

M. in Hell 481

Chapter 481 - Demon of Prophecy (2)

“Ah...”

Gaia’s eyes widened. Her heart beat rapidly as a chill ran down her back. She was gasping for air and her vision was blurring. She lost strength in her legs.

“Wh-Why...” she asked but received no answer.

The Oh Kang-Woo on the blue screen, the monster made of darkness itself with countless sharp teeth, was...

“Why is... the D-Demonic Sea... inside my child?” Gaia muttered as her eyes trembled.

The monster transformed into an immortal black mucus and ate the Parasite King alive. He was the predator of predators at the top of the food chain. Gaia was only seeing the monster through a screen, but it was easy to deduce the monster’s identity.

“Demon of Prophecy...”

He was the being who possessed the sea of demonic energy and would bring demise to the Triad.

“Hmmm,” Bael frowned in displeasure. “Well... I’ll let it slide. He indeed has the Demonic Sea *as of this moment.*”

He pouted and snorted in dissatisfaction. There was no need for him to tell Gaia that he was the true master of the Demonic Sea and the Demon of Prophecy who would bring demise to the Triad.

‘Since it’ll probably be more interesting that way.’

Bael smiled and moved his shoulders up and down.

“Were you surprised? Well, I don’t blame you. I’m sure you’re shocked out of your mind. Hihi. After all, the retainer you treasured so deeply turned out to be... the Demon of Prophecy.” He snickered to mock Gaia.

“L-Lies! My child cannot be the Demon of Prophecy!!”

Gaia strongly denied Bael’s claims and clenched her fists.

“Is that so?” Bael jumped in place as if he were having the time of his life and continued, “What about this, then?”

He snapped his fingers, changing the footage in front of Gaia.

Crumble—!!

“A-Aaaahh.”

An entire world was falling apart in the next footage; it was being reduced to ashes by the colossal flames covering the sky. One of the worlds of the Triad was ending, and a demon was looking down at the crumbling world.

“M-My child...”

The demon had wings of gold and black fire on his back, resembling the prophesized black sun.

“No... Th-That’s impossible.” Gaia shook her head in pallor.

She fell to her knees and curled up as if avoiding the undeniable truth.

“H-Hihihihih!” Bael laughed brightly. “Man~ I was honestly quite surprised by this as well. Who would’ve thought that he would end an entire world before completing the Demonic Sea?”

Bael stared crazily at Kang-Woo in the System window.

“Well, then.” He got on his tiptoes and twirled to face Gaia. “You get it now, right?”

“...” Gaia aggressively bit her lip. She clenched her fists to the point that they trembled and slowly stood up. “I-I... trust my ch—”

“Ehhh? Still?” Bael licked his lips with his long tongue. “How about this, then?”

He snapped his fingers once again.

- Hyung... You were the Demon of Prophecy?

An innocent-looking young man appeared on the screen.

“That boy is...”

Gaia recalled hearing from Layla about the Player who recently joined Guardians and defeated Kim Si-Hun in a duel, and possessed the power to see the future. The human, whom Gaia had been planning on manifesting to meet, was trembling in fear and staring at Kang-Woo in shock.

“...”

There was no need to think deeply about what it meant for a human who could see the future to call Kang-Woo the Demon of Prophecy.

“A-Aaaahh.”

Gaia could feel her world falling apart; the flames of salvation that she had put her hopes in were going out.

- I’ll keep the fact that you’re the Demon of Prophecy a secret.

- Come on, man. It only takes an instant for shit like that to spread.

A familiar face was on the screen but from it came out an unfamiliar voice and manner of speech; the familiar man was acting unfamiliarly.

“This is... fake.”

Tears trickled down Gaia’s cheeks. She aggressively stomped her foot and extended her arm toward Bael.

“How dare you try to deceive me?!”

She shot an enormous shockwave at Bael, who giggled and lightly waved his hand.

Poof!

The shockwave infused with Divinity was neutralized after making contact with the back of Bael's hand.

"Heh." Bael smiled widely after blocking Gaia's attack with ease and said, "What? You're gonna say they were fabricated this time? Hah! What a comfy life you have! You see what you wanna see, hear what you wanna hear! How awesome is that?!"

Bael burst into laughter as he grabbed his stomach.

"Well... fine." He stared crazily at Gaia. "If that's what you want to believe, go ahead."

"..."

"But... You'll realize it sooner or later. No, even if you don't, I'll keep coming to tell you." Bael slowly turned around. "Well then, see you next time."

He walked away without hesitation. Darkness clumped together and a hunchback demon appeared in front of him.

"Have you finished what you need to do?"

"Yeah!" Bael nodded energetically.

Amon, the hunchback demon, clicked his tongue as he stared at Gaia blank-eyed in shock.

"What use is it to show that incapable woman the truth?"

"Hm?" Bael tilted his head.

Amon continued, his voice as unpleasant as nails on a chalkboard, "The Demon King... will do whatever it takes to keep his identity hidden."

"Hehe, I know." Bael nodded. "I'm sure he'll manage to fool Gaia somehow even after I showed her all this."

Considering the things that the Demon King had done in Hell, Bael knew this would be nowhere near enough.

"But aren't you curious?" Bael smiled brightly, his eyes sparkling.

"What do you mean...?"

"About how desperately he'll struggle to keep the truth hidden!" Bael shouted with his arms spread out wide. "H-Hihi! I'm sure he'll crawl on the floor pathetically and bawl his eyes out again, right? Don't you agree?"

The Demon King had kneeled to Bael and licked his feet, all to fool Bael.

"Heh, hehehe."

Bael's eyes shone madly as he recalled memories of the past. His heart beat rapidly and sparks traveled throughout his body.

"Yeah, that's it! That's how you should be!"

Bael wanted to see how pathetically the Demon King would act to hide the truth.

"A-Aaaahh." Bael drooled; he got aroused just from thinking about it. "I wonder how he'll deceive her? How pathetically will he act? Would he get on his knees and beg her to trust him as he bawls his eyes out?"

Bael then muttered in rage, "But no matter how much you struggle, you'll lose everything you've built in the end."

If once wasn't enough, Bael would do it twice. If not twice, then thrice. No matter how much the Demon King struggled, he would not be able to keep his identity from getting exposed.

"H-Hihi. I'm sure all the humans he treasures will turn their backs on him."

Bael knew very well how much the Demon King treasured the people around him. If those people were to abandon him, treat him like a monster, and point their weapons at him...

It would be so... so... fun. H-Hihi."

Bael cackled as his shoulders moved up and down. The fury deep inside him was eating him whole. No, the fury had already eaten him whole since long ago because the Demon King was...

"You're... You're..." Bael muttered as he thought about the one he resented.

"Nothing."

The sound of gritting teeth echoed throughout the ruins of Olympus.

"If we can't get in contact with the divine realm..." Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. "I guess I have no choice but to go there myself." He was sure that something had happened in the divine realm so he needed to check for himself.

"It's too dangerous to go by yourself, hyung-nim." Si-Hun, who had been organizing documents like a machine, stood up. "I will go with you."

Si-Hun had awakened the Deific Essence of Heavenly Sword so there was no issue with him going to the divine realm. However, Kang-Woo shook his head.

"No, I'll go by myself."

'We can't get in touch with the entirety of Olympus. If it's that serious, I might have to open the Doors.'

If that were the case, it would be too dangerous to have Si-Hun with him. Kang-Woo couldn't afford to become black mucus covered in countless mouths in front of Si-Hun.

'And if Si-Hun isn't here, Layla might really collapse from exhaustion.'

Layla had been so busy that she couldn't even take a shower despite Si-Hun helping her; Kang-Woo couldn't help her, so he couldn't take Si-Hun with him.

"Hyung-nim..."

"You stay here and help Layla. Also, no matter how busy you are, make some time to take breaks. Just look at yourself."

Kang-Woo patted the disheveled Si-Hun's shoulder. Si-Hun was born for martial arts; he would have far more trouble battling against documents nonstop for a week than against enemies with his sword.

"... Okay, hyung-nim."

"Please stay safe, Kang-Woo. Since I'm physically fine, Lady Gaia should be fine as well," Layla mentioned calmly.

Kang-Woo nodded. "I'll be back in a flash."

He placed his hand on the Hall of Protection and drew out his energy like he had learned when he went to the divine realm. The entire Hall of Protection shone white and Kang-Woo disappeared into thin air.

"This is..."

Kang-Woo frowned aggressively as soon as he arrived in the divine realm. He saw the destroyed Olympus, in worse condition than Seoul after the Parasite invasion.

'I knew something happened.'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes. He expected something had happened the moment he noticed that communications were severed, but he did not expect Olympus to be in such terrible condition.

'Did the anti-Gaia faction do this?'

Although the situation was more or less resolved after Odin's death, there were still many gods who opposed Gaia's rule. Kang-Woo wondered if they had something to do with this.

"... No." He shook his head.

'There's no way Olympus would have lost this miserably.'

Now that Thor and Odin were killed and the Asgard faction had scattered, Olympus was the strongest faction of Earth's divine realm. Even if the anti-Gaia faction had risen in revolt, Olympus would not have been defeated so one-sidedly.

"... No way."

An uneasy sensation ran down Kang-Woo's back. He quickly entered what remained of the palace; he couldn't feel the presence of any god—no one but Gaia's.

"... Lady Gaia?"

"..."

The brown-haired goddess, collapsed on the ground, slowly turned to Kang-Woo and looked up at him in pallor.

“My... child...” she muttered faintly.

Chapter 482 - Taking Off The Mask (1)

“... What happened?” Oh Kang-Woo asked the disheveled Gaia.

Her eyes were trembling. She shut her eyes tightly and shook her head as if trying to forget something.

“Bael... attacked Olympus,” muttered Gaia.

“...”

Kang-Woo closed her eyes. He understood everything just from that one sentence.

‘I see.’

The severed contact with the divine realm, the destroyed Olympus, and the absent presence of the other gods... everything could be explained just from the name *Bael*.

“Were the other gods... eaten?” Kang-Woo asked, thinking Bael attacked Olympus to devour the gods.

“No.” Gaia shook her head.

‘No?’

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

“He did eat some of the gods, but most of them survived and are currently being treated in the World Tree.”

This was the first time Kang-Woo heard the World Tree could heal the injuries of deities, but that was not important at the moment.

‘Most of them... are alive?’ Kang-Woo tilted his head, unable to understand. *‘Why?’*

Bael attacked Olympus while Kang-Woo was battling the Parasite King. Bael also possessed the Authority of Predation, so his objective had likely been to absorb the gods’ Deific Essence.

‘So why didn’t he kill them?’

It didn’t make sense. Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes, wondering if he was missing something. Just then, he was reminded of what Layla had said.

- Since I’m physically fine, Lady Gaia should be fine as well.

Kang-Woo looked down at Gaia. As Layla had said, she was not particularly injured.

“... Ah,” Kang-Woo expressed.

He had forgotten the first thing he should have wondered after hearing that Bael attacked Olympus.

'How did Gaia manage to survive?'

If Bael had attacked Olympus for the gods' Deific Essence, he would naturally aim for Gaia, a goddess with Top-rank Deific Essence.

'But he didn't eat her.'

There was no way he was unable to; even if Gaia possessed Top-rank Deific Essence, she was no match for Bael.

'I see.'

Kang-Woo nodded as if he understood. He had been thinking about it completely wrong.

'He didn't attack Olympus for Deific Essence.'

He had a different objective.

"What happened to Bael?" Kang-Woo asked.

"..." Gaia remained silent. She then looked up at Kang-Woo with trembling eyes. She bit her lip anxiously and reluctantly continued, "He suddenly ran away... in the middle of his attack on Olympus."

"He ran away?"

"Y-Yes," Gaia answered, averting her gaze from Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo laughed in spite of himself and asked again, "Did he really run away?"

"..." Gaia clenched her fists.

"Lady Gaia." Kang-Woo crouched so that he was at eye level with Gaia. "What happened here?"

He slowly reached for Gaia's clenched fist.

"Ngh!"

Gaia slapped Kang-Woo's hand away in shock.

"... Lady Gaia?" Kang-Woo slightly grimaced.

"Ah... I-I'm sorry, my child." Gaia lowered her head in panic. She bit her lip and said as if whispering, "B-Bael said some nonsense."

"Nonsense?"

Gaia nodded. "Yes. Bael said that... you're the D-Demon of Prophecy."

"..."

"He also showed me... footage of you fighting the Parasite King and destroying Huan."

“... Pardon?”

Kang-Woo felt like a truck had smashed the back of his head. Kang-Woo looked down at the subtly trembling Gaia with wide eyes.

