

M. in Hell 221

Chapter 221 - How To Corrupt A Saint (2)

"Wh-What the hell is this?"

A strange message appeared in front of Ludwig.

Before he could finish reading the message, the darkness covering the entire cave wriggled. A tentacle rose from the side and targeted his head.

Ludwig quickly ducked, so the tentacle merely grazed his hair.

Bash!

"Kurgh!"

Instead of Ludwig, the tentacle caught a Watcher of Light standing next to him.

Squelch.

Liquid flowed down the tentacle. The tip of the tentacle split, and a sharp prominence appeared.

"E-Eek! H-Help me!! Help meeeeeeeee!!!" the priest screamed desperately.

He squirmed and cried as an intense fear that went beyond death engulfed him. The priest struggled and reached out in hopes of getting help, but...

Squelch!

"A-Arrgghh!!! L-Lord Ludwig!!! Lord Ludwig!!! H-Help me!! Lord Ludwiiiiggg!!!"

"..."

The tentacle stuck to the priest's face. The dozens of sharp prominences at the opening of the tentacle wiggled as if they were savoring the priest's skin.

Then the tentacle's hundreds of prominences, which were as sharp as blades, pierced into the priest's flesh and sucked the blood that poured out of the wounds. After that...

Gurgle, gurgle.

Yellow pus poured out of the prominences and into those wounds.

Immense pain numbed the priest's mind as a horrible stench wafted from the tentacle.

"Aaaaahh! Aaaaahh!!!"

"Father Xerath!!!" Ludwig called out.

He quickly spread his hand, and white light gathered around it. He summoned the holy sword Ludwig, which was overflowing with sacred power. The sword was his name, life, and goal.

Ludwig grabbed the sword and swung it.

Crack!

The holy sword severed the tentacle, which was as thick as the thigh of an adult male human.

The sword had received the blessing of the high elves, who didn't appear unless Aernor was on the brink of collapse.

A sacred power that destroyed demonic entities flooded the area like a fast-spreading poison.

The severed tentacle fell away from the priest's head.

A sound resembling a groan emerged from Ludwig's mouth, "Ah,"

Splat.

The priest's skull had split open, and yellow pus poured out from it. His skin was rotting, and his eyeballs were dangling. The priest was already dead.

Ludwig's expression crumpled, and he took out a communication crystal orb. It was the crystal orb that he'd received from Gaia, who told him to use it if they needed help.

'Damn.'

Zzzzt. Zzzzt.

All that could be heard from the crystal orb was static. Amid the static was a man's voice.

- Hel... Wha... th?

"This is Ludwig. It seems like someone has meddled with the gate. I believe it is a demon's trap."

- What... status?

"I am fine, but one of my subordinates has already been done in. We will be in danger at this rate. I would like to request backup from every Guardians member. We will try to stall for time as we escape."

- Can... come ou... ide?

"We will not be able to leave. It seems a demon has complete control over this space."

- Where... are...

"I am not sure. We seem to be inside a dungeon."

- We... on our—ZZZT!!

The static worsened to the point that it was hard on the ears. Ludwig frowned and threw the crystal orb on the ground.

He looked at the profound abyss, turned around, and shouted, "We will advance!!!"

If they stayed here, they would surely die. They had to move to a place free from the tentacles.

"What? A-Advance?"

"We should be going back to—"

Two priests, who were blocking the tentacles' attacks, shouted anxiously.

Ludwig bit his lip and said, "There is nowhere to run."

"A-Aaahh."

After hearing those words, the priests turned their heads and saw that the Gate they'd crossed through had been devoured by the darkness. The priests fell into despair.

Ludwig gripped the holy sword and took a step forward. He drew out the sacred power that was inside his body and emitted an aura of white light.

It was the power of an angel. If demons had demonic energy, then angels exercised miracles through sacred power.

He concentrated that power on the holy sword. Then he raised his sword above his head and swung downward.

FWOOSH!!

The brilliant light from the holy sword cut straight through the tentacles. A pathway appeared within the dark cave filled with tentacles as if he were Moses splitting the Red Sea.

"Now!"

"Aaaaaaahh!!!"

The Watchers of Light charged forward. They threw their cumbersome robes away and concentrated the sacred power on their hands.

A white light burnt and spread in all directions like fire.

Sizzle—!!

The tentacles were burnt away by the white light, emitting smoke and letting off a terrible smell.

"Kuh!"

"Don't stop!!"

Ludwig grabbed a priest who had stopped due to the smell by the neck and pulled him away. A tentacle brushed past where he had just been standing,

Ludwig lowered his posture and concentrated sacred power on his back.

Flap!

White wings pierced out of his back. He used all his strength to flap his wings, quickly flying through the tentacle-filled cave and into the darkness.

[Kahahahahaha!!]

A laugh imbued with faint demonic energy reached Ludwig, and he frowned.

"I knew it was a demon's doing."

He wasn't sure how the demon had discovered his existence or how they'd managed to manipulate a Gate inside the Hall of Protection so that it would lead here. Nevertheless, he didn't think about it for long.

'First, I will kill the demon.'

There were no doubts in his ideals. If a demon had dragged him into a trap, the only thing he had to do was to kill them.

[Nice to meet you, human.]

"..."

Ludwig didn't answer. The opponent was a demon—a filthy heretic not worth even speaking to. He raised his holy sword and got into a fighting stance.

[Kehehehe. Should we not at least exchange names?]

The demon, who had a body covered in green tentacles, laughed. Horrid demonic energy weighed Ludwig down.

"I have no name to reveal to a demon," Ludwig said firmly.

[Kahahahaha! I like your attitude!]

The five-meter giant demon laughed. Every time he laughed, the darkness fluctuated.

The demon raised his two fists, which weren't covered by tentacles.

[Still, you should at least know the name of the being who will kill you.] The demon grinned. [I am Yogg-Saron.]

"..."

It was a demon Ludwig had never heard of.

He frowned.

Still, it didn't matter who the opponent was; what mattered was that the opponent in front of him was a demon.

'All demons... must die.'

Whoom!

The holy sword emitted light, and he rushed forward with the sword.

Despite how big he was, the demon easily dodged his attack.

Yogg-Saron turned 180 degrees with his left leg as the pivot point, lowered his posture, and shot forward.

[Hehehehe.]

"E-Eek!"

After dodging Ludwig's attack, Yogg-Saron grabbed the neck of one of the priests, placing the priest between him and Ludwig like a shield.

"L-Lord Ludwig!"

Stab!!

"Kurgh!!"

Ludwig cut the priest apart without hesitation.

It didn't matter if he was his subordinate or a comrade who served the light.

'To kill a demon....'

Ludwig had no time to consider such meaningless things.

The sword cut through the priest's body and stabbed Yogg-Saron's shoulder.

The green tentacle was severed, and his muscular red skin became visible. His hands were torn as if his sword had clashed with invulnerable armor.

[Kahaha!! You are merciless! Don't you have even a single bit of hesitation since they're your subordinates?]

"Silence, demon," Ludwig said in a low voice.

He'd killed a subordinate who had served him for a long time, but there was no regret on his face. He felt neither sorrow nor remorse. There was no way he'd feel such emotions.

After all, it was only natural for a being who served light to eradicate demons. It didn't matter how much he had to sacrifice if it was to kill a demon.

Schwing.

Ludwig raised his sword, and rays of light cut through the darkness. He radiated with sacred power, and when he flapped the wings on his back, it made him look angelic.

[Interesting.] Yogg-Saron laughed. [The demon king will take great interest in you.]

"...Demon king?" Ludwig frowned after hearing the ominous title. "Are you talking about Satan?"

[Hm? K-Kahahahahahaha!!!!] Yogg-Saron laughed while holding his stomach. [Satan?? Sataaaan? Do you truly believe I, Yogg-Saron, would serve such a weakling?]

"..."

Ludwig's eyes shook, and his thoughts ran wild.

If the demon king wasn't Satan...

'Who?'

Who was the being who had the ominous title of the demon king?

[Come, servant of light. I will let you realize the power of true darkness.]

Before Ludwig could continue his line of thought, Yogg-Saron cut through the light and leaped forward.

* * *

'Good.'

Outside of the dungeon, Kang-Woo smiled went up when he looked inside the dungeon through the magic device that Lilith had installed.

It had been thirty minutes since Balrog and Ludwig had begun fighting, and Ludwig was slowly getting pushed back.

'But still, he's quite strong.'

Kang-Woo had recovered his former strength after fulfilling the conditions for the Demonic Soul. Balrog was connected to him through his soul, so he was now truly on par with a prince of Hell.

Despite that, Ludwig had battled Balrog for thirty minutes. Moreover, he had even been able to wound him. Even for an apostle of an archangel, it was impressive that Ludwig had such strength.

'I'm sure the sword is playing a part in that as well.'

Kang-Woo looked at the sword that was emitting brilliant light—the holy sword Ludwig.

The apostle Ludwig was certainly stronger than he had expected.

'But...'

That was all there was to it.

Clatter!

"Kurgh! Huff! Huff!"

Ludwig knelt, holding his chest and panting heavily.

Kang-Woo smiled as he looked at him.

'I should get started.'

He put away the communication crystal he had been holding and took out a black sphere. Then, a tentacle stealthily stuck to the back of Ludwig's head.

After confirming the connection, Kang-Woo nodded in satisfaction. Now, his voice would enter Ludwig's mind directly.

'The effect is important.'

Doing that would produce a different effect from having Ludwig hear Kang-Woo's words with his ears. It was important that Kang-Woo's voice reverberated from Ludwig's mind to the rest of his body.

'Right, then...'

It was time for Kang-Woo to recite the lines that he'd prepared. He surged with excitement.

'Man, I've always wanted to say this at least once.'

He even felt that it was unfair he'd never had the opportunity to say it after becoming a Demon King.

"A-Ahem."

Kang-Woo stretched his neck muscles.

'Let's get into the mood...'

He closed his eyes and pulled demonic energy from his body.

The phrase that he'd prepared was a symbol of corruption; it was what everyone thought of when they imagined corruption.

"Do you want power?" a grotesque and eerie voice flowed into Ludwig's mind through the black sphere.

It was a dark and wet voice that sounded as if it were coming from the abyss.

"...What?"

Ludwig looked around after hearing a voice flowing right into his mind.

Kang-Woo clenched his hands into fists.

