

*‘I wonder when I’ll be able to catch up to hyung-nim?’*

No, that was not the problem; Si-Hun at least wanted to be able to reach even a fraction of Kang-Woo’s strength.

“Hyung...”

Si-Hun thought of Kang-Woo. A sense of vanity, as if he was trying to take hold of the shining sun, swept over him.

“No.”

Si-Hun shook his head. He shouldn’t be having such weak thoughts.

*‘I should be thinking of how I can lessen his burdens even a little.’*

The weight on Kang-Woo’s shoulders had likely gotten even heavier after becoming the God of Splendor. Considering that fact, getting sad just because it was getting harder to catch up to him was ridiculous.

*‘After all he’s done for me...’*



Kang-Woo had saved him. Si-Hun, who had been saved from a hellish cycle akin to a swamp he could never escape from, had received so much from Kang-Woo that he couldn't dare to name them all.

*'And...'*

Si-Hun smiled as he recalled what Kang-Woo had said to him a while ago.

*"Thanks for staying as my little brother."*

Those words lit up his world which had been shrouded in darkness formed by his horrendous trauma. Kang-Woo might not have meant anything much by it, but it had been nothing short of a saving grace to Si-Hun.

"... I guess I'll go see hyung."

Si-Hun smiled faintly. He wanted to see Kang-Woo after recalling those words. Just then...

"You must be Tian Taihuang's vessel."

"...!"

Si-Hun suddenly heard a voice. He summoned the holy sword and quickly turned around.

"Who...?" Si-Hun slurred.

He was a middle-aged man who had a diagonal slash scar across his expressionless face. The man disappeared as he slashed the air with his sword shining dark blue.

"Kurgh!"

Si-Hun was blown back. Tai Wuji caught up to him in a flash and swung his sword.

*'Heavenly Dragon Rampage.'*

Tai Wuji had no intention of taking his time; if he took more than the necessary time, the monster would come here.

Claaang—!

Sparks flew as their swords crossed. Si-Hun fixed his broken stance and blocked all of Tai Wuji's strikes.

"H-Heavenly Dragon... Sword Technique?" Si-Hun stared at Tai Wuji in shock.

The swordsmanship of the man was no doubt the martial art of the Martial God. Tai Wuji's eyes widened as he stared at Si-Hun, who had blocked all of his attacks.

"... No, it would not be apt to simply call you a vessel."

Tai Wuji scanned Si-Hun from top to bottom with shining eyes. The man in front of him was by no means a mere vessel for Tian Taihuang's soul.

"You may be able to acquire Deific Essence within ten... no, five years."

It was shocking. Even Tian Taihuang, one with talent blessed by the heavens, had taken over a hundred years to acquire Deific Essence despite Tai Wuji having taught him himself.

‘...’

A miniscule amount of desire arose from his heart devoid of emotions. It was a desire not of the Heavenly Dragon nor the Constellation of Despair, but simply one of a martial artist.

*‘If I raise him right...’*

The human might be able to reach heights that not even Tai Wuji could dare to reach.

“...”

Tai Wuji cut off such thoughts. He was no longer the Heavenly Dragon; he was the Constellation of Despair that had risen from the dead via the power of Demon God Bauli. Striking a blow on the monster’s mind by using Kim Si-Hun was of greater priority.

*‘I was planning on taking his head, but...’*

Tai Wuji narrowed his eyes. He had sensed a very miniscule anomaly within Si-Hun’s Qi when they had crossed swords.

*‘He has demonic energy.’*

Tai Wuji could feel the demonic energy that he felt when he faced the monster.

*‘... Could it be?’*

Tai Wuji’s eyes sank. Si-Hun gripped his sword anxiously while Tai Wuji was deep in thought.

“... Shit.”

They had not even crossed swords for one second, but Si-Hun was sure of it.

*‘I can’t win.’*

The opponent was far too monstrous for him to handle.

*‘I have to call hyung.’*

There was no one but Kang-Woo who would be able to face the man in front of him. Si-Hun reached for the communication device in his pocket.

“I see,” Tai Wuji remarked. “You weren’t just a vessel, but that monster’s puppet.”

“...?”

Si-Hun could not understand what the middle-aged man was talking about. Then, Tai Wuji appeared in front of him in a flash and grabbed his neck.

“Kurgh!” Si-Hun grimaced.

Tai Wuji placed his hand on Si-Hun’s heart.

“What... are...” Si-Hun stared at him as his eyes shook.

“I will show you the truth,” said Tai Wuji in a low voice.

And then...

“Ah.”

Si-Hun’s eyes widened.

*“We’ll become very good allies.”*

Si-Hun saw a brightly smiling young man. He was all too familiar with that face.

“A-Aaaahh.”

The memory that had been shrouded in darkness was brought to the light.