‘Motherfucker.’

He barely managed to stop the curse from leaving his mouth. He felt dizzy and his thoughts were jumbling together.

‘Bael, you crazy son of a bitch.’

Kang-Woo couldn’t help but feel that Bael had gotten the better of him.

“A-And... was his name Kim Tae-Hyun? He showed me footage of you fighting him as well.”

“...”

Kang-Woo closed his eyes. He calmed his breathing and slowly unraveled his tangled thoughts. He could feel his head cooling down.

‘How?’

He did not feel anyone’s gaze when he was facing the Parasite King or Tae-Hyun. Even if he had been immersed in the battle, there was no way Kang-Woo would miss someone watching him in secret.

‘If he wasn’t watching, then how could he have—’

Just then, something popped up in his head.

‘... The Law of Titans.’

The entity that Players referred to as the *System* knew where and what every Player was doing at all times. If it didn’t, there was no way it could give rewards to Players every time they killed monsters or leveled up.

‘And Bael currently has the privilege to interfere with that System.’

Kang-Woo frowned aggressively. He understood why he had not been able to feel Bael’s presence. Kang-Woo had been watched by the *Law* that governed everything.

“...”

Kang-Woo stared at Gaia coldly.

“O-Of course, I didn’t believe a word of it. I-It’s surely doctored footage, right?” said Gaia anxiously, staring desperately at Kang-Woo to affirm her suspicions. She continued with a trembling voice, “There’s no way that you... my precious child... is the Demon of Prophecy.”

Kang-Woo stared into Gaia’s eyes filled with anxiety.

Gaia cautiously grabbed Kang-Woo's clothes and shouted, "Wh-Why aren't you answering? T-Tell me that you're not!"

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and calmly fell into thought.

'It's not difficult to cover it up right now.'

It was simple; he just needed to claim that they were doctored footage and that he had done no such things.

'Since she'll see and hear what she wants.'

Gaia truly treasured Kang-Woo and thought that he was the hope of this world. Hence, logic wouldn't be very important to her.

'But the seeds of doubt will remain.'

The proof that Bael gave Gaia would normally be so surefire that Kang-Woo would have had no way of denying it. Simply claiming that the footage was doctored would resolve the immediate issue, but she would always doubt Kang-Woo deep within her heart.

'... And that seed of doubt will engulf Gaia.'

Kang-Woo understood why Bael showed only Gaia the footage. Bael had acquired footage of Kang-Woo unleashing the Demonic Sea by interfering with the System, as well as footage of him ending Huan and of Tae-Hyun calling Kang-Woo the Demon of Prophecy.

'But...'

There was no reason for him to show only Gaia. If he wanted to expose Kang-Woo, he would have shown it to as many people as possible.

'In other words, he never intended to expose me in the first place.'

Bael had a different objective in mind.

"M-My child...?"

Kang-Woo looked down at Gaia, who was looking up at him desperately with her hands on her chest. She said that the footage Bael showed her was surely doctored, but her eyes were filled with fear and uneasiness. Telling her that the footage was indeed doctored would not eliminate the seed of doubt sown deep within her.

'I'll have to act out another shitshow.'

Kang-Woo needed a proper storyline as well as a build-up that would let everything flow seamlessly. He needed to work several times harder than normal to erase the doubt embedded deep within her heart. However, that painstaking effort would end up meaningless as long as Bael possessed the privilege to meddle with the Law of Titans.

"Ahhh, I see how it is," Kang-Woo mumbled.

He more or less understood what Bael was planning now.

"Hah," he laughed in spite of himself.

'You want to see me struggling, is it? You're gonna sit back and relax as you watch my struggle with fried chicken in hand?'

"Pfft! Bwahahahahahahaha!!!" Kang-Woo burst into laughter, unable to hold it in.

He crouched as he grabbed his stomach. He smiled and swept his hair back.

"Bael, oh Bael," Kang-Woo said to his enemy, who was likely watching him in anticipation even now. "You stupid, poor son of a bitch. Why do you keep trying to copy me?"

Taking a step back and looking down at the world as if observing it, toying with people's feelings to fulfill his objective, and standing at the top to have everything under his control as if he were a mastermind... everything that Bael was doing was what Oh Kang-Woo had done throughout his life in Hell.

"Pfft! Kehehehe!" Kang-Woo laughed as he moved his shoulders up and down.

Bael did not do such things in the past; he did not have the personality or brains to pull such schemes. He was closer to a beast, faithful to his senses and instinct. There was only one reason why Bael would complicate the situation this way.

"Did you think you could become like me... if you copied what I do?" Kang-Woo smiled. "You're nothing, man."

Kang-Woo cackled as he licked his lips.

'You want to see me struggling, is it? Sounds interesting. Alright, I'll show you. Watch and learn.'

"Wh-Why are you acting like that all of a sudden, m-my child?" asked the pale Gaia as she looked up at Kang-Woo looking up at the sky and talking to himself.

Kang-Woo looked into her brown eyes and said, "It's not doctored footage."

Deathly silence fell.

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

Kang-Woo smiled. "I said, the footage you saw through the System isn't fake."

Gaia shook her head as she trembled. "Wh-What's wrong, m-my child? Are you being threatened by B—"

"Hah, can't you see that I'm trying to be perfectly honest with you?"

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and slowly approached Gaia. He raised his right hand to cover his face with it, and then slowly dragged it down his face.

"He's right."

His hand fully came off of his face, revealing black scleras, yellow irises, and horizontal pupils. The corners of his mouth were ripped up to his earlobes and sharp teeth protruded from between his lips.

“Everything Bael said is true.”

Kang-Woo took off his mask of countless lies at last.

“I’m the Demon of Prophecy.”

Chapter 483 - Taking Off The Mask (2)

“Ah...” Gaia’s eyes widened. She mumbled incoherently in pallor and shook her head as she trembled. “N-No. Th-There’s no way...”

“What do you mean, no? I’m saying it’s true.”

Oh Kang-Woo chuckled.

Gaia took staggering steps back and said, “Y-You said before that Bael was the Demon of Prophecy.”

“I lied, obviously. Did you expect me to tell you the truth?” answered Kang-Woo as he shrugged.

Tears welled up from Gaia’s eyes. She did not want to believe that the one she trusted with all her being and considered the light of salvation was the Demon of Prophecy— no, she couldn’t believe it.

“Th-Then... were you and Bael... on the same side from the beginning?”

“Why would I be on the same side as that loser?” Kang-Woo laughed in spite of himself and continued, “It’s true that I’m the Demon of Prophecy, but I have no intention of ending the world or devouring it.”

“... What?” Gaia stared at Kang-Woo wide-eyed in disbelief.

“I’m genuinely trying to save the world.”

Gaia’s eyes shook. She bit her lip and clenched her fists. “B-Bull! The Demon of Prophecy is meant to bring demise to—”

“What the fuck is that prophecy in the first place and why does it keep saying that a person who never even thought about ending the world will end it?” asked Kang-Woo with a frown. The pent-up frustration burst out all at once. “All this shit about prophecy and whatnot...”

Kang-Woo gritted his teeth and glared at Gaia. He couldn’t help but feel wrongfully accused.

“I stopped them.”

The Demon Cult, Satan, the Constellations of Evil, and the otherworldly invasion...

“I fucking stopped them all as the goddamn gods were stuck here because of the Law and bickering about their greedy desire to manifest!”

Kang-Woo had been the one to save the dying world. If it hadn't been for him, this world would have ended a very long time ago.

"Let me hear you say it, Gaia." Kang-Woo stared at Gaia coldly. "What the hell were you all doing as I was killing them all?"

"..." Gaia remained silent.

She wanted to deny Kang-Woo's claims, but she couldn't find the right words to.

"Hm? What did you all do?"

It was because Kang-Woo had said nothing wrong.

"Well, I'm sure you tried your best. You made Layla into your incarnation and selected Protectors to protect the Earth despite being shackled by the Law of Titans. But how did that end up? Hm? Do you seriously think you would have been able to stop them all? The Demon Cult? The princes of Hell? The Constellations of Evil? The Parasite King? ... Bael?"

"Th-That's..." Gaia stammered and lowered her head. She turned away from Kang-Woo as if averting her gaze from the truth.

Kang-Woo cackled. "What? Do you want me to praise you since you tried your best? Hm? Wow~ the almighty Lady Gaia sure must have had a hard time~ Want a medal?"

Kang-Woo walked up to Gaia, grabbed her chin, and yanked her head to face him. He said coldly, "What the hell did you all do other than mouth off about the prophecy?"

"..." Gaia remained silent. She slapped Kang-Woo's hand away as she trembled. "Do not touch me!"

Tears flowed down her cheeks. She was filled with a sense of betrayal because Kang-Woo had been deceiving her all this time, and sorrow because she couldn't refute any of his claims. Whether it be humans or gods, one's reaction when they were faced with a truth they did not want to accept was the same.

"The prophecies of the World Tree are absolute!" Gaia shouted. "From the beginning of time to now... It has never been wrong."

If Kang-Woo was truly the Demon of Prophecy, the world would end at his hands.

"As proof of that, you destroyed Huan!"

Kang-Woo had said that the footage Bael showed her was real. If that was the case, it meant that Kang-Woo had ended Huan.

Gaia bit her lip anxiously and continued, "Even if you truly have no intention of ending the world..."

She recalled what Kang-Woo looked like as he was fighting the Parasite King. His countless mouths, sharp teeth, and the shroud of darkness as black as the darkest abyss...

"The Demonic Sea will... one day take over you."

If Kang-Woo possessed the prophesized Demonic Sea, the end of the world was already set in stone regardless of his intentions— one could even call it inevitable. Even if Kang-Woo were to kill Bael, he would eventually lose control over the Demonic Sea and lose his sanity. He would become a mindless monster and devour the world whole.

“The Demonic Sea is growing bigger inside you, is it not?” Gaia asked.

Kang-Woo remained silent.

As she had mentioned, The sea of demonic energy within his heart was growing bigger and bigger as if the universe was expanding, even without him eating anything.

“You...” Gaia stared at Kang-Woo sorrowfully. “Won’t be able to endure it.”

There was no way he would be able to. An individual couldn’t even begin to handle an infinitely expanding sea of demonic energy, even if that individual were a Titan.

“Pfft. I won’t be able to handle it?” Kang-Woo burst into laughter. “He said something similar too.”

He recalled the bellowing Demon God trapped within the Abyss of the Demonic Sea. The Demon God had also said that Kang-Woo wouldn’t be able to handle the Demonic Sea’s infinite power.

“Who—”

“Do you guys...” Kang-Woo interjected. He stared at Gaia with deeply sunken eyes. “... have any idea who I am?”

They had no idea who Kang-Woo was and what he had done to survive. They likely had no interest either; they simply prophesized the end after judging that the power wasn’t something a mere human could handle.

It was the case in Hell as well. No one thought Kang-Woo would survive in the Ninth Hell, kill the seven princes of Hell, and rule over Hell as its king. Despite all that, he was here.

“Well, fine. Let’s say that I won’t be able to handle the Demonic Sea’s power and that I’m the demon who will end the world.” Kang-Woo leaned on a broken pillar with his legs crossed. He said to Gaia, who was glaring at him, “So what?”

“...”

“What do you want me to do? Hm? Tell me.” Kang-Woo smiled and then continued calmly, “Alright, then. Kill me.”

“... What?”

“Stop spouting shit about prophecies and just kill me.”

Kang-Woo yanked Gaia’s hand toward him and placed it on his chest.

“The Demonic Sea is right here.” Kang-Woo tapped on his chest. “I haven’t opened the Doors or drawn out demonic energy, so you’ll be able to kill me with just one blow.”

Even if the Deific Essence barrier were to activate like a passive skill, Gaia’s Deific Essence would be able to penetrate it.

“What are you doing? Hurry up and kill me. Hm? I’m the Demon of Prophecy who will end the world, aren’t I?”

“Th-That’s...”

Gaia was left confused, not expecting Kang-Woo to act this way. Her hand on Kang-Woo’s chest trembled. She stared in pallor at Kang-Woo’s face.

- I will... dedicate myself to the light.

She recalled the day when she accepted Kang-Woo as her retainer. His voice had been filled with bravery and passion. Just remembering what Kang-Woo used to be pained her heart.

“Now, this is your golden opportunity to kill the Demon of Prophecy. It’s easy. Just use your Divinity and stab my heart,” Kang-Woo said calmly. He caressed the crying Gaia’s hair and continued, “Go on. Save the world, Goddess of Parental Love.”

“...” Gaia’s lips turned blue as she stared at her trembling hand. She muttered, “I-I...”