'Shiiiiiiiieeet!!! Fuck yeah! This is the shit! You can't go without this line if you wanna corrupt someone!'

Excitement surged within him.

'Holy fuck.'

"Do you want power?" Kang-Woo heard his line echoing in his ears.

'So fucking cool.'

Kang-Woo wished his darling could see this.

Chapter 222 - How To Corrupt A Saint (3)

A bit earlier...

Clang!

White flames poured in all directions. The sword and fist collided.

Massive pressure tore Ludwig's hands apart, but that only lasted for a short while. His radiant sacred energy healed the wounds on his hands.

"Kuh," he grunted.

Ludwig took a few steps back, lowered his posture, and raised his sword again.

They clashed once more.

Slash!

Ludwig slashed the demon's wrist. Blood poured out of the deep wound, but...

Bash!

"Kurgh!"

The demon ignored the wound and countered.

The massive shock shook Ludwig as if he had been hit by a battering ram. His vision swirled. He was shaken by the sensation of flying through the air and gravity smashing him down onto the ground.

Ludwig felt like the entire world was spinning. He coughed up crimson blood.

"Haaa, haaa..."

His breath became heavier, and he raised his head to look at the demon who called himself Yogg-Saron.

They had been fighting for thirty minutes. Ludwig's stamina was about to bottom out, the strength in his hands was gone, and his legs were shaking.

The brilliant light enveloping him was also dimming. He could feel that he'd lost.

"Kuh."

Ludwig frowned. He couldn't accept it.

The demon in front of him was still in perfect condition.

'Demons... must be killed.'

Whatever it took... Whatever needed to be sacrificed... demons had to be eradicated. That's what he'd known since birth.

His memories of the despair he'd felt in the past returned to him.

Demons... Whenever he thought about those disgusting beings, he felt nauseous.

"I will... kill you," Ludwig said in a low voice.

His eyes were full of madness. He was trying to hypnotize himself.

He put more strength in his trembling legs and stood up, gripping the holy sword with both hands and preparing to fight again.

[Amazing,] Yogg-Saron said in surprise.

He felt Ludwig's indomitable will. It was an obsession close to madness.

Yogg-Saron smirked and clenched his hands into fists.

The heat of the battle made his blood boil.

Slam—!!

They clashed, exchanging rapid blows over the course of a second in midair. The battle couldn't be observed with even a sixth sense.

Ludwig swung the holy sword downward on Yogg-Saron's shoulder.

Yogg-Saron blocked it with the back of his hand, spewing black blood. His Demonic Armor deflected the holy sword away, and he used the recoil force to twist his body midair. He flapped his wings to correct his unstable posture.

Ludwig once again swung down the holy sword, aiming for Yogg-Saron's head this time.

[However...]

Yogg-Saron stomped on the ground. He lowered his body as the ground caved in. His thigh muscles inflated, and the tentacles were torn away.

He swung his fist like an uppercut, colliding with the holy sword that was being swung down.

Boooooom—!!!

A huge explosion shook the dark cave, and a blinding light swept away the darkness. Ludwig was pushed back by the impact, and he rolled on the ground.

[This is your limit.]

Yogg-Saron looked down at Ludwig with deep, sunken eyes.

"Cough! Cough!"

Ludwig coughed blood while digging his fingers into the ground. He tried to get up, but he couldn't put any strength into his arms. He collapsed, falling face-first into the dirt.

"A-Aargh."

Ludwig struggled and squirmed like he was trying to deny reality, but he simply did not have the strength to stand back up. He raised his trembling head to see the demon looking down at him.

He could instinctively feel that his death was near.

'At this rate...'

It would be the end.

He would die in a faraway world without having done or achieved anything.

'No.'

Ludwig's eyes filled with desperation.

He wasn't afraid of dying. It was an honorable thing to die in a battle against demons. This was the most secure way to reach Heaven, which was what every Watcher of Light wanted.

Yet...

'At least...'

He couldn't die at this moment. He had found a reason to survive.

'I have to tell Lord Raphael.'

Ludwig thought of the 'seed' he'd found by coincidence before coming here. When he thought of the esteemed one who was trapped in the body of a lowly human and living the life of one, he couldn't help but tremble.

He clenched his hands into fists, ground his teeth, and tried to stand again. He shook from the strain and gave out again before he could fully raise himself.

"A-Aaaahh," he cried in despair while Yogg-Saron walked toward him.

The light around him faded, and darkness fell.

Then...

- Do you want power?

"...What?"

Ludwig had heard a quiet voice in his mind. He looked around, but he couldn't see anything.

- There is no need for you to speak out loud.

'Who... are you?' he asked the voice in his mind.

- I am death. I am the end. I am the father of all wrath, and I am wrath itself, the voice continued rhythmically like a singer or a poet reading a poem.

- I am Satan.

'Sa... tan...?'

Ludwig frowned aggressively after hearing that name.

Rage toward Satan boiled up from within him.

- I have come to make you a deal.

'Get out of my head. I will not listen to the whispers of a demon.'

Ludwig firmly shook his head.

There was no need to listen to what a demon had to say, especially Satan.

'He is the Demon of Prophecy.'

He was the Demon of Prophecy who would bring destruction to this world. But it wasn't just Earth. A god had foretold that the Demon of Prophecy would destroy Aernor, Huan, and all other worlds connected to the Nine Hells.

So, there was no need to listen to such a being.

- Hahahahaha!!

An evil laugh echoed through his mind.

- As expected from a Watcher of Light.

'Silence. I will listen to you no longer.'

- Hehehehe. Can you truly afford to do that in the situation you are in?

'...'

Ludwig remained silent and raised his head. He saw Yogg-Saron walking toward him.

Yogg-Saron was walking very slowly. Perhaps it was because Yogg-Saron thought he'd already won or because he wanted Ludwig to be fearful of his approaching death.

Regardless, there was one thing Ludwig was sure of. When the demon reached him... he would die.

'It matters not.'

- I cannot see that being the case, Satan remarked mockingly.

Ludwig bit his lips.

'I would rather die than make a deal with a demon.'

- Hahahahaha! Good! That is a good mindset to have! But... I wonder if you would still make the same choice after knowing the truth...?

'What?'

- Even if I tell you that Raphael could die... if you do not let this truth be known?

'What are you talking about?'

Ludwig's eyes wavered.

What sort of truth could it possibly be for him to dare to mention Raphael dying?

- Have you still not realized it even after listening to Yogg-Saron? Can you truly not imagine why I am trying to make you a deal?

'...What in the world are you t—'

- I am not the Demon of Prophecy.

'...!'

Ludwig's eyes widened, and he trembled.

Raphael had already posed the possibility that Satan might not be the Demon of Prophecy, but hearing it from Satan himself sent chills through his entire body.

'In that case...'

The retainers of Gaia were being deceived by the true Demon of Prophecy.

"Kuh." Ludwig anxiously bit his lip.

'If you are not the Demon of Prophecy... Is the Demon of Prophecy the demon king whom this demon in front of me mentioned?'

- You are fortunately not a moron.

Satan laughed softly.

- Correct. I was captured by the demon king and was reduced to being his mere subordinate.

'...'

There was a short silence.

A demon strong enough to make a prince of Hell his subordinate... Ludwig couldn't even imagine who such a demon could be.

'Is the demon king... Bael?'

- No. It is not Bael.

'Wha...'

Ludwig's thoughts became even more of a jumble.

Even the demon that the angels were most wary of wasn't the demon king...?

'How am I supposed to trust you?'

- Use the sword.

Ludwig lowered his head to see a sword emanating a white light.

Holy Sword Ludwig... It was a sword with sacred energy, and it was capable of locating the Demonic Sea.

"Kuh..."

[What? Are you thinking of putting up some sort of last stand?]

Yogg-Saron chuckled as he approached Ludwig. He then stopped and crossed his arms.

[Then give it a shot. I will wait.]

"..."

Ludwig bit his lip and raised the holy sword.

The success rate was higher only if he focused entirely on it in a quiet place, but he did not have the leeway to choose at the moment.

Ludwig closed his eyes and focused. He soon found the Demonic Sea.

"Ah..." Ludwig gasped.

He trembled after realizing the truth.

"The Demonic Sea is..."

- You seem to have found it.

Satan laughed.

"...Inside Guardians?"

Ludwig didn't know who had the Demonic Sea, but it was currently in the Hall of Protection, Guardians' headquarters.

If that was the case... that meant...

"Hypothetically speaking... what will you do if there really is a demon in Guardians?" Ludwig recalled Kim Si-Hun's words.

'The retainers of Gaia...'

They were being completely deceived by the Demon of Prophecy. They'd been deceived so perfectly that they'd even accepted him as a member of Guardians.

No, there was a chance that they hadn't been deceived.

'Guardians could be...'

They could be in leagues with the Demon of Prophecy.

"N-No."

Raphael had accepted the request from the gods of Earth and was working with the retainers of Gaia. Yet, the Demon of Prophecy was inside Guardians....

'I have to let them know.'

Ludwig had to tell Guardians, who were being deceived by the Demon of Prophecy. He had to tell Raphael, who was trying to help without knowing that Guardians was being deceived by the Demon of Prophecy.

Ludwig couldn't even imagine how many lives would be lost if he didn't reveal the truth. In the worst-case scenario that he didn't even want to think about...

'Lord Raphael could die.'

There was no guarantee that the darkness that had devoured Guardians wouldn't spread to Raphael.

"A-Aaaahh."

Crack.

Ludwig clenched his hands into fists.

He widened his eyes. He swung his hands as if he were trying to grab the air and then desperately stood up with every bit of strength he had.

[Hah, you call that your last stand?] Yogg-Saron said disappointedly.

Ludwig's eyes filled with despair.

At that moment, he heard Satan's voice.

- Now, I will ask you again. Would you like to make a deal with me?

"..."

There was silence.

Ludwig did not take long to think.

"I..." Ludwig said in a firm voice with an unwavering gaze, "...refuse."

Riiing.

[The Authority of Subordination has failed due to the subject's resistance.]

Ludwig gripped his holy sword tighter. White light poured out of the sword and covered his body.

"Do not delude yourself, Satan," Ludwig continued with blazing eyes.

Even if he lost everything...

Even if everything was destroyed...

"I do not compromise with demons."

Chapter 223 - How To Corrupt A Saint (4)

"Oh?" Oh Kang-Woo uttered after reading the message window that appeared in front of him.

"Impressive."

He'd pushed Ludwig into a corner and also eliminated all other choices for him. Kang-Woo had even revealed the truth to Ludwig to an extent and dragged him down into the pit of despair.

'Even after that...'

Ludwig was in the worst possible situation he could be placed in, yet he still rejected Kang-Woo's deal and resisted the Authority of Subordination.

'I'm surprised.'

Kang-Woo couldn't help but be impressed by Ludwig's pure and firm ideals. He'd thought that the chances of Ludwig refusing the deal in that situation would be extremely low.

"But..."

Kang-Woo shrugged while smirking at the absurdity.

He'd certainly thought that the chances would be low, but that also meant he had thought of the possibility of Ludwig refusing. In other words, Kang-Woo had already made the necessary preparations for such a situation.

"...That's all there is to it."

The demon laughed.

* * *

"I do not compromise with demons," he said in contempt as if he found even the thought of it disgusting.

Ludwig used his holy sword to prop him up as he staggered to his feet.

He knew it wasn't the best decision to make in his situation. He wasn't stupid enough that he couldn't recognize that bending his ideals for the future, Raphael, and Aernor would be the right decision.

'But...'

Ludwig's eyes gaze sharpened.

He knew demons very well. He knew just how evil, wicked, and clever they were.

'A deal?'

Ludwig laughed in disbelief. It was absurd.

Satan hadn't mentioned the price Ludwig would need to pay because there was no need to.

'Because...'

He was planning to take everything from Ludwig.

If the price Ludwig had to pay was everything he had, then his decision didn't matter; it would lead to a doomed end regardless. He wasn't stupid enough to not realize that.

Even if he managed to walk out of here alive, it wouldn't be over; he would spend the rest of his life as Satan's puppet before he could convey the truth to Raphael, killing his comrades of the light with his own hands.

'I cannot let that happen.'

Ludwig's eyes shone sharply.

It was true that he had to tell Raphael what he'd just learned, but borrowing the power of a demon to do that would be counterproductive. It would only be a shortcut to even greater destruction.

'In that case...'

Ludwig gulped and closed his eyes. He focused his attention on the holy sword Ludwig—the sword he'd even thrown away his name for.

"I offer my life," he said to the sword.

Whoom.

The holy sword vibrated and emitted a white light.

Ludwig caught his breath and raised his head. He shone brilliantly and spoke the name of the technique that he needed to sacrifice his life to use.

"Radiance."

Whoooooom—!!!

The vibration became more intense, and the sword emitted an explosive amount of light that covered Ludwig.

Rip.

The skin on Ludwig's back tore, and four wings emerged from it. They weren't fake wings made of light like the ones he had before; these were real angel wings.

A brilliant light filled their surroundings.

"K-Kurgh!"

He twisted and squirmed as an enormous amount of sacred power from the holy sword flowed into him. It had already gone beyond the amount of sacred power a human body could accept.

"A-Aaaaaaaaahh!!!"

Ludwig swung the holy sword while enveloped by the brilliant light.

Crackle!!

The darkness was split.

* * *

[My king,] Balrog's voice rang out through the black sphere. His tone was stiff. [It seems the plan has gone awry.]

"I can see that," Kang-Woo replied.

His initial plan had been to corrupt Ludwig and control him through the Authority of Subordination. In other words, Kang-Woo wanted to use an apostle of an angel as his puppet.

"It's a bit unfortunate."

Kang-Woo leaned back in his chair.

He had materialized the plan that he had improvised while making the dungeon with Lilith. Furthermore, he had done his best to amplify the anticipated gains.

'I guess it failed.'

If Kang-Woo just wanted to make Ludwig unable to use the holy sword, all he had to do was kill Ludwig. A dead man wouldn't be able to use the holy sword.

However, Kang-Woo wanted more than that. He had judged that he would be able to obtain an even greater return if he put in more effort to corrupt Ludwig, allowing the apostle to free himself from the repetitive pattern he was stuck in.

'That's why I was planning to use the Authority of Subordination.'

If Kang-Woo were able to obtain Ludwig, Ludwig would have been useful in all sorts of ways. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to do that now.

[Will you kill him?] Balrog asked with intense bloodlust.

"Mmm..." Kang-Woo murmured, thinking deeply about what to do.

He leaned back while rocking the chair and recalled his conversation with Vaal Zahak.

- Hmm. About that man named Ludwig... What a shame.

'A shame?'

- Yes. I have never seen a human with such a powerful and impressive body other than your brother. I would guess... that he is even better than Reynald.

'So?'

- Hehehe. If I could turn him into a Death Knight... an incredible piece of art would be born. A Death Knight of the highest... No, maybe something beyond a simple Death Knight. I may be able to turn him into an Abyss Knight.

'That name sounds strong as fuck.'

- They are a superior form of Death Knight. It can only be created with a vengeful soul that has suffered an unjust death. The power of such a being would be... Hehehe. Even Lord Balrog would have a hard time against it.

'Mmm... It's rejected for now. We can turn him into one anytime after using the Authority of Subordination on him.'

The short conversation played in his mind.

After thinking about it for a while, Kang-Woo slowly said, "No, don't kill him."

[But at this rate, he will escape the dun—]

"It's fine."

[He knows too much,] Balrog replied worriedly.

Kang-Woo smiled.

"Balrog."

[Yes, my king.]

"What do you think is the best way to corrupt a saint?"

[There are many ways to—]

"Under the assumption that they will not be corrupted no matter what we do for whatever reason."

[...]

Balrog remained silent.

Corrupting an incorruptible saint... The question itself was contradictory. There was no answer to such a question.

"Take a good look." Kang-Woo smiled. "I'll teach you how."

* * *

Crackle!!

The darkness was split. The cave was torn apart, and light flowed through the cracks.

'This is...'

Ludwig saw the familiar ruined grassland.

'This is where we first arrived.'

Ludwig's eyes shone.

Then he turned and looked at Yogg-Saron. For some reason, the demon wasn't moving at all.

'This is my chance.'

Ludwig wasn't sure why the demon wasn't moving, but that didn't change the fact that it was the perfect opportunity for him to escape.

Ludwig crouched down, jumped into the air, and flapped his four wings. He shot forward at incredible speed.

'I have to let them know.'

He had to tell Raphael everything he'd heard in the dungeon.

Ludwig escaped the dungeon through the cracks in the darkness. Tentacles chased after him, but he was faster.

Crackle—!!

Upon breaking free from the dungeon, Ludwig crashed to the ground and rolled over the dirt.

"Huff, huff," he panted heavily.

The side effects from pushing the holy sword to its limit were already taking their toll on his body. Ludwig could tell that he did not have much time left.

'Quickly...'

He had to return to Aernor.

Just then...

"Ludwig!!"

"Are you okay?!!"

Kim Si-Hun, Kang-Woo, Gaia, Cha Yeon-Joo, Grace McCubbin, and other elite Guardians members were running toward him. It seemed like the backup Ludwig had asked for had arrived.

"Kuh..." Ludwig groaned as he looked at them warily.

Guardians was being deceived by the Demon of Prophecy. He first had to tell them the truth.

"You are all being decei—"

"Wait," Kang-Woo, the young man with sharp eyes at the front, interjected and raised his hand. With a stiff expression, he urged, "Everyone, stop."

"Wh-What's wrong, hyung-nim?!" Si-Hun asked anxiously.

"..." Kang-Woo frowned. "It's... too late."

"Huh? What do you—"

"Ludwig is already being controlled by a demon."

"...What?"

"I-Is that true, Kang-Woo?!" Gaia hurriedly asked.

"Yes. It's already... too late," Kang-Woo answered, nodding with a heavy expression. He clenched his hands into fists aggressively and stomped on the ground. "Shit! Shit! If only we'd arrived faster!"

Ludwig looked at Kang-Woo blankly.

'What is he talking about?'

Ludwig wasn't being controlled by a demon. He'd refused Satan's deal. He had escaped the dungeon purely with his power.

So, why was Kang-Woo saying that it was too late?

"H-Hyung-nim! What do you mean?! Ludwig is perfectly fi—"

"No," Kang-Woo said, firmly shaking his head. He took out a communication crystal orb from his pocket. "To be honest, from the moment I heard this message... I knew that it was too late."

A voice rang out from the crystal orb.

[This... Lud... g. It seems some... meddled with the Gate... demon's trap... I am... already... done in... danger... every... escape... demon has complete control over...]

It was Ludwig's voice, mixed with a lot of static interference. In the message, he seemed aware of his imminent death and spoke as if those were his last words. It was not hard to tell from this message that it had already been too late for Ludwig.

Kang-Woo grabbed Si-Hun's shoulders.

"I'm sorry, Si-Hun. I couldn't bear to let you listen to this message earlier."

"A-Aaaahh..."

"Ludwig... has already been corrupted by a demon."

Kang-Woo lowered his head as if he couldn't bear to look at Ludwig.

Ludwig looked at him with his mouth wide open.

'What the...'

His thoughts tumbled around in his mind. What he heard through the crystal orb was definitely his voice, but... he'd never said anything like that.

'What's going on?'

Ludwig turned pale.

He recalled the conversation he'd had with a Guardians member as soon as he entered the dungeon.

- Hel... Wha... th?

"This is Ludwig. It seems like someone has meddled with the Gate. I believe it is a demon's trap."

- What... status?

"I am fine, but one of my subordinates has already been done in. We will be in danger at this rate. I would like to request backup from every Guardians member. We will try to stall for time as we escape."

- Can... come ou... ide?

"We will not be able to leave. It seems a demon has complete control over this space."

- Where... are...

"I am not sure. We seem to be inside a dungeon."

- We... on our— ZZZT!!

That had been what he had said.

'How did that...'

[This... Lud... g. It seems some... meddled with the Gate... demon's trap... I am... already... done in... danger... every... escape... demon has complete control over...]

'...Turn into this?'

"A-Aaaahh," Ludwig uttered while trembling.

He looked at Kang-Woo with a pale face.

"Ludwig has already been corrupted," Kang-Woo said firmly as he teared up. "We must... kill him with our own hands."

Corrupting an incorruptible saint was much simpler than it seemed.

'The truth doesn't matter,' Kang-Woo thought.

All that mattered was what seemed like the truth.

Chapter 224 - Holy Sword Ludwig

"You son of a—"

Ludwig trembled, his mouth gaping open in surprise. His head was burning from the rage boiling up within him.