She shut her eyes tightly. Her hand on Kang-Woo’s chest fell lifelessly.

“What? You can’t do it?” Kang-Woo smiled. “Then I’ll do it myself.”

Crush!

He stuck his hand into his chest. He tore his flesh apart and ripped out his bones. Blood poured out like a fountain from his carved-out chest cavity.

Gaia yelled in shock, “Wh-What are you doing?!”

She quickly reached for Kang-Woo’s arm and pulled out his hand before he could crush his own heart.

“*Huff, huff,*” Gaia panted heavily, cold sweats trickling down her forehead. She looked down at her hand that had pulled out Kang-Woo’s hand. “Why...?”

She was more confused by the fact that she had stopped Kang-Woo’s suicide attempt than Kang-Woo’s actions themselves.

‘The Demon of Prophecy would have died if I just left him be.’

“Arghhh...”

Gaia tried to let go of Kang-Woo’s arm, but her hand would not budge no matter how hard she tried.

“Why are you stopping me when I’m doing you a favor and killing myself?” Kang-Woo chuckled. He caressed Gaia’s hair and continued, “I mean, I guess you didn’t have a choice.”

Kang-Woo leaned in and whispered in her ear, “You swore on your Deific Essence, after all.”

“...!”

Gaia’s eyes widened. The words that she had said when she accepted Kang-Woo as her retainer struck in her head like a bolt of lightning.

- From now on, I, Gaia, swear on my Deific Essence of Parental Love that I will treat Protector Oh Kang-Woo as I would my child and spare no support and love for him.[1]

“A-Aaaahh.”

Gaia trembled. She understood why she was unable to let go of Kang-Woo’s arm despite finding out that he was the Demon of Prophecy and that everything he had shown her had been a lie.

“Pfft, bwehehehehe!!” Kang-Woo grabbed his stomach and laughed vulgarly. He wiped Gaia’s tears and remarked, “There’s no need to make things so complicated, Lady Gaia. You don’t have to be angry or sad by the betrayal either.”

He then whispered, “I’m sure you know as well, don’t you? That you can’t stop the end of the world without me.”

“...”

Gaia remained silent. She knew that no one but Kang-Woo could stand in Bael’s way. However, the world would inevitably end if the Demonic Sea within Kang-Woo were to keep expanding. In the end, she needed to choose the better of the two terrible scenarios.

Hence, Gaia had no choice but to trust that Kang-Woo would be able to endure the Demonic Sea’s attempt to take control over him and that he would become the savior of the world. Hanging on to the sliver of hope was the only choice allowed to her.

“A-Aaaahh,” Gaia stammered.

She stepped backward in pallor. She was finally able to realize that she never had a choice from the beginning even after finding out about Kang-Woo’s true identity. She was unable to kill Kang-Woo because of her pledge with her Deific Essence on the line— forget killing him, her body would move of its own accord to protect him if he were to be put in danger.

“Did you...”

Gaia could not expose Kang-Woo’s identity to the world either since he was the only hope that the world had to be saved from demise. All would despair if that hope turned out to be the Demon of Prophecy.

“Know about this...”

The only choice left to Gaia was to trust that the Demon of Prophecy, the being who would end the world, wouldn't end it.

“From the beginning?”

She had no choice but to cling to Kang-Woo powerlessly.

“Who knows?” Kang-Woo smiled. “Right, have you decided what you're going to do?” He caressed Gaia's cheek and asked, “Will you kill me here and now, or trust the Demon of Prophecy destined to end the world?”

“...” Gaia remained silent and turned away from Kang-Woo.

“Answer.” Kang-Woo grabbed Gaia's chin and forced her to face him. He looked into her trembling eyes and said, “Now.”

“...” Tears welled up around Gaia's eyes again. She lowered her head and answered reluctantly, “I will... trust you.”

“Trust who?”

“I...” Tears flowed down her cheeks. “I will trust... the Demon of Prophecy.”

Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction. He opened his arms wide and embraced the frozen Gaia.

“Thank you very much for treasuring me so lovingly.”

“*Sniff*, hurgh.” Gaia trembled as she cried. “Y-You scumbag... H-How could you be so wicked...?”

Despite boiling with rage from the betrayal, she had no choice but to trust and put her hopes in Kang-Woo.

“Lady Gaia.” Kang-Woo got on one knee and continued, “I will dedicate my life to you.”

“Ah...” Gaia's expression turned pale.

Kang-Woo had said that line when Gaia accepted him as her retainer.

“You... You...”

His expression, voice, and line were the same. Gaia knew his words were a sweet lie and that his true wicked nature was hidden behind that warm smile, but she found herself feeling relieved. She wanted to keep hearing those sweet lies— no, she preferred not knowing the truth at all.

“You are... truly a demon.”

Tears gathered on her chin. Kang-Woo lightly kissed the back of Gaia's hand and smiled.

“Who in the world would fall for a demon's temptations if their words were bitter?”

Chapter 484 - Taking Off The Mask (3)

“Hurgh...”

The cries of a goddess echoed within a ruined palace.

Oh Kang-Woo looked down at Gaia, who was bawling her eyes out on the floor. He clicked his tongue with a bitter expression.

‘Maybe I went a little too far.’

He naturally had no intention of doing this from the beginning; he had planned on concealing his true identity from Gaia to the end.

‘But I was given no choice once it was all out in the open.’

Bael was able to monitor Kang-Woo at all times through the System— no, he was even able to show others footage of Kang-Woo with it as well.

‘I probably would have managed to fool her once.’

It would be a hassle, but it was possible. However, what about a second or third time?

‘Impossible.’

Bael would inevitably expose Kang-Woo’s identity if he had the System privileges.

‘It’s like being filmed by a security camera with no blind spots twenty-four seven.’

Going out of his way to hide his identity in such a situation would only restrict his actions.

‘I had no choice but to make Gaia trust me even after knowing my identity.’

Kang-Woo looked down at Gaia with deeply sunken eyes. Her shoulders were trembling pitifully and tears were trickling down her cheeks. Not only had the retainer whom she trusted betrayed her but she was forced to trust the Demon of Prophecy on top of that. Kang-Woo sighed.

‘I would have revealed it to her sooner if I knew this would happen.’

Kang-Woo had considered multiple times to reveal his true identity and prove that he had no intention of ending the world, however long it took.

‘But I ended up not doing it because of how massive the backlash would be.’

There was a huge difference between trusting the hero who would save the world and being given no choice but to trust the Demon of Prophecy. It was no different from a nation forcing its citizens to sacrifice themselves for their great nation.

‘There’s no way someone would give their all when they are forced to do it.’

Kang-Woo could no longer expect much from Gaia; her faith in him had shattered beyond repair.

‘At least there’s still the pledge she made with her Deific Essence on the line.’

If it hadn’t been for that, Kang-Woo might have had to eliminate Gaia.

‘Well, regardless.’

What was done had already been done; it was irreversible. Time was better spent doing what he could instead of regretting what he had already done.

“Sniff... Sniff.”

Kang-Woo walked toward Gaia, who was crying with her hands over her face.

‘Since I was harsh on her, it’s time to console her now.’

“Well, don’t feel too bad about this. I’m just as frustrated as you are.”

“...” Gaia slightly lowered her hands and looked up. “What... do you mean?”

“Like I told you from the beginning, I have no intention of ending the world. If I did, why would I have gone through all that shit to save it? I would have just left the world to end by itself. I just want to eat my kimchi stew and live happily ever after with my Darling.”

“...”

Gaia flinched. Kang-Woo was not wrong; the Demon Cult would have turned Earth into Hell if not for Kang-Woo. Even in Aernor, the angels would have been no match for the Constellations of Evil. No, even just a few days ago, the Parasites would have been unstoppable without Kang-Woo.

“I only hid my identity because of how fervently you wanted to kill the Demon of Prophecy.”

“B-But—”

“Yes~ yes. I know what you’re worried about. You’re trying to say that I’ll be consumed by the Demonic Sea once it gets bigger and end up destroying the world even if I don’t want to, right?”

“...” Gaia remained silent.

Kang-Woo chuckled. “Let’s see... Since it was when I first entered the Ninth Hell... Yes, I’ve heard that constantly since a thousand years ago.”

“A-A thousand?”

“Yes. And as you can see...” Kang-Woo opened his arms widely. “I’m right here, perfectly fine.”

“...”

Gaia looked up at Kang-Woo with trembling eyes. No one could endure for a thousand years with the Demonic Sea inside them.

“Well, the Demonic Sea wasn’t complete at the time,” Kang-Woo remarked.

“How did you—”

“I don’t know.” Kang-Woo shrugged. “I have no idea how I managed to hold out for this long, but one thing I know for sure is that I will remain myself from now on as well.”

He had endured ten grueling millennia in Hell without proper food or rest. There was no form of entertainment, only massacre and battle.

‘And most of all.’

There were no goddamn women. After eight millennia passed, Kang-Woo couldn’t even imagine women because he had forgotten what they looked like.

‘Do you know how miserable I felt whenever I touched my Fran?ois because I was worried that he would die? Huh? Do you? Oh, wait. I guess there was a woman, but can you even call that a woman?’

Squelch.

Kang-Woo was reminded of those nightmarish ■■■■■■■■■■ as well as the sounds of sticky mucus.

“No, you can’t.”

Kang-Woo had no choice but to do it, but he didn’t want to consider that his first time. No, he couldn’t— he refused to.

“M-My ch— no, Oh Kang—”

“Fuck! Motherfucker! I was reminded of that cursed memory again!” Kang-Woo shouted at Gaia.

Gaia flinched.

“Huuu, huuu. I won’t let it be taken.”

“...”

“My endless frustrations refuse to let my body be taken. Okay? Hm? Fuck the Demonic Sea, I’ll never hand over my body. I fucking refuse.”

“I-I understand, so calm d—”

“I won’t fucking calm down!” Kang-Woo aggressively grabbed Gaia’s shoulders. He stared at her with blazing eyes and continued, “Listen carefully, okay? I won’t let anyone take my goddamn body, so get your worries out of your head and focus on the tasks ahead.”

“...”

“Besides, you already know you have no choice but to trust me, don’t you?”

“That’s...”

“Then trust me,” Kang-Woo stated firmly. “Or you can just stay a crybaby bawling your eyes out on your knees.”

His words were as cold as ice, but they were just what Gaia needed to hear.

“...” Gaia closed her eyes and stood up slowly. “As you’ve said, I am an incapable goddess.”[1] “...”

“I tried my best to save this world... and my children, but you’re the one who saved them in the end, not me.”

Gaia recalled Kang-Woo’s sharp remarks after he revealed himself as the Demon of Prophecy. As he had said, she wasn’t able to save anything. The one who had been protecting the world all this time was not her but the Demon of Prophecy.

Gaia clenched her clothes and stared at Kang-Woo with trembling eyes.

“Are you... Are you sure I can trust you?” she asked desperately.

Kang-Woo smiled and turned to her. “That’s up to you. Even I can’t control that, but you need at least something to cling onto if you want to save the world, right?”

Even if that something was the demon destined to end the world.

Gaia remained silent. Kang-Woo turned his back on Gaia and walked out of the ruined palace.

“Fuuu, haaa,” he inhaled and slowly exhaled. He looked up at the black sky of the divine realm and asked, “Were you watching?”

There was no reason to struggle pathetically to hide the truth. There was no need to even put effort into bending a poor goddess to his will.

“Right then, take notes,” Kang-Woo said to the being who was likely watching from somewhere. “This is gonna be on the exam.”

He cackled.

Wham—!

The hill made of red sand exploded.

“AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!” The roar of a beast echoed throughout the hill. A boy screamed madly, “OHHHHH KAAAAAANG-WOOOOOOOO!!”

Boom! Boom!

The hill exploded every time he swung his arms. The sky turned black and the ground distorted. The nearby demons bowed deeply on their knees.

“SHIT, SHIT, SHIT, SHIT!!!” the boy screamed hysterically as he pulled on his hair.

He raised his right arm and sucked one of the bowing demons toward him.

“L-Lord B—”

Crunch—!

Bael bit off the head of the demon trembling in pallor.

“Haaa, haaa, haaa.”

The boy trampled on the demon’s corpse, exploding it into pieces. He stared daggers at the blue window in front of him.

- Pfft! Bwahahaha!!

A man with sharp eyes was bursting out laughing with his hands on his stomach.

“This... is wrong.”

This was not the struggling and frustrated Demon King that he wanted to see. The Demon King was not pathetically trying to hide his identity in tears. Rather, the Demon King was... the embodiment of what Bael considered the ideal attitude of a demon.

“THIS IS WRONG!!!”