"A-Argghh."

He put his hands on his cheeks. He couldn't even form proper words, and his head felt fuzzy.

'It's over.'

Ludwig could tell from the grim expressions of the Guardians members and from Kim Si-Hun's anguished expression that he was screwed. He couldn't understand how a demon had edited his words in such a way, but the result was impressive even to him.

'No matter who hears it...'

The recorded message sounded like Ludwig's last words, spoken after falling for the schemes of a demon and becoming corrupted. His message said that it was already too late for him and that they shouldn't go find him.

After receiving such a message, who in the world would think that he hadn't been corrupted?

"Y-You're wrong!" Ludwig shook his head and pointed at Kang-Woo. "This is all part of that scumbag's pl—"

Gurgle, gurgle.

At that moment, a green tentacle stuck to the back of his head wriggled. It was the tentacle that Kang-Woo had placed on Ludwig to speak into his mind.

The tentacle branched out into dozens of tendrils and traveled down Ludwig's body. They were not attacking him; they were moving across his body and sticking to his skin to make it look like his blood vessels were protruding from his skin in a horrifying manner.

Then...

"As expected, he's being eroded by the demonic energy," Kang-Woo remarked while lowering his head.

Horrifying green blood vessels had become visible all over Ludwig's body. Objectively speaking, Ludwig appeared to be in an abnormal state. There was no better word to describe it than 'erosion.'

"No, this isn't—"

"Shut up, you evil demon!!" Kang-Woo screamed at Ludwig in disgust, and his lips trembled. "I already know that Ludwig isn't there anymore. He completely disappeared after you took over his body!"

"Everyone..."

"Sniff. Ludwig... How could this have..."

"Please, listen to m—"

"We will... never forget you, Ludwig..."

"For fuck's sake."

Ludwig grabbed his head as if he was about to go insane. His mind was in jumbles. He looked up to see everyone else staring at him with eyes full of pity and sadness.

"Ludwig..." Si-Hun uttered.

He closed his eyes and squirmed, unable to get over the shock.

Everyone's reaction was different, but they all had something in common... They believed Kang-Woo rather than Ludwig.

"H-Haha," Ludwig laughed in disbelief.

He couldn't even think of anything to refute the situation. It was far more difficult to prove a person's innocence than to prove that they were guilty. His back had been put up against the wall of the situation.

'It can't be reversed.'

Such a thought crossed his mind, and anger surged within him.

Ludwig paled as he looked at Kang-Woo. He saw the tips of Kang-Woo's mouth curl up into a smile.

'Oh Kang-Woo.'

Thoughts flashed through his mind. All of the puzzle pieces in his mind had come together.

The one who had tampered with the Gate leading from the Hall of Protection to Africa, the one who had received his transmission from the Gate, and the Demon of Prophecy, the master of the Demonic Sea, who had infiltrated Guardians...

"It... was you," Ludwig stated.

He trembled, and his eyes widened. Mad with anger, rage took control over him. He lost his reason as his emotions burst forth.

"It was you," Ludwig repeated.

That was the only possible explanation.

It didn't matter whether he had truly been corrupted. It had become the truth the moment that everyone deemed that he had been corrupted.

All his efforts to cast aside Satan's temptations and to keep his beliefs from wavering had been for naught.

"Oh Kang-Wooooooooooooooooo!!!"

He let madness take control of his body and stomped on the ground. Ludwig gripped his holy sword, and blinding light followed his movements.

He'd used most of his power to escape the dungeon, but he couldn't afford to fall yet.

"Raaaaaaaaaaaahh!!!"

Ludwig had to tell Raphael the truth about the demon king and the woman named Han Seol-Ah.

However, none of those things mattered at the moment. Kang-Woo was right in front of him.

The demon who had infiltrated Guardians, the group of people protecting Earth, was mocking him despicably. Kang-Woo was a monster wearing human skin.

His sneer was engraved in Ludwig's mind.

"DIIIE!!!" Ludwig roared.

He swung down the holy sword.

Claaang!!

However, Si-Hun blocked the sword, which was covered in brilliant light.

He wore an anxious expression as he said, "Lud... wig..."

"Mooove!! You are all being deceived!! You are all being played by that demon!!" Ludwig screamed.

"Kuh."

"Damn idiots!! And you call yourselves the protectors of Earth?!!"

"Ludwig!" Si-Hun exclaimed desperately while looking at Ludwig, who had been taken over by madness.

It hadn't been long since they had met—only about a week. Si-Hun had only shown Ludwig the many different cultures on Earth that he had been curious about, so their relationship was a bit ambiguous for him to call Ludwig his friend. Nevertheless...

"Shit, shit, shit!!" Si-Hun cursed.

Ludwig was covered in pure-white light, but he couldn't look any more horrid. His eyes were filled with madness, and he was panting heavily. Most of all, green blood vessels were protruding from his skin, which proved that he had been taken over by a demon.

They all meant one thing... Ludwig had passed the point of no return.

'Hyung-nim.'

As if asking for an answer, Si-Hun turned to look at Kang-Woo.

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and shook his head, implying that it was too late for Ludwig.

Si-Hun silently gripped his sword tighter.

Kang-Woo grabbed his shoulder and said, "Si-Hun, let me—"

"No," Si-Hun replied in a low voice, suppressing his sorrow. "I'll do it. This is... something I have to do."

He stared at the corrupted saint.

Si-Hun had never seen this side of Ludwig before—the side that had lost his mind to rage. He saw the pendant he'd given to Ludwig hanging on his neck.

Si-Hun felt like he was tearing up and closed his eyes.

'I have to do it.'

Even if it was painful, no... he had to be the one to do it because it was this painful. He couldn't let anyone else do it.

'Ludwig.'

He didn't know which demon had corrupted Ludwig, but it wasn't hard to guess who it was. From what he knew, there weren't many demons capable of corrupting a saint with such firm beliefs like Ludwig.

'Focus.'

Si-Hun eliminated all useless thoughts and cast aside his emotions, focusing only on what he had to do,

His eyes sank deep into their sockets, momentarily becoming similar to Kang-Woo's.

"Fuuu."

Si-Hun took a deep breath, gripped his sword with both hands, and lowered his posture. He stomped on the ground and rushed forward.

"Aaaaaahh!!" Ludwig screamed.

He was thrashing about while being tainted by madness.

"Don't worry, Ludwig," Si-Hun said shortly.

"You motherfuckersssssss!!!"

"I'll end your pain with my own hands."

"Fucking listen to meeeeeeeeeee!!!" Ludwig shouted like a madman.

For a moment, a hopeful thought that maybe Ludwig would be able to escape from the demon's influence crossed Si-Hun's mind.

'Don't think about nonsense,' Si-Hun told himself.

He remembered Kang-Woo's words that it was already too late for Ludwig. There was likely a reason why Kang-Woo had said such a thing.

Kang-Woo's abilities were far more extraordinary than what Si-Hun could imagine. So, if Kang-Woo was certain of it, then it was bound to be true.

"I'm sorry," Si-Hun apologized.

After that, he stretched his hands forward, and his sword flew through the air as if it were alive. He closed his eyes and focused.

'Heavenly Dragon Flash.'

There was a flash of light as the sword pierced Ludwig. Red blood splattered on the ground, and the smell of iron wafted from his wound.

"Cough!"

"Ludwig..." Si-Hun cried.

He caught the falling Ludwig with one arm and embraced him.

"I'll remember you," Si-Hun said.

"U-Urghh..."

Ludwig teared up.

Clatter.

The holy sword fell to the ground.

Si-Hun and Ludwig... The protector and the corrupted saint painted a moving scene.

Kang-Woo lowered his head and pretended like he was crying, but he was actually glancing at the holy sword that had fallen to the ground.

Gulp.

'I'm sure it's at least Mythic-grade.'

He couldn't help but feel excited.

'It could even have a unique stat boost effect!'

If Holy Sword Ludwig had such an effect, it could even have the goofy effect of a holy sword boosting his Demonic Energy stat. It seemed possible since Seol-Ah's Grace of Light had boosted his Demonic Energy stat before.

Kang-Woo carefully walked toward the two of them and picked up the holy sword.

Ring!

[Holy Sword Ludwig is rejecting the filthy soul!!]

Whoom.

White light burst out from the holy sword.

'A filthy soul, you say?'

Kang-Woo frowned. He couldn't understand the message window at all; there was no soul more pure than his.

'The system is so unreliable.'

Ring!

[Holy Sword Ludwig is being tainted by darkness due to the overwhelmingly filthy soul!]

'Bro.'

[Holy Sword Ludwig is vomiting in disgust!]

'Swords don't fucking vomit.'

[The sacred power of Holy Sword Ludwig is starting to be annihilated!]

'What the f—'

[The holy sword is being decomposed! The blessing of the high elves, Demon-Detecting Light, has been damaged!]

'Fine. I won't use you, so stop, dammit.'

Kang-Woo frowned while holding the sword. Sacred power was gushing out from the tip of the holy sword as if it were actually vomiting.

He didn't care that its ability to detect demonic energy was damaged, but the Mythic-grade weapon could disappear at this rate.

"Si-Hun."

"Hyung-nim..."

Kang-Woo put his hand on Si-Hun's shoulder and handed Holy Sword Ludwig to him.

The sword stopped vomiting sacred power.

"Ah..."

"From what I know, the name of this sword is also Ludwig," Kang-Woo said.

"...Yes," Si-Hun replied with a nod.

The first day that they met Ludwig, Ludwig had mentioned the sword's name.

Kang-Woo gripped Si-Hun's shoulder and spoke in a firm voice, "Take this sword. Only you have the right to wield it."

"Hyung-nim... I... wasn't able to save him."

"Yes, you weren't. Since you weren't able to save him, take this sword and save even more people with it."

"Kang-Woo hyung-nim..."

"Never forget."

Kang-Woo and Si-Hun, who was crying, looked down at Ludwig's corpse.

Ludwig, the saint who had been corrupted by an evil demon... His eyes were wide open, seemingly bitter about his death.

Kang-Woo closed Ludwig's eyes for him.

"Ludwig will always be with you," Kang-Woo told Si-Hun.

"...Sniff."

Si-Hun lowered his head, and tears flowed down his cheeks. He took off the pendant on Ludwig's neck while holding the holy sword.

"Okay," Si-Hun said. He put the pendant around his neck. "I will never forget."

When he stood back up, there was an intense light burning in his eyes.

Ludwig, a Watcher of Light... He'd been corrupted by a demon, but his strong will and beliefs managed to be passed down to Si-Hun.

Chapter 225 - Abyss Knight

'But will he be able to use that?'

Oh Kang-Woo took a glance at Kim Si-Hun, who held the holy sword with a sad expression on his face.

One couldn't say that Si-Hun's soul was completely pure.

Just taking into consideration what kind of person he was, one could say that he had a pure soul, but he was Kang-Woo's Familiar and was connected to him through the Authority of Subordination.

Their souls were deeply connected.

'But it's at least not vomiting anymore.'

Unlike how it was vomiting sacred power as if it were having a seizure, it now looked quite comfortable. Rather than accepting Si-Hun as its owner, it was as if it were saying that Si-Hun's soul was bearable.

'Shit.'

He thought he'd be able to get a Mythic-grade weapon, but he had been unable to get it because the sword itself possessed an ego.

'Well, I guess it's not terrible.'

Kang-Woo glanced down at Si-Hun, who was holding the holy sword and looking down at Ludwig's corpse with eyes full of determination. Ever since his El Cuero Blade had been destroyed during his battle against Mammon, Si-Hun had been using a Unique-grade sword.

'It's too low-grade for Si-Hun.'

Phrases like "the quality of swords being pointless to a true swordsman" were complete shit. As one was able to control more power, a weapon durable enough to handle that power was crucial.

'Tsk. It's too bad, but I guess it can't be helped.'

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue and turned his head. After all, he already had the Key of the Demonic Sea—a Transcendent-grade weapon. He had no reason to be so hung up over the holy sword.

'Come to think of it, when is this thing gonna finish digesting?'

Kang-Woo took a glance at his black ring, which wasn't reacting at all. It wasn't like he desperately needed a weapon at the moment, but not being able to use something he normally could was disappointing.

"Let's go back, Si-Hun."

"... Yes, hyung-nim."

Si-Hun nodded with a heavy expression on his face.

Kang-Woo turned around.

'Angels, huh...?'

He narrowed his eyes. He actually had no intention of going against the angels. Even in the case of Ludwig, if he had not had the power to locate the Demonic Sea, he wouldn't have done anything to him.

'There's no reason to fight them.'

As long as they didn't notice him, he had no reason to antagonize the angels... or that was what he had thought.

"Ngh."

His mind became a mess.

'They're probably gonna keep coming.'

Ludwig had died. Although Kang-Woo had no idea who had corrupted him or which demon had laid their hands on the Watchers of Light, one thing was for sure:

'They won't stop here.'

The goal of the angels was to eradicate demons from all dimensions linked to the Nine Hells. There was no way they would sit idly by after the death of a Watcher of Light, even if it had occurred in another world.

'And there's no way that Raphael thinks lowly of Ludwig.'

Although it was for an otherworldly matter, he had sent Ludwig to answer the request from the gods of Earth. No one sent the dregs of their organization or dispatched employees as diplomats. In other words, Ludwig was a very important individual to the celestial realm.

'If that's the case...'

Kang-Woo kept thinking. The more important Ludwig was to Raphael, the easier things became.

'Of course, that's as long as the celestial realm doesn't have another item with the same capability as the holy sword Ludwig...'

He'd learned that there were items that could locate the Demonic Sea, which was a huge problem for Kang-Woo.

'The chances aren't high.'

No, he was sure it was close to zero.

He recalled Ludwig's last moments and how desperate he was to tell Raphael the truth.

'If there were other items besides the holy sword Ludwig with such an ability...'

Ludwig wouldn't have been so desperate.

If Raphael himself had the ability to locate the Demonic Sea, the truth would have been exposed even without Ludwig struggling so desperately with his life on the line.

Kang-Woo had to be careful about unexpected variables, but at this moment in time, it would be okay to think there was no other item capable of locating the Demonic Sea.

'This is...'

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

A storyline started to be drawn in his head.

The forces of the celestial realm that would involve themselves with Earth in earnest and the Demon of Prophecy, Satan...

If he could direct both factions the way he wanted to, it wasn't a complicated plan to pull off.

'Good.'

A smile appeared on his face. Having a reliable ally was always welcome.

"Si-Hun..." Gaia was in deep sorrow after hearing Si-Hun's weeping. She turned her wheelchair and rolled to the source of the sound, probably to console Si-Hun.

"Gaia." Kang-Woo held Gaia's shoulder. "It would be best if we let Si-Hun be alone for the moment."

"Ah... B-But..."

"It's okay. He isn't one to despair because of something like this."

"..."

She lightly trembled. She seemed to be shocked that the forces of the celestial realm, which she had relied on, had been destroyed so thoroughly by a demon.

"Who could have done something so..."

"You know there is only one."

"..."

Gaia closed her mouth. She pictured a red demon mask appearing from an endless darkness.

"How many more atrocities must be committed... for him to be satisfied?" she said in a sad voice.

Kang-Woo put a bit more strength into his hand, which was over her shoulder. He lowered his head and spoke in a trembling voice that made it sound like he was suppressing his rage. "I will never forget what happened today."

"Kang-Woo..."

"I will make him pay, no matter what it takes."

The Demon of Prophecy, Satan...

There was no need to think deeply about the culprit behind Ludwig's corruption. The culprit of everything was the demon among demons—the absolute evil driving the world to its ruin. Satan had spread so much despair that the extent of this despair had become unfathomable.

"... You will be able to do it." Gaia nodded while holding back her tears.

Kang-Woo made a faint smile and took his hand off her shoulder.

* * *

[Hehehe. As expected of you, Master... You have brought me such wonderful material.]

It had been a week since Ludwig had been corrupted after falling for Satan's wicked scheme. Vaal Zahak smiled while looking at Ludwig's corpse, which Kang-Woo had brought him.

Kang-Woo sat on a chair inside the laboratory while making a tired expression. He had built a laboratory for Vaal Zahak inside Balrog's residence. It resembled a lab belonging to either a black mage or a mad scientist.

"It was extremely hard getting that, you know."

Kang-Woo sighed while leaning back in the chair. Switching Ludwig's corpse for a fake had been harder than initially thought.

Just as Kang-Woo had expected, the forces of the celestial realm had come to Earth soon after Ludwig's death. Angels like Raphael had yet to come, but a large number of Watchers of Light were busily investigating the truth behind Ludwig's death. Unlike Ludwig, they did not cooperate with Guardians and carried out their own investigations.

'I get it.'

From their point of view, Guardians members were also suspects. Even if Guardians was excluded from the list of suspects, they still couldn't trust Guardians.

After all, Guardians had not been able to do anything while Ludwig had been dying within a demon's trap.

And most of all, Si-Hun had been the one to kill Ludwig.

Even when there was footage of Ludwig's corruption, there was no way that they would trust the people of the world that they had sent their diplomat to.

'This needs to be resolved, too.'

It wasn't good for Guardians and the celestial realm to suspect each other. They were not enemies but comrades and allies who needed to band together against the powerful foe that was Satan.

In any case, swapping the corpse with a fake one had been extremely tiresome for Kang-Woo.

"So, how is it?" Kang-Woo asked while leaning back in the chair.

He'd gone through all that trouble to get Ludwig's corpse because of the Abyss Knight, a superior form of the Death Knight that Vaal Zahak had mentioned.

[Wow. Ahh, good. Truly... phenomenal,] Vaal Zahak said as if he were high. He softly caressed Ludwig's corpse with his hands, which were nothing but bones.

"Is it that impressive?" Kang-Woo asked.

[Yes. I believe... we will manage to get something even more impressive than expected.]

"Oh?"

Kang-Woo's eyes shone. Just from Ludwig's battle against Balrog, Kang-Woo could tell that he was amazing. Even if Ludwig was the apostle of an archangel, being able to face Balrog was something worthy of respect.

'But is it actually that impressive?'

He was honestly a bit suspicious. From Kang-Woo's subjective point of view, the extraordinary thing had not been Ludwig himself but his holy sword. In other words, Kang-Woo thought that Ludwig's power, which had put him on par with Balrog, had been thanks to his equipment, not his own power.

[No, his physical body is not what is phenomenal about him.]

"Hm? Then what?"

[His vengeful soul. I can feel an enormous amount of resentment within it. I cannot even imagine how mortified he must have felt at the moment of his death.]

"..."

Kang-Woo went silent after hearing Vaal Zahak's words. He nodded, making a heavy expression.

'I get it.'

Ludwig's piety had been the real deal. He was so upright that he had even told the members of Guardians to run away while he was on the verge of death and his mind was being dominated by a demon. Satan had corrupted a saint of such character. It was hard to imagine what Ludwig had to suffer through when he was being corrupted.

'I can't just sit here and do nothing about it.'

He couldn't keep taking Satan's evil acts lying down.

Kang-Woo clenched his fists.

'It's time to turn the tables.'

A firm determination was imprinted in his mind.

* * *

At the end of a massive ice tunnel was a wriggling black sphere thirty meters in diameter. A portion of the black sphere had been severed as if a blade had cut through it. A woman with bandages all over her body approached the giant black sphere and knelt on one knee.

"Lord Satan."

[... What is it?]

The black sphere fluctuated.

Satan groaned as if enduring pain. Black blood poured from the place that seemed to have been cut with a blade.

"The apostles of Raphael are crossing over to Earth."

[Raphael...?] Satan asked in disbelief. [Are they chasing after Lucifer?]

"No. I am not sure of the exact circumstances, but... a demon has apparently brutally murdered one of Raphael's apostles."

[Hah.] Satan laughed in a mocking voice.

Raphael was one of the four archangels of the celestial realm. Satan knew the archangels very well.

[Which moronic demon decided to cross Raphael?]

Satan laughed in disbelief.

Chapter 226 - Everyone Does That, Don't They?

"So, can you create that Abyss Knight right away?" Oh Kang-Woo asked.

[Mm... There is a bit of a problem.]

Vaal Zahak opened his mouth after looking at Ludwig's corpse.

Kang-Woo frowned.

"What problem?"

[There is still far too much sacred power left within this man named Ludwig. We will have to wait until all the sacred power dissipates from his body. I cannot proceed like this.]

Vaal Zahak made a troubled expression.

"Hm."

Kang-Woo fell into thought and walked toward Ludwig's body.