Bael stomped his feet as he pulled on his hair.

- Did you think you could become like me... if you copied what I do?

“No...”

Bael trembled. The Demon King was staring at Bael as if he were talking to him.

“I’m... not... copying... you.”

Bael’s eyes were bloodshot. He gritted his teeth so hard that they were shattering and flying everywhere.

- You’re...

“Don’t say it,” Bael said as if begging.

- Nothing, man.

“A-Aaaahh.” Bael staggered backward. “AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!!”

A crazed scream filled the hill once again.

Chapter 485 - Frozen Temple (1)

- You’re nothing, man.

Oh Kang-Woo’s words of mockery were engraved in Bael’s head. Bael scratched his cheeks with his sharp fingernails, forming hideous wounds from his cheekbones to his chin. Black blood dripped from the wounds.

“I-I-I-I...” Bael mumbled crazily.

He swayed from side to side. His vision blurred and he panted heavily. Kang-Woo’s words continued to echo inside his head.

“I’m... not... nothing.”

He gritted his teeth and the broken fragments of his teeth mixed with his blood and flowed down to his chin.

“I was first,” Bael muttered crazily. “I was first, not you.”

Bael glared at the Demon King on the screen.

“Your position... What you have... They were all supposed to be mine.”

His resentment ran down his back and throughout his body. He knew better than anyone what the source of that resentment was.

“You’re... nothing,” Bael muttered, his voice filled with a sense of inferiority. “Haaa, haaa.”

He bit his lip as he panted heavily and wet his hand with the black blood pooling on his chin. He slowly looked up.

“Amon.”

“Yes, Lord Bael.”

A wave was formed in the darkness as if a black dye was dropped in water. The darkness gathered together and a hunchback demon with a staff appeared from it.

“Are the preparations complete?” Bael asked.

Amon easily understood what Bael was asking despite being given no specificity.

“Yes, preparations for the day of the Apocalypse are almost complete.” Amon bowed deeply and continued, “I have given Eilles the exact date and rallied the demons of the Ninth Hell. However...” Amon clicked his tongue in dissatisfaction. “It is a shame Doomguard was allowed to escape.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Bael answered in irritation.

Doomguard was but a fly who was of no consequence to the great plan.

“The true purpose of *Ingrium* hasn’t been discovered yet, has it?” Bael asked.

“It has not.” Amon smiled, his wrinkly face wrinkling even more. He bowed.

Bael’s grimace turned into a bright smile. “Heh. Okay, that’s all that matters.”

He laughed as he moved his shoulders up and down. His victory was guaranteed as long as he had *that*.

“H-Hihihi,” Bael chuckled as he glared at Kang-Woo in madness. “Mock me as much as you want while you still can. You’ll lose everything soon enough.”

Bael gritted his teeth which had instantly regenerated again.

“Now.” Bael stood up, opened his arms wide, and looked up at the burning sky. “It is time for the Apocalypse.”

The army of demons filling the colossal hill of red sand roared.

Whoooooom.

A white light lit the floor of the Hall of Protection. The light gathered in one spot and appeared a young man with sharp eyes.

“Hyung-nim!” Kim Si-Hun ran toward Kang-Woo, who manifested back into the physical realm. He searched Kang-Woo in worry. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” Kang-Woo nodded and walked.

“Did something happen in the divine realm?”

“Bring Layla first. It’ll be much quicker to explain it to you both.”

Si-Hun nodded and turned to head to Layla’s office but Layla, who had followed Si-Hun, entered the room before Si-Hun could bring her.

“Did you find out why contact with the divine realm was cut off, Kang-Woo?” she asked.

“Yes.”

Kang-Woo concisely explained to them what had happened in the divine realm. Of course, he did not tell them what happened between him and Gaia.

“Bael, that son of a bitch...”

“... So that’s why communication was severed.”

Si-Hun and Layla’s expressions turned gloomy after hearing Kang-Woo’s explanation.

“What could Bael’s goal be? If he attacked the divine realm when the Parasites attacked Earth, there’s no way he would leave the majority of gods alive...”

Layla frowned, having the same thought as Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo shook his head and replied, “I’m not sure either.”

He knew that Bael’s goal was him, but he couldn’t afford to tell Layla that.

“Haaa. The otherworldly invasion, and now Bael... ” Layla clenched her fists anxiously. “Will we... really be able to save this world?”

Kang-Woo nodded without hesitation. “We will, as long as we do it together.”

It was a line straight out of a generic shonen manga, but Kang-Woo was not wrong. Even if he was able to stop Bael by himself, he would not be able to handle his army on top of that. Even if the

entire force of Guardians was a match for Bael's army, they would be no match for Bael himself. They needed to join forces to save this world.

"Hoho. Sounds like a line straight out of a shonen manga," Layla expressed.

"I guess you're right."

"But the clutches of lust usually aim for the heroines while the protagonist is busy fighting evil..."

'I don't think we're reading the same shonen manga.'

"A-Ahem. I'm just joking. Hoho, I've been so busy that I haven't been able to go on Hit — I mean, relieve stress lately."

'I'd love to know how you usually relieve stress.'

"Hohohoho."

'Don't try to elegantly laugh it off.'

"Ah, Si-Hun. Let's go take care of the remaining paperwork."

"... Oh, yes. Of course."

Layla dragged Si-Hun with her back to the office. Kang-Woo chuckled and shook his head.

"Now, then..."

He narrowed his eyes. There was something he needed to do with utmost priority.

'Is there a way for me to break free from the System's eyes?'

Kang-Woo wouldn't be able to prepare any countermeasures if he were being monitored at all times.

"I have no clue..."

Kang-Woo crossed his arms and shook his leg in dissatisfaction. As long as he was a Player, he was unable to free himself from the System's influence.

'... No.'

Something lit up in his head. Kang-Woo slightly raised his head and recalled back when he had made Cha Yeon-Joo his incarnation.

"Eve, was it?"

There was no response.

"I know you're watching," Kang-Woo continued.

A few moments later...

Riiing.

[The Law's auxiliary control system 'Eve' is unable to make willful decisions.]

“Oh? What was that about the fucking splendor last time, then?”

[That was automatically assigned because it was the most apt title based on the analyzed actions of Player Oh Kang-Woo.]

“What did you say, bitch? Don't you know that my slim chance of victory gets even slimmer if all my actions keep getting monitored like this?”

[...]

The blue message window in front of Kang-Woo shook. After some silence, the message window changed.

[Only a temporary block in information is possible with the current amount of privileges possessed by 'Eve.']

“How long exactly?”

[49 days.]

“That's good enough.”

The final battle against Bael was just around the corner; being able to escape from his sight even for a short amount of time was good enough.

[However, information can be permanently blocked once Player Oh Kang-Woo achieves Transcendent-rank Deific Essence.]

“Hmm...”

‘Transcendent-rank Deific Essence, huh?’

Kang-Woo frowned. It would be amazing for him to escape from Bael's sight forever.

‘But I have no idea how to get it.’

Kang-Woo put his hand over his forehead as if he was getting a headache.

‘I don't think it can be achieved just by tons of devouring.’

Considering Kang-Woo possessed the Demonic Sea, an infinite supply of demonic energy, the amount of demonic energy was likely not the condition for achieving Transcendent-rank Deific Essence.

“Tsk,” Kang-Woo clicked his tongue.

‘I'll go back home for now.’

He wouldn't come up with an answer just by thinking about it. It was probably a better idea to train by himself.

“Physical training is pointless for me now...”

He would be better off placing a barrier in his room and training to better control the energy within him. Kang-Woo left the Hall of Protection and headed to his home.

Beep, beep.

He opened the front door with a fingerprint scan and entered his home.

“Darling~?”

Kang-Woo looked around for Han Seol-Ah.

Rumble—!

Just then, noisy footsteps rang from the living room and a black-haired girl jumped at Kang-Woo and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Kang-Woo!!”

“Whoa, there.”

Kang-Woo caught Echidna and smiled.

“Hm! Hm!” Echidna snorted and rubbed her face on Kang-Woo’s neck. Her eyes shone as she shouted, “I missed you soooooooo~ much, Kang-Woo!”

She even bit Kang-Woo’s neck, not being satisfied enough just by rubbing her face on it. Kang-Woo trembled as if it tickled. He walked to the living room with Echidna in her arms and put her down on the couch.

“Where’s Seol-Ah?” he asked.

“She went out because Yeon-Joo asked for her help. Something about healing people in the, uh... Church of Splendor, I think it was called? To raise their faith.”

“Oh, she’s doing very well.”

‘Looks like the Oppa~ is working wonders.’

“What about you, Echidna? Weren’t you supposed to be with Lilith and Halcyon to find information about Nostrian?”

“Hm! I came back because I had something to report to you!”

“Something to report?” Kang-Woo asked, his eyes shining.

Echidna stuck back on Kang-Woo on the couch and rubbed her cheeks on him.

“I’ll tell you in a little bit,” she said as she acted spoiled.

Kang-Woo smirked as he patted Echidna’s head.

‘I guess I haven’t been spending much time with her lately.’

Although Echidna was nowhere near as obsessive as Seol-Ah, she was highly dependent on Kang-Woo because she had been abandoned by her father in the past.’

"I looked around super hard, Kang-Woo," Echidna mentioned as she leaned her head toward Kang-Woo as if asking him to praise her.

"Yeah, I'm proud of you." Kang-Woo patted her head.

"Hm, hm! I even held off on my Master promos!"

"Master promos? What does that mean?"

"It's for a game that Yeon-Joo showed me!"

"Oh, that. Yeon-Joo's a Bronze."

"Pfft. Bronze?" Echidna sneered. "Does Yeon-Joo only have three fingers?"

"... Mm. I think I understand how low a Bronze is now." Kang-Woo snickered and spent some more time with Echidna. "Alright, then."

Kang-Woo grabbed Echidna by the armpits and pulled her away from him.

"Urghh." Echidna pouted but she also knew that she couldn't act spoiled any longer.

"We found a dungeon in a Gate around the Arctic Ocean."

"A dungeon?"

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

'The dungeon name isn't something like Lilith? Demon King Love House, is it? If it is, then I'm not going.'

Chapter 486 - Frozen Temple (2)

"What kind of dungeon is it?" asked Oh Kang-Woo as he tilted his head.

'Have I ever entered a dungeon?'

After some thought, he realized that although he had created dungeons, he had never entered one.

"I haven't gone inside, so I don't know. Lilith told me to report to you first!" said Echidna, emphasizing that it wasn't because she was scared.

Kang-Woo smirked and nodded. "Good job. Always report to me first whenever you find anything."

Unauthorized investigations were off-limits now that otherworldly invasions had begun. Even if it was a hassle, safety always needed to be first.

"But how do you know that it's a dungeon if you haven't gone in?" Kang-Woo asked.

"It's because of, uh... that cheeky human who kept calling you hyung."

Echidna hugged Kang-Woo's arm tightly, her eyes filled with hostility.

'Tae-Hyun?'

Kim Si-Hun and Kim Tae-Hyun were the only ones who referred to Kang-Woo as hyung. Echidna was fairly close to Si-Hun, so her hostility was likely aimed at Tae-Hyun.

“Hmph, I hate that human. He keeps sticking to you and annoys you. You got even busier because of him,” Echidna blurted all sorts of complaints regarding Tae-Hyun.

Kang-Woo smiled bitterly and patted her head. “That’s enough of that.”

“Oh... sorry, Kang-Woo. Ahem. Anyway, that human said that he coincidentally found a dungeon after falling from a cliff, didn’t he?”

Kang-Woo nodded.

Echidna continued, “The Rift was similar to that human’s descriptions of what the one he entered looked like.”

“I see.”

Kang-Woo nodded in understanding. He had not been overly interested in the dungeon, but his eyes were now shining.

‘It’s highly likely that it’s no ordinary dungeon.’

It might have formed because of a Titan’s intervention, just like the dungeon where Tae-Hyun found the Eye of Nostrian.

‘No, even if a Titan has nothing to do with it, it might be a sign of an otherworldly invasion like with the Parasites.’

Whether it be the Titans or otherworldly beings, Kang-Woo couldn’t leave it be.

“Contact Balrog and Si-Hun.” Kang-Woo took his hand off Echidna’s head and stood up. He narrowed his eyes and continued, “We’ll set out first thing tomorrow.”

Whoosh.

Bone-chilling winds raged. Their breaths could be seen as steam.

“Dayum, I thought it’d be nothing but snow, but there’s quite a lot of grass too.” A red-haired woman looked around wide-eyed.

Kang-Woo turned to the woman and asked, “Why are you here?”

“What? I’m not allowed to be here?” Cha Yeon-Joo glared at him.

“No, I just heard that you’ve been super busy as the leader of the Church of Splendor.”

“I sure am, thanks to a certain someone.”

“What brings Your Excellency all the way here despite your hectic schedule?”

“You try being among those fanatics and see if you wouldn’t wanna get away from them.” Yeon-Joo shook her head in irritation. “For fuck’s sake, every single day it’s Ohmen, Ohmen, Ohmen... they never get tired of it..”

She glared at Kang-Woo in rage. Feeling guilty, Kang-Woo stopped pursuing the matter and averted his gaze from her. He turned to the party members he had gathered for the dungeon raid.

“I wonder if a divine artifact like the one Tae-Hyun obtained would appear here as well?” Si-Hun asked as he stared at the Gate entrance with a formless sword in hand.

“It might be those insects again,” said Balrog, who took off his pendant and returned to his demon form.

“If so, then I’ll kill them all.”

“Hmph, stand down, human. I will be the one to kill my king’s enemies.”

Balrog and Si-Hun were having a war of nerves against each other. Si-Hun, after glaring at Balrog for some time, shrugged after realizing something.

He mentioned, “Come to think of it, you haven’t awakened Deific Essence yet, have you?”

“Ngh...” Balrog flinched.

In actuality, Balrog had a way to fight toe to toe against beings with Deific Essence, but it was far too risky to use regularly. It was true that he had no way of facing those with Deific Essence in a normal battle.

“Huhu. It seems I’m the only one who can fight for hyung-nim,” stated Si-Hun.

“Shut up, human.”

Balrog frowned aggressively and walked past Si-Hun.

“What? Why are you so serious?”

Si-Hun was left slightly flustered by Balrog’s unexpectedly boring reaction and chased after him.

“I hope we’ll be able to find information about Nostrian here.” Lilith sighed.

She had been fairly bothered by the fact that information regarding Nostrian had been far more scarce than she had expected. Her expression was filled with fatigue.

“Are you okay, Lilith? I could cast a fatigue recovery spell on you...”

“Oh, I’m fine, Seol-Ah. I’m just a little stressed out.”

“But you never know. Come here.”

Han Seol-Ah grabbed Lilith’s hand and cast healing magic. Twelve wings pouring out light appeared from her back. The light flowed into Lilith and her fatigued expression regained energy.

“My, my, Seol-Ah. You’ve gotten even better at this! Healing is an understatement at this point!”

Lilith widened her eyes in surprise. As she had mentioned, Seol-Ah's healing magic had gone beyond the confines of healing; it felt as if every single cell in Lilith's body had been reborn anew. Forget being in perfect condition, she was brimming with energy that she had never experienced before.

'This is...'

Lilith turned to Kang-Woo; such an extraordinary effect was better than Kang-Woo's Authority of Enhancement. No, that was an understatement; it was on another level.

'When did she become so...'

Lilith stared at Seol-Ah in disbelief.

Seol-Ah's face reddened and she waved her hands. "N-No, you're exaggerating. It's just because my magic is specialized in healing."

"Mm. I guess that could be true."

Although Seol-Ah possessed a few offensive and binding skills, she would still be classified as a non-combatant. Leaving aside her Deific Essence, buffing would be a far better use of her abilities and time than attacking.

"That aside, a demon being healed by an angel's power feels a little weird."

Lilith smiled as she looked down at the white light lingering around her. Demonic beings like Undead and demons would usually take immense damage from sacred power, but Seol-Ah's abilities, fortunately, seemed to ignore such racial differences.

"I should be the one feeling weird by the fact that you're a demon, Lilith. You're so beautiful..."

"Oh? Hohoho. Thank you, Seol-Ah."

Lilith smiled alluringly and grabbed Seol-Ah's hands.

"Right." She brought her mouth close to Seol-Ah's ear as her eyes shone. She whispered, "Come to think of it, Seol-Ah... You can use this spell on Master Kang-Woo as well, right?"

"Oh. Yes, of course."

"Fufufu. I see."

"Why would you ask such a... Oh!"

Seol-Ah, who had been tilting her head in confusion, widened her eyes in surprise. Lilith hummed as she smiled widely.

"With such an extraordinary spell... It would allow us all to enjoy our time together without issues."

"Th-That's a bit..."

“Oh, my. Are you uninterested?”

“...”

“Hoho. I’ll make sure to teach you all sorts of things.”

“N-No, it’s not that I’m not interested. It’s just... um... Even so, doing something like that is...”

“Fufu. There’s no need to worry.” Lilith whispered persuasively, “There’s nothing that feels better than doing something you know is wrong.”

“Ngh...” Seol-Ah lowered her head, her face as red as a tomato as a demon whispered sweet temptations into her ear. Lilith found such a reaction cute and she embraced Seol-Ah as she giggled.

“What’s going on over there?”

Kang-Woo, who had been watching Lilith and Seol-Ah talking about something from a distance, flinched after feeling uneasy. He felt as if something very, very bad would happen to him soon.

‘Why am I feeling this w—’

“Hm! Kang-Woo! This way!”

Echidna pulled Kang-Woo, who was getting goosebumps for an unknown reason, by the hand before he could finish his thought. He turned to her and the other party members.

‘Yeon-Joo, Balrog, Si-Hun, Lilith, Echidna, and Darling make seven of us.’

It felt like a lot but it wasn’t a bad party composition.

‘Besides, I don’t need to hide my identity as desperately as I used to anymore.’

There was no need for him to hide his identity like his life depended on it not that Gaia found out his true identity. Although Yeon-Joo and Si-Hun still didn’t know, Kang-Woo was confident enough to be able to persuade them even if they found out.

He said to his scattered party members, “Everyone, focus up and get into formation.”

Si-Hun and Balrog were in front, Yeon-Joo, Kang-Woo, and Echidna were in the middle, and Lilith and Seol-Ah were in the rear.

‘Though I don’t really feel the need for it.’

Kang-Woo laughed in spite of himself as he looked at the formation. Although being in formation was the most effective, each of them was so powerful that Kang-Woo honestly did not see the need to be so orthodox.

‘I guess it’s better than being reckless.’

Being in formation was also effective in getting people into the right mindset besides being able to fight efficiently.

“Let’s go,” Kang-Woo said.

“Okay, hyung-nim.”

Kang-Woo and the party slowly entered the dungeon.

Riiing!

[You have entered the ‘Frozen Temple!']

A blue message window popped up in front of them.

Whoosh—!

“Oh, f-fuck! It’s fucking freezing!”

A blizzard raged. Yeon-Joo hugged herself as she shivered intensely.

“Celestial Repayment,” Seol-Ah chanted as she raised her arms.

A translucent barrier enveloped the party members, making the freezing cold feel like a light breeze.

“Phew, thanks. I thought I was gonna freeze to death.” Yeon-Joo stood back up from her crouched position and looked around. “Where is this place...?”

There was a thirty-meter fortress wall made of ice in front of them. They could see the top of an ice palace beyond the wall.

“Hah, are we in *Frozen*?” Yeon-Joo chuckled, steam leaving her mouth.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes as he looked around.

‘Something’s... off.’

He was sure that this was his first time here, but it felt familiar for some reason. Kang-Woo looked around to find the source of the familiarity, but could not find anything despite even using the Authority of the Beholder.

“Hyung-nim, the gate is this way.”

“Okay.”

Kang-Woo turned to Si-Hun after looking around. Si-Hun was pointing with his sword at a giant gate as well as what looked like two ice statues of knights twenty meters tall. They were so big that Balrog looked like a dwarf next to them.

Rumble—!

“Wh-What the hell?!”

The ice statues moved simultaneously once the party members got closer to the gate. Unlike Yeon-Joo, who stepped backward in shock, Kang-Woo calmly walked toward the ice statues.

“Sheesh, they’re so unnecessarily big.”

Kang-Woo looked up at the statues and whistled. He lightly raised his right arm and turned the Key of the Demonic Sea into an ax. He grabbed the ax and pulled his arm back.

[You who wish to tread into the Temple of Frost.]

[You must first prove you are worthy.]

The ice statue wielding a spear and the one wielding a sword spoke simultaneously. Their deep voices echoed within the party members' heads.

Boom—!!

The earth shook as the two ice giants moved. Kang-Woo apathetically swung around his ax despite being in front of two overwhelmingly powerful-looking giants.

The ice giant with the spear stomped his foot and said, [We will first test your intelligence.]

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

[One of us will tell the truth.]

[And one of us will lie.]

“Oh! I know what this is!!”[1] Yeon-Joo clapped her hands together. “This is... uh... you're supposed to ask—”

Whaaaaaaaam!!!

As she was mumbling with her finger on her forehead, the head of the ice giant with the sword shattered.

“What the fuck?!” Yeon-Joo cursed in shock and stared at the destroyed ice giant.

Kang-Woo had thrown his ax at the ice giant's head. He turned to the ice giant with the spear and pointed at the shattered ice giant.

He asked, “Is he dead?”

[No.]

“Then you're the liar.” Kang-Woo smiled in satisfaction and nodded.

Yeon-Joo stared at Kang-Woo dumbfoundedly. “What the...”

‘Wait, that's illegal.’

Chapter 487 - Frozen Temple (3)

Boom!

The ice giant with the spear stomped his foot.

[You have passed the trial of intelligence. Now, your strength will be put to the test.]

“That actually worked?”

Cha Yeon-Joo chuckled because of the absurdity. The ice giant aimed his giant spear at Oh Kang-Woo.

“Sigh, forget it.”

Yeon-Joo was about to scold Kang-Woo but stopped herself. She had known that was the kind of person he was from the beginning.

“Well, more importantly.” She glared at the ice giant despite knowing Kang-Woo would easily defeat him. “I can’t just stand around doing nothing when I came here to relieve some stress!”

Yeon-Joo smiled and swung her left arm.

“Red Lotus, Third Form.”

Clatter!

Dozens of lotuses made of red chains bloomed along the path of her arm swing and wrapped around the ice giant’s spear.

Rumble—!

“Urgh, he’s so damn strong.” Yeon-Joo frowned as she felt the immense pressure through her chains. She turned to Kim Si-Hun and Balrog to shout, “I don’t think I can hold him for long!”

Si-Hun and Balrog nodded simultaneously and jumped on top of the twenty-meter ice giant’s shoulders. They attacked the giant’s head together as if they had already discussed it.

Wham—!

[Y-You have... passed the...]

The ice giant’s head shattered and its giant body fell.

“It seems the only thing he had was size,” said Balrog as he kicked a fragment of the ice giant’s head.

Kang-Woo smirked and shrugged. “You should take into account our party’s combined strength. Just these two giants would be able to destroy Earth.”

“Yes... I guess that is true.” Balrog nodded.

Although only seven were in the party, more than half of them possessed Deific Essence. Even if they did not take Deific Essence into account, Kang-Woo, the Demon King who ruled over the Nine Hells, was in the party.

“Master Kang-Woo,” Lilith called as she examined the ice giant’s corpse with narrowed eyes.

“Hm?”

Kang-Woo, who was about to head to the gate, turned to Lilith with his head tilted in wonder.

Lilith placed her hand on the ice giant’s corpse and remarked, “I sense demonic energy from this ice golem’s corpse.”

“What?”

Kang-Woo frowned. He placed his hand on the golem's corpse and used the Authority of the Beholder. As Lilith had mentioned, he could feel demonic energy; although very faint, it was demonic energy nonetheless.

“Why do these things have demonic energy?”

Based on what they had seen in the dungeon so far, it seemed to be in an outer world, just like the home of the Parasites, apart from the Triad.

‘There is also a power I've never felt before aside from the trace amounts of demonic energy.’

He had felt the same thing when he first made contact with the energy of the Parasites known as *Vitality*.

‘I thought such a thing was normal since they're from the outer world like the Parasites, but why do I also feel demonic energy from them?’

“...” Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

“Do you think otherworldly beings also possess demonic energy?” Lilith asked.

“No. If they did, it would be weird for them to have such trace amounts.”

Even if one of the outer worlds was made of demonic energy like the Nine Hells, it did not make sense to feel such a tiny amount.

‘Moreover...’

Kang-Woo's eyes shone sharply. He finally realized the source of familiarity that he felt when he entered the dungeon.

“...”

Kang-Woo reached his hand toward the ice giant's corpse.

Crunch! Crunch!

Black mucus oozed out of him and devoured the ice giant. Information about the ice giant flowed into his brain.

‘It wasn't a golem; it was a lifeform.’

Kang-Woo had thought the ice giant was a golem that moved with magical energy, but after devouring it with the Authority of Predation, he found out that it was a bona-fide lifeform.