'Sacred power, huh?'

Mana was the energy of nature that humans, monsters, and even gods with Divinity like Tirion used.

Demonic energy was a destructive energy derived from the Nine Hells.

And then sacred power was an energy of the completely opposite nature from demonic energy.

Of course, the three energies were the same in the sense that they could be channeled into power to break and destroy things—it wasn't like one would heal someone if one swung a weapon with sacred power.

Although their properties were different, they were all, fundamentally, energies.

'I wonder what would happen?'

Kang-Woo's eyes shone with great interest.

In the case of mana, he had the Trait Mana-Craving Demon, which transformed mana into demonic energy, but he'd never absorbed sacred power before, nor had he acquired it through other means.

'I wonder if I can transform sacred power into demonic energy like I can with mana.'

If he could, it would be wonderful news to know that he could absorb sacred power from individuals as powerful as Ludwig.

[We should first wait until the sacred power naturally dissipates from his b—]

"No."

Kang-Woo spread his hands over Ludwig's corpse. Black smoke poured from his hands and covered the corpse.

'Authority of Predation.'

Sharp teeth sprouted from the black smoke. Rather than a beast's teeth, they were more like countless small teeth resembling suckers.

Kang-Woo had modified them so they would only absorb Ludwig's sacred power without leaving a scratch on his body.

Slurp.

The teeth, so small that they were invisible to the naked eye, bit into Ludwig and absorbed the sacred power within him.

Whoom.

White light poured out of Ludwig's corpse and entered Kang-Woo.

Crack!

"Kuh."

Kang-Woo frowned.

He felt his skin distort where the sacred power flowed into him, and he felt as if he were burning from within.

'My demonic energy must be resisting it.'

Kang-Woo clicked his tongue. If the two energies repelled each other, he couldn't forcefully absorb the sacred power. Just as he was about to stop absorbing it...

Riiing.

[Sacred Power has risen by 1.]

"What?"

He was bewildered by the unexpected message.

'A stat rose?'

He laughed in disbelief.

'I mean, I guess it makes sense that the Sacred Power stat would rise when I absorb sacred power.'

Still, he was the demon king, so it was weird for him to have sacred power.

'Am I being corrupted? What should I call this?'

An angel with demonic energy was known as a fallen angel, but what would they call the opposite situation?

'Well, whatever the case...'

The name did not matter.

Kang-Woo fell into thought while looking at the stat that had been added to his status window.

'Should I absorb more or not?'

He had no idea whether it would be a plus or a minus for him.

Although it was true that they were opposite energies, they were not excessively denying each other to the point that Kang-Woo couldn't absorb the sacred power. As long as he absorbed the sacred power while controlling his demonic energy, the absorption process would not be hard at all.

'I'll just absorb it and see what happens.'

He needed to check how the sacred power and demonic energy would react in his normal state—or in other words, after he had absorbed the sacred energy and converted it into a stat.

If it hindered him from circulating the demonic energy within his body, there was no need to have it.

Riiing

[Sacred Power has risen by 1.]

[Sacred Power has risen by 1.]

.....

...

He kept absorbing Ludwig's sacred power.

The stat was so low that it was rising at a very quick pace.

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and controlled his demonic energy. He felt a single ray of light flowing into the endless darkness. It was as if he had found a bioluminescent organism within the pitch-black abyss.

He thought it was fascinating and beautiful.

'This must be sacred power.'

He raised his hand, and a small white light gathered.

He felt as if he were gently floating in the air.

Although it sounded unclear, the power truly felt holy and sacred.

'I think I'd look super important if I wrapped myself in this.'

If he covered his body with demonic energy, he would give the impression of being destructive and aggressive, so sacred power would have the opposite effect—he would exude a warm and trustworthy aura.

'This should be useful.'

It was only on the level of an optical illusion. It had nothing to do with a person's real characteristics or qualities, and it was more akin to clothes. But even so, one could not deny that attire was extremely important in human relationships and, if taken a step further, in otherworldly relationships.

Swindlers always looked neat for a reason, after all.

Who would invest in the new coin you were promoting if you were wearing rags?

'I'm not a swindler, though.'

There was no one further from instigation, fabrication, and swindling than Kang-Woo. Leaving that aside, this sacred power would undeniably be of help to him. Thinking about how he had to build a positive relationship with the angels from now on, sacred power was absolutely necessary.

'I can't rely only on the Ruler of Demonic Energy Trait.'

Ruler of Demonic Energy made his demonic energy feel like mana. In other words, he couldn't cause an effect similar to sacred power with it.

Also, since he had confirmed that demonic energy could be detected with the power of the holy sword Ludwig, having sacred power would have many uses.

'There's a chance I could interfere with demonic energy detection with sacred power.'

The chances were not high; there was no way he'd be able to conceal the infinite amount of demonic energy within the Ten Thousand Demon Core with just Ludwig's sacred power. An ocean did not become freshwater just from pouring a bucket of freshwater into it, but he should be able to benefit to an extent by using sacred power in tandem with the Ruler of Demonic Energy Trait.

'It's not hindering my demonic energy circulation either.'

That was the most important thing.

If he consciously regulated his demonic energy, he could avoid it clashing with sacred power. It was the same as using the Heavenly Dragon Cultivation Technique while walking.

[D-Did you just absorb sacred power?] Vaal Zahak asked in confusion as if he'd just witnessed something unbelievable.

"Oh, yeah.."

Kang-Woo nodded. He couldn't understand why Vaal Zahak was so surprised.

'If you can control demonic energy, it isn't hard to have both energies simultaneously.'

He thought that even Vaal Zahak should be able to do it.

[What in the... That should not be possible...]

Vaal Zahak put his hands on top of his skull in confusion.

Kang-Woo tilted his head in wonder and placed his hands on top of Ludwig's corpse again.

"I'll suck all the sacred power out of him."

[Wai—]

Before Vaal Zahak could finish talking, the Authority of Predation surrounded Ludwig's body.

Thin and long teeth pierced the corpse.

"Haaa."

Kang-Woo was beginning to pant a little.

Controlling demonic energy while accepting sacred power was just enough of a challenge to stimulate his brain cells.

'This is pretty fun.'

It felt like playing a well-balanced puzzle game.

Kang-Woo accepted sacred power while smiling.

Riiing.

[Sacred Power has risen by 1.]

[Sacred Power stat has reached 73!]

'73, huh?'

Although it looked like a lot at first glance, that wasn't really the case.

'Most of it was annihilated during the absorption process.'

In terms of stat points, Ludwig's Sacred Energy stat likely surpassed a hundred points easily.

Considering that each point made a bigger difference the higher the stat was, 73 was not high in the slightest.

'Well, there's nothing I can do about it.'

The Authority of Predation couldn't even absorb demonic energy with 100% efficiency, so there was no chance it would be able to perfectly absorb sacred power, which was something it hadn't done before.

'I wanna test it out a bit.'

He wondered how it would feel to use sacred power and demonic energy at the same time.

Kang-Woo raised his left arm. He drew out demonic energy and then used sacred power.

Rumble!!!

The lab shook.

An enormous amount of energy burst out as if the two energies underwent a chemical reaction, and they ran wild around his arm.

"Kuh," he grunted.

The skin of his left arm split, and black blood poured out.

Then, for a moment...

'Gray?'

He saw a gray energy he'd never seen before gather around his left arm. Before he could even think about that gray mana, he felt an intense pain spread through his left arm.

"Fucking hell."

It hurt like hell. The pain was hard even for Kang-Woo, who was used to pain, to resist.

He controlled his demonic energy and stopped it from clashing with the sacred power.

'I guess it's a bit of a stretch to mix the energies.'

He was curious about the gray energy he'd just seen, but he couldn't carelessly try to mix them.

'It hurts way too much.'

The pain was almost unbearable.

Vaal Zahak opened his mouth and asked in disbelief, [Wha... What was... D-Did you really absorb all of Ludwig's sacred power?]

"I mean, it wasn't that hard."

[What are you talking about? Sacred power and demonic energy are clashing energies. Unless you have full control of the demonic energy in your body, there is no way you could stop them from...]

Vaal Zahak's words were cut short. He began to tremble.

[Master, could it be... do you always finely control your demonic energy?]

"Huh? Isn't that obvious? Everyone does it, don't they?" he asked in confusion.

Demonic energy was destructive in nature.

He couldn't fully control the energy within the Ten Thousand Demon Core because it was so boundless, but he always kept the demonic energy available to him under control at all times.

If he didn't, his entire being would end up being consumed by the Ten Thousand Demon Core, and he would die.

[...]

Vaal Zahak remained silent.

Finely controlling one's demonic energy? What kind of nonsense was that?

'Such a thing is...'

It was equivalent to controlling every single blood cell in one's body.

'What in the...'

Vaal Zahak shuddered. He looked at his master, Kang-Woo, who was looking at him and tilting his head in confusion.

'What is this monster?'

His master was an incomprehensible existence.

Like a stigma, a deep fear was imprinted into Vaal Zahak's bones.

Chapter 227 - Love Advice

"Let's see..."

Kang-Woo picked up the documents he'd received from Kim Si-Hun.

The documents mentioned the recent movements of Guardians and countries worldwide; they also included the restoration work done to restore territories occupied by monsters in detail.

"China and Japan have almost been fully restored."

There were deserted territories that no one lived in due to the SS-rank Gates in Shanghai, China and Sapporo, Japan.

As the size of Guardians increased, the restoration process became faster.

After the Day of Calamity, half of the population of Earth had disappeared, so in reality, there was no need to explore and reclaim those territories.

'But they need to level up.'

Guardians had become massive after a huge number of people joined them, so it was necessary to push them into dangerous areas for them to grow.

If humanity couldn't handle fighting monsters, they would be absolutely useless in battles against demons.

"Next."

He turned the pages to the next document and read the information he was actually most interested in at the moment: the information on the movements of Raphael's apostles, the Watchers of Light.

"... Nothing yet, huh?"

They were moving on their own without collaborating with Guardians. The Watchers of Light were still trying to find the culprit behind Ludwig's death, but they hadn't shown any movements yet.

'I was hoping they'd move more actively.'

He needed the help of the Watchers of Light to keep Satan's forces in check, but they weren't moving at all. He wasn't sure if they were waiting for something or were investigating through other routes.

'Are they waiting for an angel?'

Kang-Woo's eyes narrowed.