‘And...’

Kang-Woo focused on the demonic energy that flowed into him through the Authority of Predation.

“...!” Kang-Woo's eyes widened. “This is...”

“What did you find?”

"..." Kang-Woo remained silent. He turned to Lilith and said quietly, "Bael's demonic energy."

"Pardon?"

"The demonic energy in these guys is Bael's."

"..." Lilith's eyes widened, not having expected it at all. "Wait a minute. That means..."

"Hah, that crazy brat. Looks like he's been busy, huh? No, I doubt Bael came up with this on his own, so it's probably Amon."

Kang-Woo laughed in spite of himself and swept his hair back.

"What do you mean? Who's been busy?" asked Yeon-Joo as she frowned, not following what Kang-Woo was saying at all.

"Well, to put it simply." Kang-Woo slowly turned to the giant palace made of white ice and continued, "This temple was already taken over by Bael."

"..."

"I knew he was expanding his forces, but to think he even recruited forces from the outer worlds."

Kang-Woo grabbed his forehead as if his head hurt.

'No wonder he hasn't shown himself all this time.'

Kang-Woo was curious about what Bael had been doing ever since he got his hands on the Demon God's heart, but he could more or less understand now.

'He's been raising an army.'

Bael also likely knew that numbers were meaningless against Kang-Woo, but he was raising an army nonetheless for one reason.

'Probably the same reason as me.'

Kang-Woo had not helped Si-Hun power up, turned Yeon-Joo into his incarnation, and spread the Church of Splendor so that he could get their help in his battle against Bael. All of that plus raising Guardians and getting aid from Olympus and Aernor were to protect the entirety of Earth, which was far too big for Kang-Woo himself to protect.

For a similar reason, Bael was raising an army and formulating a plan to decimate Earth; to destroy everything that Kang-Woo was desperately trying to protect.

"Hah," Kang-Woo chuckled.

'That's cute.'

Kang-Woo smiled and looked up at the giant temple of ice. He did not know how many other outer worlds were under Bael's command, but Kang-Woo had only one thing he could do.

“Now, then.” Kang-Woo slowly walked toward the massive fortress wall encircling the temple and stood in front of the gate.

“Let’s see the bastards who decided to lick Bael’s ass.”

He raised his right leg and kicked the gate.

Smash—!!!

The giant gate made of ice crumbled into pieces.

A white-haired man sitting on a frozen throne inside the temple of white ice slowly opened his eyes. He was made of translucent ice, not flesh and bones. He stared at the entrance of the temple, his eyes shining blue.

“We have intruders,” he mumbled.

His voice was as clear as his body made of ice.

“W-We will send out the guards right away!” shouted a vassal standing at attention in front of the throne as they bowed on their knees.

They were also made of translucent ice, just like the white-haired man.

“Wait,” the man commanded.

Just then, someone shouted, “Hmph! What kind of fearless punk dared to trespass on Father’s temple?”

A woman with long, white hair and wearing a beautiful dress made of ice ran toward the throne.

“Arianne. How many times must I tell you that we Frostborn must always act with dignity?”

The white-haired man scolded the woman who was running toward him as her dress fluttered.

“Hehehe. I’m sorry, Father.”

The woman known as Arianne jumped on the man’s lap as she giggled.

“Haaa. When will you grow up?” The man sighed and lightly conked Arianne’s head.

“Do you think Lord Bael will accept you as his wife if you keep acting like this?”

“Ah! What are you saying, Father?! Lord Bael complimented me a while ago, saying that I looked like I would be refreshing if shaved!”

“Is that even a compliment?” The man groaned as he watched Arianne acting proud.

“Intruders when the day of the *Apocalypse* is just around the corner..”

Arianne raised her hand high and shouted, “Hehe! Father! I’ll go! I’ll go kill them all!”

The white-haired man narrowed his eyes and shook his head. “They instantly killed the guardians of the ice wall. It’s far too dangerous.”

“Hihi, aren’t you being way too cautious over those pieces of junk getting destroyed?” Arianne swung her legs made of translucent ice back and forth and giggled. She rested her head on the white-haired man’s shoulder and continued, “However strong they are, they are but mere insects compared to you, the master of the First Heaven.”

Eilles, the master of the First Heaven, was the king of the Frostmen and the guardian deity of this frozen world. He possessed the title *Freezer of Worlds*, as well as the captain of Bael’s elite force known as the Four Heavenly Kings.

“I told you that you must never let your guard down,” Eilles reprimanded fiercely.

“Hehe, I know, Father!”

Arianne paid no concern to Eilles’s scolding and kissed him on the cheek before standing up. She twirled elegantly as if dancing, the hems of her dress fluttering.

“Haaa. Oh, you...”

Eilles sighed and shook his head, regretting raising his beloved daughter too spoiled.

‘She needs to wed Lord Bael one day.’

He recalled the master to whom he swore his loyalty.

- Hihi, what’s this? Blocks of ice are moving?

Hidden within his laughter as clear as ice was an unfathomable darkness. Eilles recalled the terror and ecstasy that he had felt when facing that darkness.

‘He is the true master of the Triad.’

Eilles’s heart beat rapidly. On the day of the Apocalypse, humanity would meet its end and the new masters of the Triad would be born. One of its masters would be the Frostborn.

‘And the insects who have trespassed on the temple must be eradicated to prepare for that day.’

Eilles’s eyes shone coldly. He looked down at his vassal bowing on their knees and commanded, “Send the guards imm—”

“Me! I’ll go, Father!”

“...”

Eilles stared at Arianne, her eyes shining brightly, in silence. He knew that his daughter couldn’t be stopped once she set her mind on something.

“Haaa,” he sighed and then nodded.

“Yahoo!” Arianne clapped her hands together. “Oh right, may I borrow your sword, Father?”

“Hmm.”

'Well, she would be safer that way.'

Eilles tapped on his throne and stood up.

Crack—!

His ice throne slowly changed into the shape of a sword enveloped in white frost. It was infused with the power of the Frost Queen, the ruler of the Frostborn long ago.

“Be careful with it.”

“Okay!”

Arianne accepted the sword with a smile.

The bowing vassal cautiously remarked, “Um... I do not believe it is wise for Her Highness to join the b—”

Slash!

Arianne swung the Frost Sword, beheading the bowing vassal. White blood splattered all over the place.

“How dare you run your filthy mouth without permission?” Arianne said in a brutal tone that she had not used when speaking with Eilles. She then began to hum and trotted. “Hihi, How long has it been since I’ve let loose~?”

She twirled as if she were having the time of her life.

“Haaa.” Eilles sighed deeply as he stared at his daughter dancing with a crazed smile. “I just told you to be careful with it.” He frowned in displeasure and remarked, “Do not taint it with the blood of filth.”

Eilles snapped his fingers and the vassal turned into ice fragments and disappeared.

“Hehe. Yes, Father!”

Arianne smiled brightly as she hugged the Frost Sword.

Chapter 488 - We Have An Army

“This place is so damn large.”

Cha Yeon-Joo shook her hand to fan herself, her breathing slightly labored. Around her were piles of the corpses of knights made of translucent ice. White fluid was flowing out of the areas penetrated by the red chains.

“Is this really blood?”

Yeon-Joo poked the white fluid oozing out of the Frostborn knights’ corpses with her finger.

“Ah! That’s cold!” She flinched and quickly drew her hand back. “Hey, Oh Kang-Woo! Are these things really alive?”

Their bodies, made of ice, and their blood as cold as liquid nitrogen did not give off the feeling of life.

“Die, intruders!!”

A Frostborn soldier guarding the entrance of the Frozen Temple charged at Kang-Woo with a large halberd in hand. Kang-Woo slightly leaned back to dodge the halberd and grabbed the shaft.

Crush!

“Well, they only look like ice blocks, but they’re alive.”

Kang-Woo recalled the information regarding the Frostborn that had entered his mind through the Authority of Predation. Although they couldn’t be classified as lifeforms based on human standards, they were alive nonetheless. They were even capable of reproducing.

‘They look like they’d be delicious as shaved ice or something.’

Kang-Woo clenched the ice soldier’s neck tightly and looked into the soldier’s translucent ice head.

‘Some sweet red beans on top and lots of condensed milk...’

Kang-Woo wiped his drool with the back of his hand.

“E-Eek!”

“Oh? You can even feel emotions?”

Kang-Woo looked down at the ice soldier, trembling in fear, and smirked. He had barely felt any emotions from the ice giants guarding the gate, but the ice soldiers they had met on the way to the temple were no different from humans aside from their appearance.

Crush!

Kang-Woo gripped harder to shatter the ice soldier’s head and slowly headed toward the temple.

“Hm, hm, hm, hm~”

Just then, someone hummed excitedly. Kang-Woo turned to the direction where the sound was coming from.

“Ah, found you!” shouted a woman after she clapped her hands together.

Although she was made of translucent ice, one could easily tell she was a woman based on her curvature accentuated by her tight dress.

“Hehehe. Are you guys the intruders?”

The woman in the dress giggled with her eyes shining.

“You’re...”

“I’m Arianne! The princess of the Frostborn!” shouted the woman known as Arianne as she raised one arm above her head.

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes in silence. He could tell that she was on another level compared to the ice giants and soldiers they had faced until now.

“Hehe! I’ve come to kill you all!”

Unlike her cheerful tone, her voice was filled with bloodlust.

Thump!

Frostborn knights appeared from behind her and surrounded Kang-Woo’s party in perfect formation. Their vigor was as sharp as a knife.

“Yeah, I knew it wouldn’t be that easy.” Kang-Woo chuckled.

They had been far too weak for Bael to have accepted them into his army.

“Aren’t there too many of them, Kang-Woo?” Yeon-Joo asked anxiously.

There were easily over a thousand of the Frostborn knights that had appeared out of nowhere and surrounded them. The seven of Kang-Woo’s party members were severely outnumbered, but...

“It’s exactly for situations like this that I made you my incarnation,” Kang-Woo said as he lightly patted Yeon-Joo’s shoulder.

Her abilities were highly specialized for one-versus-many battles.

“Hmph,” Yeon-Joo snorted, her expression mixed with joy and a sense of burden.

Clatter.

She took out her red chains and looked around fiercely.

“Hehe, you seem to be the leader of the intruders,” said Arianne as she stared at Kang-Woo with shining eyes. She unsheathed a white sword from her waist and shouted as she lifted it, “Let’s fight!”

“No,” Kang-Woo answered apathetically as if uninterested.

“Hm? What? Why? Didn’t you come here to fight?” asked Arianne wide-eyed, not having expected that answer.

Kang-Woo picked his ear and answered, “Because I might get a one-way trip to the boat ending if I raise any more flags[ref[This is a *School Days* reference... I won’t explain it for the sake of the innocent souls who have not watched that garbage show.]/ref].”

“...?”

“For real, though, an ice block is crossing the line.”

Ice was not disgusting like tentacles were, but that did not make it okay either.

‘I know I’m getting a little ahead of myself, but...’

Every single crazy woman he had met became romantically interested in him.

'I can't handle any more of them.'

There was already one Chinese heroine who had become irrelevant to the story one day. Kang-Woo turned to Han Seol-Ah and grabbed her hands.

"Darling... you trust me, right? You're the only one for me."

"Pardon? Oh, yes."

"So don't think about cutting it off, okay?"

"Umm... I'm not sure what you're talking about, Kang-Woo."

"I see, okay. That's great." Kang-Woo nodded in satisfaction. "Si-Hun."

"Yes, hyung-nim."

"I'll leave her to you," he said as he gestured at Arianne with his chin.

His desire to escape the boat ending was part of it, but Kang-Woo had another reason why he had let Si-Hun be her opponent.

'It's pointless for me to fight her at this point.'

There was no better fertilizer for growth than battling against the powerful; it could not be substituted with training. Hence, if Kang-Woo were to fight him, he would be throwing aside the chance for his party members to grow stronger.

'Especially Si-Hun.'

Considering his immense talent, such opportunities were hard to come by and therefore very important.

'And...'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes and stared at Arianne, who was looking this way dumbfoundedly.

'She introduced herself as the princess of the Frostborn.'

In that case, there should also be a king of the Frostborn.

'It's best to hide my powers until he appears.'

It would be a pain in the ass if he were to run away.

"What?? You dare send an underling to face the great Arianne?" asked Arianne in disbelief. She stomped her feet and shouted, "You're so, soooooooooooooo funny! How dare you pieces of filth disrespect me?!"

"Oh, thank God. I'm in the clear," Kang-Woo expressed.

She was excluded from the heroine candidates the moment she spouted that line.