There was a high chance that they were not strong enough to face Satan, the culprit behind the corruption of Ludwig, the wielder of the holy sword.

'If they are the surveying party...'

It meant that a main force consisting of angels would arrive soon. There was also a chance that Raphael, one of the archangels, would come to Earth as well.

"Well... I guess I'll wait until an angel arrives."

The angels were important allies that would be of help in their battle against Satan, the Demon of Prophecy.

Fighting against Satan when angels weren't here yet would be idiotic.

'... Even if we can beat him without them.'

It was a matter of cost and benefit.

Kang-Woo didn't have a reason to face Satan alone.

'Not just that...'

Satan possessed Divinity.

Kang-Woo wasn't sure where he'd obtained it, but he needed to be prepared for unexpected variables.

Knock, knock.

He heard someone knock on the door while he was reading through the documents. A smile appeared on his face.

'Darliiiiiiiiiing!!'

Kang-Woo coughed and then opened the door.

He saw Han Seol-Ah holding a steaming cup of coffee.

"Are you busy, Kang-Woo?"

"Nope. I'm done with the urgent matters."

Except for reading through documents, he didn't have anything to do until the angels arrived on Earth.

A smile appeared on Seol-Ah's face after hearing that.

"I-In that case..."

"Why don't we go get some air?"

"Ah... O-Okay!"

Seol-Ah quickly nodded.

It was an awkward but rosy atmosphere. It was the first time Kang-Woo felt such emotions since he was born.

'I'm so glad I came back to Earth.'

If he were still in Hell, he would have gone his entire life without feeling such things.

He asked, "Where do you want to go? We can pretty much go anywhere in the world through the Hall of Protec—"

"No. I'd like to go for a walk in the nearby park."

"The park? But we could go anywhere..."

Physical distance and money didn't pose any problems. Kang-Woo was now among the wealthiest people in the world. It didn't matter if it were a luxury hotel or a Michelin 3-star restaurant—they could go anywhere.

"Fufu, it's okay. Let's leave that for next time." Seol-Ah grabbed Kang-Woo's hands while smiling brightly, pulling him gently.

They opened the door and walked out, and cool air brushed past their cheeks.

They walked through the park while chatting about all sorts of things. They didn't talk about anything important—they just talked about Echidna, a TV program they'd enjoyed recently, and where they wanted to visit.

Kang-Woo found it refreshing to talk about things that had absolutely no weight to them, unlike the things he usually talked about with Balrog and Lilith.

A smile appeared on his face.

'This must be why...'

He began thinking that he had perhaps been able to endure so many years in Hell for this moment.

"Should we take a seat somewhere?" Kang-Woo asked.

"Ah, okay."

Kang-Woo looked around for a bench to sit on, but in the evening, the park was crowded with families, couples, and students.

'Authority of Fear.'

Kang-Woo used the Authority of Fear for a very brief moment at a very low intensity.

The people around the park paled and left the park as if running away.

A satisfied smile appeared on his face.

"... Everyone suddenly went away," Seol-Ah remarked.

"They sure did," Kang-Woo said slyly while shrugging.

Seol-Ah sighed as if she had more or less realized who the culprit was.

They sat together on the bench in a moment of silence.

"Come to think of it, is there any place you want to visit, Kang-Woo?"

"Hmm, I'm not sure since I don't know much..."

One needed to have done things before knowing what one wanted to choose as entertainment.

Before returning to Earth, the only forms of entertainment he could think of were reading free webnovels and webtoons and eating. He couldn't think of any place that he wanted to visit.

"I guess we're the same in that aspect." Seol-Ah lightly laughed. She also had a harsh childhood, so she wasn't used to doing things for entertainment's sake. "I really wanted to go to Disneyland with you back then."

"..."

She narrowed her eyes and pinched Kang-Woo's side.

Kang-Woo remained silent after remembering what had happened in Japan. He couldn't find any excuse.

"You will go with me next time, won't you?" she asked.

"... Of course."

"Hehe."

Seol-Ah smiled and slowly hugged Kang-Woo's arm.

He felt a soft sensation spreading through his arm.

'Oh my fucking God.'

Kang-Woo's eyes widened, and his pupils shook.

Seol-Ah placed her head on his shoulder.

"Let's stay like this for a bit."

'We could stay like this forever.'

Kang-Woo gulped. He was extremely unfamiliar with such situations, and it was very awkward.

'Fuck, I don't know how to deal with situations like this.'

All he'd done for the past ten millennia was fight. Even after returning to Earth, that lifestyle continued. He'd never experienced something like this.

'What should I do?'

His mind was in jumbles.

'Do I set the wedding date now?'

He couldn't think of any other option than a wedding.

'Shit. I haven't bought a ring yet.'

He couldn't help but blame his lack of preparation. He felt anxious.

'Where should we go for our honeymoon? Hawaii? What about educating our children? Should we send them to private school?'

"Kang-Woo?"

"No. Private isn't good. Public is best for primary school."

"... Pardon?"

"Yeah... Social media, was it? I heard that you get bullied if you don't do that these days. What age should I get them a smartphone?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I guess I should buy annuities in real estate starting now."

"Excuse me? Kang-Woo?"

Seol-Ah waved her hand at Kang-Woo, who'd fallen into thought, but her words didn't reach him.

* * *

'Why is he like this all of a sudden...?'

Seol-Ah looked at Kang-Woo in confusion.

He kept mumbling things about retirement and raising children with a scary look on his face.

"Mmm."

Seol-Ah looked at him with a troubled expression and then held him a little tighter. His warmth spread from her chest throughout her body.

"Hehehe."

She giggled. After her self-destruction-like confession succeeded last time, every single day felt like a dream to her.

'Though it's a shame we don't get to spend a lot of time together...'

Still, being connected with the person one liked was a joyous thing.

She looked down at her own hands.

'I need to work harder.'

She didn't want to stay by his side while being one-sidedly protected. After all, the world's destiny rested on Kang-Woo's shoulders.

'At least a bit...'

She wanted to lighten his heavy burden.

After laying her head on Kang-Woo's shoulder for a bit, Seol-Ah let his arm go. She really wanted to stay like that for a bit longer, but it was time to go back home. After all, she had a skill that she was training.

"Kang-Woo."

Kang-Woo was still mumbling about things in a state of confusion.

Seol-Ah pouted and clenched her fists.

'I-In times like this...'

She had recently learned that she needed to be more assertive.

Seol-Ah looked around to see if anyone was looking. Then, she took a deep breath. She raised her head and kissed him on the cheek.

"H-Have you come back to your senses?"

"..."

Seol-Ah blushed while avoiding his gaze.

Kang-Woo nodded.

"It's time to go back," Seol-Ah remarked.

The two walked across the park and reached the entrance to their apartment.

"You can go up first," Seol-Ah said.

"Why? Do you need to stop by somewhere?"

"No, I just want a bit more fresh air," Seol-Ah said while fanning her reddened face.

Kang-Woo thought about it for a bit but ended up entering the apartment first.

"Phew."

Seol-Ah sighed and put her hands on her bright red cheeks. The sensation remaining on her lips was sending tingles down her entire body.

Step, step.

She heard footsteps and turned her head toward the source of the sound.

"... I'm glad," the woman said, a smile on her face.

It was Kurosaki Yurie—no, Lilith, who was inside her body.

"Ah..."

Seol-Ah let out an exclamation.

Lilith...

She knew about her long relationship with Kang-Woo. Her feelings became heavy.

Lilith said, "Congratulations. It seems you've won... the demon king's heart."

"..."

"Fufu. I'd love to know your secret."

She felt the emotions hidden beneath Lilith's smile.

Seol-Ah hesitated. She honestly had nothing to say to Lilith. It was a simple matter—she'd succeeded, and Lilith had failed.

That was it.

'But...'

Seol-Ah's thoughts were in a mess. Lilith had spent a millennium next to Kang-Woo, so she couldn't ignore her feelings.

After thinking about it for a while, Seol-Ah opened her mouth.

"I-I think you should be a bit more assertive."

"I'm sorry?"

"That's what I did."

Seol-Ah had taken the first step...

Just with that, she was able to confirm Kang-Woo's feelings.

'Ms. Lilith was probably too passive.'

—Just like how she used to be.

If not, there was no way Kang-Woo would have ignored the feelings of such a beautiful woman.

"More assertive, you say?"

"Yes. I think that you should show him your sincere and honest feelings."

"Ohh."

Lilith's eyes shone.

Seol-Ah grabbed her hand—they were truly beautiful hands.

"To be honest, I'm still not sure if I'm doing the right thing, but... do you remember what you told me before? You said that you wanted to heal Kang-Woo's wounds. Um... I... don't think I can do that alone. Because... I don't know Kang-Woo's past."

Seol-Ah struggled to say that last sentence. She'd asked Kang-Woo numerous times, but he'd always avoided talking about it on purpose.

"Seol-Ah..."

"I wish for you... to convey your feelings to him as well, Ms. Lilith." Seol-Ah smiled brightly. "I'm sure that Kang-Woo will understand your feelings if you are even more assertive and honest in conveying them. Oh, that's right. You said you could return to your true form, didn't you? You're stunning even now, but... I'm sure he would like your true form even more."

"Ah..."

"I'll be rooting for you."

Lilith trembled a bit, and she hugged Seol-Ah. "Thank you. A bit more assertive... I see. You're right. I've been doing nothing but waiting all this time."

A smile appeared on Lilith's face, and her long black hair rose into the sky.

"I'll muster up the courage to take a step forward just like you, Seol-Ah."

Her floating hair slowly transformed into green tentacles.

Chapter 228 - Halting Operations

"Haaa, haaa, haaa."

A man's heavy breathing was heard, and his clothes were soaked in cold sweat.

A silhouette shot forward from the darkness at an incredible speed.

Slam!

He aggressively opened the door of a building with an abnormally tall ceiling.

[My king?]

Balrog, who was training alone in the big space, tilted his head.

"Hide me for a bit."

[What is wrong?]

"Something... something's wrong."

Kang-Woo kept talking with a hardened expression on his face.

After he returned home from hanging out with Han Seol-Ah, he looked over the documents he'd received from Kim Si-Hun once more. Then, right when he was getting ready to sleep...

He heard the sound of a flowing viscous liquid. He had shot straight up from his bed the moment he heard the sound of something wriggling his way along the wall.

'I know this sound.'