'Watch me bob and weave to dodge these boat ending flags.'

“Arrrggghhh!” Arianne yelled temperamentally and stomped her foot.

The hems of her ice dress fluttered and the Frost Sword, emitting chilling frost, aimed for Kang-Woo’s throat.

Clang—!!

Si-Hun blocked Arianne’s powerful swing and stood in front of Kang-Woo as if protecting him. Si-Hun’s hair slightly fluttered from the shockwave formed from the clashing of swords. He grimaced slightly due to the impact being more powerful than he expected.

‘Dear lord, you’re so fucking cool. For real, though. Aren’t you just way too handsome? Look at that sharp-ass jawline. It’s sharp enough to cut through my Deific Essence barrier. What are you doing, Si-Hun? You’re making my heart flutter.’

“Your opponent... is me.”

‘Kyaaaaaaahhh! Si-Hun oppa!!’

“Argh! Move! I have no interest in filth!”

Arianne swung the Frost Sword in irritation as if she wanted to fight Kang-Woo no matter what. Her swings looked random at a glance but every single swing perfectly targeted Si-Hun’s vitals as if she were a master martial artist.

Clang! Clang! Clang—!!

“Kurgh!” Si-Hun grimaced.

Her swordsmanship was highly refined despite her looking like she was running wild like a mad beast in a frilly dress.

“Oh...?”

Kang-Woo watched the battle between Si-Hun and Arianne with shining eyes.

‘She’s no joke.’

She was completely overwhelming Si-Hun purely in terms of swordsmanship. In all of Si-Hun’s battles, the only opponent whom Si-Hun had been inferior in terms of swordsmanship was Tai Wuji.

‘But she’s not being pushed back against Si-Hun at all.’

Rather, Arianne’s swordsmanship was overpowering Si-Hun.

Clang—!

Arianne and Si-Hun were pushed away from each other after a powerful sword clash.

“This is...” Si-Hun’s eyes filled with shock.

He seemed to have not expected his battle against an ice block wearing a dress to be such a challenging one. Si-Hun was not the only shocked one.

“What the hell are you?” Arianne also stared at Si-Hun, her blue eyes shaking in shock. “What’s happening? This can’t be.”

Arianne tilted her head in confusion and looked down at her sword. She couldn’t comprehend the fact that a human was able to combat her swordsmanship.

Si-Hun bit his lip and fixed his grip on his formless sword.

“Hehe. I thought you were just human filth, but I guess not!”

Arianne cheered as she jumped up and down in place.

Crack!

She ripped the hem of her frilly dress and exposed her smooth legs made of translucent ice.

“Hihi. Let’s continue!”

The Frost Sword shone brightly white. Arianne’s swordsmanship sped up and barraged Si-Hun like a raging storm.

“Haaa, haaa.”

Si-Hun calmly blocked her swordsmanship as he slowed his breathing. As their battle was taking place, the Frostborn soldiers surrounding Kang-Woo’s party shrank the encirclement.

“Suppress the intruders!”

“Stay in formation and march forward!”

The general who seemed to be the leader of the guards raised an ice sword and pointed it at Kang-Woo.

“You are surrounded and have nowhere to go! Surrender peacefully!”

The Frostborn general glared at Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo shrugged and asked, “Why should we?”

“What else do you think the mere seven of you can do?”

The general chuckled and stared at Kang-Woo’s party. Although the warrior battling Arianne, who was known as the *Sword Princess* of the Frostborn, was no doubt powerful, the soldiers as well as the rest who were standing by in the rear were the elite soldiers of the Frostborn, numbering ten thousand. It was seven versus ten thousand; trying to figure out who would win was just simple math.

“We have an army,” the Frostborn general remarked threateningly.

“Is that so?” Kang-Woo cackled as his shoulders moved up and down. “We have a Balrog.”

Wham—!

A muscly demon wearing black full-body armor swung his fist, obliterating dozens of Frostborn soldiers in formation.

“Graaaaaaaaahhh!!”

A ferocious Demon Roar shook the entire Frozen Temple.

Chapter 489 - Master of the First Heaven (1)

“Kurgh!”

“Arghhh!”

The Frostborn knights in the range of Balrog’s explosive Demon Roar crouched with their ears covered. Some were even passing out as they vomited white snow. The roar of one demon destroyed the morale of ten thousand soldiers.

“Kurgh,” the Frostborn general bit his lip.

The soldiers’ formation broke down from one roar and they were in chaos. The knights standing by in the rear were fine because they were far away, but the ones who had been shrinking the encirclement were in terrible condition.

“Pull yourselves together!” the general yelled hurriedly to restore the soldiers’ morale. “There are merely seven of them!”

Emphasizing one’s advantage over their enemy was the most effective morale booster it guaranteed victory against the enemy. The panicking knights gradually began to calm down.

“Keep pressuring them without giving them any time to rest! Fatigued knights, retreat to the rear! We will tear them down little by little!”

They outnumbered the intruders by an overwhelming margin, but the Frostborn general did not outright command the knights to charge at them. He knew very well that each intruder was very powerful. Since they already had the intruders surrounded, gnawing at their stamina little by little would be the most effective strategy. The knights fixed their formation and slowly shrank the encirclement.

“Kehehehe,” Balrog laughed quietly as he stared at the knights. “They sure have thought it through.”

It was indeed a perfect strategy for the overwhelming numbers of the Frostborn, but it was pointless against Balrog’s destructive capabilities.

“GRAAAAAAAAHHH!!”

Balrog stomped his foot and let out another Demon Roar. He tore apart the encirclement and charged into the enemy’s formation without hesitation.

“Wh-What the—!”

The Frostborn general was left with his mouth agape. Who in their right mind would break the encirclement meant to trap them and jump into the enemy’s formation? It was as if the intruder was asking to be killed.

“Kill him!” the general shouted.

The encirclement around Kang-Woo's party immediately focused on Balrog.

"Kahahahaha!" Balrog laughed in joy as he ran wild, destroying Frostborn with each swing of his fists.

Crack! Crack!

Almost a hundred knights shattered into little pieces in just a moment.

"Hup!"

Balrog took a deep breath and grabbed the torso of one of the knights charging at him with one hand.

Crack!

"Kurgh!"

The knight's body was crushed by Balrog's muscular hands, white blood pouring out of him. Balrog turned to look at someone with the Frostborn knight's corpse in hand. His ferocious eyes were visible from within the black helmet surrounding his entire head.

"E-Eek!"

The Frostborn general's face turned pale after locking eyes with Balrog. Balrog smiled and pulled his right arm backward. He raised his left foot and twisted his body.

Tssssssss—!!

White steam poured out from the gaps in his armor. Balrog threw the corpse in his hand as hard as he could as if he were a baseball pitcher.

"S-Stop h—"

The Frostborn knight's corpse smashed into the general like a cannonball.

Slam—!

The general raised his shield in shock, but the speed at which the corpse smashed into the general blew him away.

"Gaaaaahhh!" He tumbled on the ground, shouting in extreme pain. "A-Argghh."

The general trembled. His arm was blown off by the massive impact along with his shield, white blood pouring out of the site of injury. Intense pain took over him, his breathing became erratic, and his sight was getting blurry.

"You're a persistent one."

The general could faintly see a grim reaper wearing black armor.

"Ah..."

Crack.

Balrog grabbed the general's head before he could even say anything and ripped off his head.

He then shouted, "I've killed the enemy general!"

The general's head rolled on the ground.

"G-General!!!"

"Kurgh!"

The general's death caused the soldiers to spiral into greater panic compared to when they were hit by the Demon Roar. Their formation broke down almost instantly.

"P-Pull yourselves together! Keep pressuring them!" shouted a knight who seemed to be the second-in-command, trying to calm the knights down.

"Red Lotus, Fourth Form."

Clatter!!

Red lotuses made of chains spread past the encirclement and throughout the battlefield.

"Explosive Chains."

Boom—!!!

The red lotuses exploded one after another. Ice fragments and white blood splattered all over the place.

"Hmmm!" A black-haired girl opened her mouth wide and snorted energetically. "FUS RO DAH!!!"

Echidna's dragon tongue created a powerful storm, which mixed with the explosions that Cha Yeon-Joo caused and turned into a massive fire tornado that engulfed the Frostborn knights.

"Sanctuary Expansion."

The twelve wings on Han Seol-Ah's back emitted light so bright it could burn. She cast an overpowered wide-area buff that provided immunity to all debuffs, drastically raised all stats, and even replenished their stamina over time.

"Whoa, what the hell? This is awesome!"

Yeon-Joo looked back at Seol-Ah wide-eyed. She had received many of Seol-Ah's buffs until now, but it was her first time seeing such extraordinary effects. She was brimming with power like back when she was given Deific Essence for the first time by Kang-Woo.

"Alright." Yeon-Joo opened her arms widely with a smile and chanted the magic spell that filled her to the brim with energy. "Motherfucking Oh Kang-Woo!!!"

Red chains swept the surroundings like a storm, wiping out the nearby Frostborn knights as if they were autumn leaves.

"Son of a bitch! Coward! You call yourself a man?! Huh? After toying with a woman's heart?!"

Yeon-Joo released her stress as she barraged the Frostborn knights with attacks. Kang-Woo dumbfoundedly stared at Yeon-Joo in battle.

“The fuck?”

‘What did I do so wrong? That’s so uncalled for. I think you need another oppa~ lesson.’

“Looks like... there’s nothing for me to worry about here.”

Kang-Woo turned his attention away from the encirclement that was falling apart due to Balrog and Yeon-Joo’s rampage.

Clang—! Clang!

“Haaa, haaa.”

“Kyahahahaha! Die! Die!!”

Kang-Woo focused on the heated battle between Kim Si-Hun and Arianne. Arianne was swinging her white sword furiously, laughing hysterically as if she were fully immersed in the battle against Si-Hun. However, it did not mean that she had lost her sense of reason although she was swinging her sword as if she were a wild beast, each swing carried a sense of refinement.

Clang—!

“Kurgh!” Si-Hun grunted after deflecting a swing aimed at his neck. “Haaa, haaa.”

He was panting even harder and covered in cold sweats. He felt a vivid sense of fear that he couldn’t feel during a duel purely for training. The anxiety of knowing that death would arrive with even the tiniest mistake felt like it was burning him alive.

“H-Haha,” Si-Hun laughed despite being on the boundary between life and death.

He was not hysterical like Arianne, but sparks of ecstasy were crackling throughout his body.

‘How long has it been?’

Si-Hun couldn’t remember the last time he fought against an opponent on the same level as him in terms of swordsmanship.’

“Fuuu, haaa,” he took a deep breath in and out.

He let the sparks of ecstasy take control of him he grasped the Mind’s Sword, the sword that transcended physical limits.

“Hihi! What the hell?! You’re amazing!”

Si-Hun ignored Arianne’s shouts. His focus was only on the edge of the sword covered in white frost. Its every movement was engraved into his mind.

‘Will I be able to surpass her?’

He could feel an enormous amount of weight on his shoulders. He was confident that he would be able to surpass her, purely in terms of swordsmanship.

‘But...’

“...”

Si-Hun looked down at his hand with deeply sunken eyes. He had only just realized that his trembling hands were covered in white frost. His entire arm felt numb from the cold each time he clashed swords with Arianne.

‘It must be that sword’s power.’

Si-Hun stared at the sword of white frost in Arianne’s hands. The cold energy infused in the sword was easily penetrating the Deific Essence of *Heavenly Sword* and freezing him. The longer the fight went on, Si-Hun’s senses would dull and he would continuously take damage.

“Hmm, let’s finish this up. Man~ what a shame. I wouldn’t have used Father’s sword if I knew it was gonna be this fun! It doesn’t make things fair,” Arianne complained with a pout. “Hihi, but I’ll bear with it since the faster I kill you, the faster I get to kill your leader! Hehe, I’m gonna kill you all super quickly and be praised by Father~!”

Si-Hun closed his eyes and tuned Arianne out.

‘Think only about the sword.’

He stared at the tip of the white sword that gave him chills just looking at it. He continued to analyze everything about the sword.

‘I don’t see it.’

Si-Hun couldn’t see a way to surpass that sword. Only the white sword was vivid within his darkening consciousness.

“Haaa,” he sighed heatedly as sparks crackled all over him.

His head felt hot as if he had taken a stimulant.

‘I don’t need to surpass it.’

Analyzing the sword’s movements was not the right answer. Si-Hun gripped his sword tighter but he could no longer feel the sword in his hands it was as if he and the sword had become one.

‘No.’

He did not become one with the sword he had become a sword.

“Right then, let’s end this,” Arianne said leisurely.

She charged toward Si-Hun, her sword exuding freezing energy. Si-Hun froze, wondering whether or not he should enter the Sanctuary that Seol-Ah made. However, he shook his head. It would be pointless if he were to receive Seol-Ah’s help.

‘I...’

Si-Hun’s eyes shone sharply. It felt as if his mind was burning within his heated head.

“Heavenly Dragon...”

He lowered his stance and gripped the formless sword. He felt like he could now reach the unreachable peak of Tai Wuji's swordsmanship.

"Flash."

"...!"

Arianne's expression filled with shock. She could see space itself being severed as if the world was being split.

"Wh-What the—!"

Her expression was dyed in shock for the first time. Her instincts were warning her, saying that the attack was dangerous.

"Kyaah!"

Arianne halted her charge and shut her eyes tightly. Just as the slash resembling a ray of light was about to reach her neck—

Claaaaaaaaang!!!

Someone appeared from behind Arianne and grabbed her hand to move the sword.

"Kurgh!" Si-Hun was blown backward, coughing blood.

"Ah..." Arianne turned back to look at the person who grabbed her hand. Tears filled her eyes. "Father!"

"You must have been scared, Arianne."

The white-haired man who appeared from behind the trembling Arianne carefully embraced her. Arianne bawled her eyes out with her head buried in the man's embrace.

"Waaaaah! F-Father!!"

"There, there."

"I-I'm so sorry, Father. *Sniff*. I... *sniff*, I-lost to these... *sniff*, f-filthy intruders."

"It's okay." The white-haired man patted Arianne's head and took the Frost Sword from her hand. He coldly turned to look at Si-Hun and pointed the sword at him. He commanded, "Freeze."

Crack!!

An enormous frost storm shot toward Si-Hun.

"Kurgh!"

Si-Hun crouched in shock. It was not an attack he could dodge or block. Just as the frost storm of death was about to engulf him—

Fwoosh!

“Dayum, just look at that impeccable entrance timing. It’s a work of art, really. And your lines... Sheesh, I could fall for you.”

The frost storm was devoured by a black sun.

“Be honest with me. You were aiming for it, right? Right? I bet you’ve been watching for the past five minutes thinking ‘*Dayum... I bet it’d be sick as fuck if I appeared around here,*’ right? Am I right?”

“...”

“Bwehehehehe! You don’t have to look at me so coldly, man! Wow, I guess it means you were, huh? Come on, you thought your entrance just now was pretty fucking cool too, didn’t you? Hm? You’re getting teary-eyed just replaying it in your head, right?”

A vulgar laughter echoed throughout the battlefield and destroyed the heavy and serious mood within five seconds.

“Sheesh, it sure sucks for you when you worked so hard to look badass. Your entrance scene would’ve been gushing with badassery in any other novel, but we’re pretty harsh critiques of badassery up here, you see.”

A young man with sharp eyes walked out of the black sun as he cackled.

Chapter 490 - Master of the First Heaven (2)

“You...”

Eilles narrowed his eyes, his expression completely frozen as he glared at Oh Kang-Woo, but not because the human was the most disrespectful and vulgar man he had seen.

Fwoosh!

He was staring at something else entirely at the flames that had devoured the storm made by the Frost Sword.

‘How can a human use the Frost Queen’s Soul Speech...?’

Soul Speech allowed one to speak words imbued with power, invoking miracles that defied the laws of physics. The Frost Sword was infused with the powers of the Frost Queen, which could be activated through Soul Speech. The frost storm activated with the power of Soul Speech was powerful enough to overpower even a being with Top-rank Deific Essence.

‘At least, it should be able to.’

Eilles stared at the flames that had devoured the storm created by the Frost Sword. Its black and gold colors reminded him of a black sun. A chill ran down Eilles’s back.

He said to Arianne, “Get to someplace safe.”

“Father...?”

“Now,” said Eilles firmly as if he would take no objections.

Arianne teared up momentarily and then turned away after glaring at Kang-Woo.0

“Hmph! Father! Please kill those filthy peasants!”0

“Very well.” Eilles clenched his fists and gave Arianne a sweet smile.0

“Sheesh.” Kang-Woo chuckled as he watched them. “Are we in a drama or something? I would think we’re the bad guys if I didn’t know any better. Huh? Wait. Are we the baddies since we’re technically the intruders...?”0

Kang-Woo tilted his head in wonder with his arms crossed. Undeniably, a subordinate of Bael was an enemy of humanity and a threat to Earth, but Kang-Woo was the villain in this specific situation.0

Eilles frowned as he watched Kang-Woo tilting his head. “You talk too much, human.”0

“I get told that a lot.”0

“I wonder if you can keep talking after I cut off that blabbering head of yours?”0

“Hm? I sure can, even if my head gets chopped off. Don’t tell me you can’t?”0

Eilles glared at Kang-Woo in displeasure. Kang-Woo cackled as his shoulders moved up and down.0

“Well, that’s enough pointless banter,” Kang-Woo stated.0

His frivolous attitude took a 180 he stared at Eilles as coldly as Eilles was glaring at him.0

Kang-Woo then asked, “What’s your relationship with Bael?”0

Eilles’s eyebrows made of thin ice flinched. “Do not speak his name so disrespectfully.”0

“Hmm. Based on that sentence, you seem to be his subordinate...”0

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.0

‘If such a powerful being is Bael’s subordinate, would that make him one of the Four Heavenly Kings?’0

It was highly likely.0

“I am Eilles, Lord Bael’s loyal retainer as well as the master of the First Heaven.”0

“Yeah, I had a hunch,” replied Kang-Woo as he nodded.0

‘The guy at the World Tree called himself the master of the Fourth Heaven, right?’0

Kang-Woo recalled the outer god named Moab.0 freewebnovel.com

‘He said he was the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings.’0

After some simple thought, one could easily deduce that the master of the First Heaven among the four would make him the leader of the Four Heavenly Kings.0

‘What a fucking score.’0

Kang-Woo smiled. He was only here to investigate an abnormal Gate phenomenon but ended up catching a massive fish without even intending it.0

*'I was just about feeling pissed because my private information was getting taken without my consent.'*0

Although it was temporarily blocked at the moment, Bael had been gathering all sorts of information about Kang-Woo using his System privileges until recently. Not only did Kang-Woo not know where Bael was, but he had no idea about the scale of Bael's army and when he was planning to strike.0

*'If this guy is the leader of the Four Heavenly Kings...'*0

He would surely have precious information that would even the playing field.0

"Nice." Kang-Woo smiled widely and licked his lips.0

"What's nice?"0

"It looks like I'm gonna be able to get some information about Bael from you."0

"Hah," Eilles laughed in spite of himself and glared at Kang-Woo fiercely. "Do you think I will give you that information?"0

"Yeah." Kang-Woo nodded without hesitation. He smiled and slightly bent forward. "I think you will."0

Eilles shook his head, thinking he would not get through to the human. He gripped the Frost Sword tightly and slowly walked toward Kang-Woo. "I am not obligated to do that."0

"It's okay. I'll just make you feel obligated to."0

Kang-Woo snickered and stood in front of Eilles. He never thought that Eilles would give up that information so easily.0

*'The leader of the Four Heavenly Kings, huh?'*0

Kang-Woo stared at Eilles with great interest. He licked his lips and pulled out Ingrium strapped to his waist.0

*Fwoosh.*0

The flames of Voracity wrapped around Ingrium. He lowered his stance and leaped forward.0

*Bang!*0

The entire temple shook.0

*'Let's start off with a light greeting.'*0

Kang-Woo swung down his sword.0

*Boom—!*0

The frost storm and the Flames of Voracity clashed. The storm of ice and fire filled the temple with an enormous amount of steam.0

“Freeze,” Eilles said in Soul Speech.0

Freezing energy poured out of the Frost Sword and engulfed Kang-Woo.0

Kang-Woo smiled and asked, “That’s Soul Speech, isn’t it?”0

He added more strength into his grip on Ingrium and stepped forward. He slightly twisted his body and commanded in Soul Speech, “Burn.”0

*Fwoosh—!!*0

The Flames of Voracity instantly grew bigger as it devoured the frost storm.0

“What the—!” Eilles expressed shock.0

He thought, *‘I had my suspicions when he blocked my Soul Speech attack, but I can’t believe he can actually use it!’*0

“Kurgh!”0

Eilles distanced himself from the Flames of Voracity, spreading as it devoured the frost storm. A massive crater was formed where he had been standing the floor of the Frozen Temple had evaporated.0

*‘What in the world is that human...?’*0

He looked at Kang-Woo in disbelief. It was as if he were having a horrible nightmare. Eilles bit his lip and swung the Frost sword toward the ground.0

*Crack—!*0

A giant ice wall surged from the ground along the Frost Sword’s swing. The wall made contact with the Flames of Voracity and evaporated soon after.0

“Fuuu,” Eilles inhaled deeply, using the small amount of time bought.0

He organized his thoughts and focused on the enemy before him. He had no idea where such a human appeared from.0

*‘But he will surely be a hindrance to Lord Bael’s grand plan.’*0

Of that, Eilles was sure.0

“O frost spirit,” Eilles muttered. “I command you in the name of the king.”0

Although the intruder was far more powerful than he had expected, they were in the Frozen Temple, the home of the Frostborn as well as where the power of frost was the strongest.0

“Extinguish the flames.”0

Thousands of frost spirits that looked like cotton balls appeared around Eilles. They filled the surroundings in an instant and swelled simultaneously.0

*Crack—!!*0

Space itself froze. Air so freezing that it could freeze one's lungs just by breathing engulfed Kang-Woo. He jumped backward and stretched out his left hand enveloped in the Flames of Voracity. The flames were snuffed out by the freezing air. Despite being within the influence of Seol-Ah's sanctuary, Eilles's magic easily penetrated Seol-Ah's protective sanctuary and turned Kang-Woo's left hand into ice.0

"It's over."0

Eilles turned away from Kang-Woo, whose left hand was frozen, as if the battle had been decided. There was nothing more to see once the frost spirits made contact with the enemy they would spread throughout the enemy's body until they were completely frozen.0

"Wow."0

Kang-Woo looked down at his frozen arm with great interest.0

*Crack, crack!*0

The power of frost invaded his body and the ice spread across more of his body as if it were poison. It started from his left forearm and then spread to his shoulder, collarbone, and then his chest. It did not take long for most of his body to become frozen.0

"That hits the spot. Nice and cool." Kang-Woo smirked.0

The freezing energy spread throughout his body and he stopped moving as if he had become an ice statue.0

"You can no longer run that impertinent mouth of yours."0

Eilles snorted and turned away from Kang-Woo. He had yet to dispose of all the intruders there were still six more intruders whom he needed to turn into ice statues.0

"Mm... He's completely frozen."0

"A-A statue of Kang-Woo... *gulp*."0

Cha Yeon-Joo was staring at Kang-Woo in ice as if it were no big deal, and Han Seol-Ah was panting heatedly as she drooled.8

"Hm?" Eilles's expression crumpled slightly.0

The reactions of the intruders were weird. Humans normally became enraged or scared out of their wits once they saw a comrade die before their very eyes.0

*'But why...'*0

None of them were getting enraged or trembling in fear.0

*Crack.*0

Just then, the ice around Kang-Woo began to crack. Flames like the black sun spewed from the cracks in the ice.0

"I told you." Kang-Woo walked out of the shattered ice and smirked. "I can keep talking even if my head gets chopped off."0

Merely freezing him wouldn't be enough to kill him.0

"You..."0

Eilles's eyes widened as he was encroached by fear. He finally realized the off-putting feeling he experienced when he first saw the intruder.0

"You're... not human."0

Kang-Woo smiled as he stared at the terrified Eilles. He wrapped himself with the Flames of Voracity— no, he became the Flames of Voracity themselves. The flames enveloped in chaos burned radiantly.0

*Fwoosh!*0

The black sun sprouted wings and the ice making up the Frozen Temple began to melt slowly.0

"Now," said Kang-Woo after melting the entire temple. "Do you feel obligated to tell me now?"0

"..."0

Eilles gripped the Frost Sword tightly. He could tell what the outcome of the battle would be as he stared at the burning black sun.0

*'Arianne...'*0

He closed his eyes and recalled his daughter who ran away. He turned to face the burning black sun with wings and slowly opened his eyes, staring at Kang-Woo after mustering up his resolve.0

"Even if I were to melt to death, my loyalty to my liege Bael will never break."0

"No," Kang-Woo immediately replied and licked his lips with his long tongue. He then declared as if he had seen the future, "It'll break."2

The demon cackled as his shoulders moved up and down.