He felt a familiar uneasiness. A premonition-like sense was telling him to escape. Kang-Woo had left his house without hesitation and had run full speed to Balrog's home.

[Hahaha! You used to do this a few times in Hell. Oh, my king...]

Balrog walked toward him, smiling.

'Don't smile, you look scary,' Kang-Woo thought.

Balrog placed his giant hand on Kang-Woo's back.

[If you wanted to see me, you could have just said so... As long as you summon me, I will come to you from anywhere.]

'The hell are you talking about?'

Kang-Woo's mouth fell open in disbelief.

Balrog wiped off his sweat with a towel the size of a blanket as if he were satisfied just by the fact that Kang-Woo had come to see him.

"Haaa."

Kang-Woo wanted to say something, but he just sighed as if he were too tired to say anything. He looked around.

'It feels like I'm in Gulliver's Travels.'

All of the furniture inside was specifically built for Balrog, who was five meters tall. Since all of the furniture in the room was meant for Balrog's size, he felt like a dwarf in a country of giants.

He lightly jumped and landed on top of a giant couch.

"Is there anything you find uncomfortable?" he asked Balrog in passing.

Balrog smiled.

[Nothing at all.]

"... But I'm sure it's uncomfortable living by yourself."

Balrog had countless subordinates beneath him in Hell, but this was Earth—he had no subordinates or a comrade to chat with.

Demons were not emotionless, so they also felt lonely.

[Hup.].

Balrog sat on the couch.

Kang-Woo bounced in the air as the couch shook.

Balrog opened his mouth and said, [I am fine. After all, you are here, my king.]

"..."

[I was actually more lonely in Hell after you left.]

"... Why?"

Kang-Woo couldn't understand it. If Kang-Woo had disappeared, Balrog would have been the one in charge of the demon king army since he had been the second-in-command.

'Balrog probably took over the role of demon king.'

Since all seven princes of Hell had died, no one but Balrog would be fit for the role if the ancient demonic beasts were excluded.

Balrog had acquired the authority to rule over the Nine Hells, so Kang-Woo couldn't understand why he'd felt lonely in Hell.

[Because you were not there, my king.]

'You're giving me goosebumps, man.'

He felt chills at Balrog's calm reply.

Kang-Woo shifted away from him a little while feeling uneasy.

Balrog clapped as if he'd remembered something.

[Oh, right. Would you like to try this, my king?]

He walked toward the giant refrigerator and took out a giant silver container.

"...Draft beer?"

It was a giant draft beer container they often had in restaurants and bars.

Balrog nodded and brought out two of the giant containers.

[Do you remember when we had a feast of blood with the humans where we roasted and devoured the corpse of an animal?]

"Are you... talking about the barbecue we had at the picnic?"

[Ohhh, so you call that ruthless act a barbecue. Roasting the flesh of prey while laughing... Humans are not to be trifled with.]

"No, I mean... if you put it like that, you're right, but..."

[Anyway, I had this thing known as beer while I was there. The fizzy sensation that it gives... I have never tasted anything like it in Hell.]

"You have a sense of taste?" Kang-Woo asked back in surprise.

A demon's taste buds were almost non-existent because, after all, they didn't need to eat or drink, so there was no reason for them to have a sense of taste.

To them, eating the corpse of another demon was like a victory ceremony.

[Kekeke. I got more and more used to the taste after I kept drinking it, but I still can't understand the flavor of the kimchi stew that you enjoy so much.]

"You dare insult kimchi stew?"

[Hahaha! My apologies.]

Balrog smiled brightly.

Kang-Woo smiled as he recalled memories of the past when they were still in the Ninth Hell. He remembered that the conversations he had had with Balrog between the wars against the princes of Hell had been quite entertaining.

Crack! Pshh!!!

'Oh, fuck.'

Balrog tore the top off the draft beer container, and the beer overflowed from it. He picked up the other huge draft beer container and gave it to Kang-Woo.

[From what I have seen, humans do it like this. Ahem, chee—]

"Leaving the cheers aside, what are you going to do about the floor?"

[Oh, that is no problem. Vaal Zahak cleans it up on his own if I just leave it.]

"No, how can you treat our Vaal Zahak like—"

[Hehe. I am above him in rank, am I not? Also, I am not sure who he learned from, but he seems quite used to doing housework.]

"It's probably innate talent."

Balrog burst into laughter and brought the beer container toward Kang-Woo once again.

Kang-Woo sighed and snapped his finger.

He activated the Authority of Freezing, and created a cup of ice that he poured some of the alcohol into. He then raised the glass.

Clink.

It was an unexpected toast.

Although it had nothing to do with the coming battles, he didn't feel like he was doing a useless thing.

Kang-Woo recalled when he had first met Balrog. It had been a while since the memory had been jogged.

"Kaaaah! That's refreshing. Do you have any snacks to go with it?"

[If you would like, I will invade a Demon Cult branch right now and collect the heads of demons—]

"Never mind. Jeez, there's no getting through to you."

Kang-Woo shook his head and took a sip of beer, and the fizz traveled down his throat.

There was a refreshing sensation, and his unease was swept away.

[This reminds me of the past.]

"The past?"

[Yes, the memory of when I first met you, my king.]

"..."

Kang-Woo remained silent after he heard what Balrog said. They happened to be thinking the same thing.

"My name is Balrog."

Kang-Woo remembered their very first conversation.

"I see the rumors that a human had been able to climb up to the Ninth Hell were true."

He raised his head and saw Balrog chugging down the beer container.

"I have come to ask you for a favor."

His body had been covered in wounds, and his eyes were dark, like the eyes of a dead fish rather than the eyes of a demon.

"Please... kill me."

"..."

The memory was cut short.

Kang-Woo downed the beer in silence, and a bitter taste spread through his mouth.

[I still remember what you said to me back then, my king.]

"Really? It's been so long that I can't remember."

[You said, 'Stop shitting around being a fucking drama queen and screw off,' I believe it was.]

"Come on. There's no way I was that harsh to you."

[You actually said more curse words that I could not understand. I did not know Korean back then, so I could only understand the demon language mixed in between.]

"..."

There was silence.

Kang-Woo coughed and avoided his gaze.

'How weird. There's no way I said something like that.'

Past memories were easily fabricated, or so they said.

Kang-Woo shook his head and poured another cup of beer.

Clink.

He once again clinked glasses with Balrog.

'This isn't bad.'

Drinking while talking about the past...

He never imagined he'd do it with Balrog, but it didn't feel bad.

'One day, when everything's over...'

He downed the glass while wondering if days like this would continue in the future.

* * *

[Myyyyyyy kiiaiiiiing~~]

"Urgh."

[Sniff. Do you have any idea how lonely I have been without you, my king?]

"How the fuck does a demon get drunk?"

[Drunk? Kahahaha! There is no way I, Balrog, would become drunk from mere alcohol!]

"You're drunk right now, dammit!!"

[Nonsense. Okay, take a look at this. See? I can walk perfectly straight!]

Crack!

Balrog stepped on a table and crushed it to smithereens. Then, he hugged Kang-Woo with his muscular arms. Perhaps it was because he had been training before Kang-Woo had come, but an immense stench of sweat attacked Kang-Woo's sense of smell.

"Urghh."

Kang-Woo couldn't breathe.

Click.

The door opened.

"Balrog, have you seen Kang-Woo hyung-nim? I asked Seol-Ah, but she said he suddenly went out —"

Si-Hun entered. His expression hardened when he saw Balrog hugging Kang-Woo.

"Si-Hun, help m—"

Kang-Woo extended his hands, and Si-Hun trembled.

"Balrog... you..."

Chilling bloodlust rose up.

'Help me, Si-Hun.'

Kang-Woo looked at Si-Hun with hopeful eyes while he was being restrained by Balrog.

"How could you do something so envi—I mean, disrespectful?"

'Si-Hun?'

"Arm yourself, Balrog."

'What the hell are you talking about?'

"I challenge you to a duel."

'Excuse me?'

[Kahahaha! Sounds good to me!]

'What's good?'

BOOM.

Balrog got up.

[Let us see who is more fit to be the king's subordinate, human.]

"I wouldn't have it any other way."

'Stop, you crazy sons of bitches.'

Kang-Woo grabbed his head at the unexpected development of events.

Then...

Squelch.

He heard the sound of mucus dripping.

Kang-Woo's face turned pale.

"Hohohoho. I was wondering where you were. I finally found you."

"Ah..."

"I was given a very good piece of advice from Seol-Ah today. Yes... I have been far too passive until now."

"What? Passive? You?"

"Yes. I have realized I must be more assertive in communicating my feelings for you, my king."

"No, that's not the problem."

"Now, come here, my love."

Lilith embraced Kang-Woo.

Balrog and Si-Hun were fighting with weapons in their hands.

There was a huge vibration, and the building shook.

'Will days like this continue once everything's over?'

He felt that he was in the middle of an inescapable nightmare. He freed himself from the tentacles wrapping his body and ran away. He put his hand on the hand scanner to Vaal Zahak's secret laboratory in Balrog's house.

- Whirr. Scanning fingerprints.

- Error. Error.

- Halting operations.

- Operations halted.

"Wh-what? Why isn't it opening?"

The door was not opening due to the unknown mucus on the fingerprint scanning device.

"I can't open the door!"

Squelch.

"N-no!"

A tentacle wrapped around his body as if to stop him from escaping.

"This is crazy. I have to get out of here. Why can't I get out?"

AAAAAAAAAAHHH!

Chapter 229 - The Truth Will Never Die (1)

"Angels have arrived?"

"Yes, I just received a revelation," Gaia said with a nod.

She had summoned the core members of Guardians to the Hall of Protection, which included Kim Si-Hun, Grace McCubbin, Cha Yeon-Joo, and Tian Wuchen. They had gathered in the meeting room.

Si-Hun looked over the documents, which detailed the movements of the Watchers of Light on a map.

He remarked, "The Watchers of Light we've been watching have also made their move."

"It seems they decided to make a base in Africa," Yeon-Joo said after taking a glimpse at the documents.

Si-Hun nodded. "Yes. They're currently building a base where the confrontation between Lucifer and Satan took place. It seems like they're considering a long-term battle against Satan."

"From the pictures, it looks more like a fortress than some outpost."

Yeon-Joo laughed in disbelief.

As angels began to cross over to Earth, the Watchers of Light also made their move.

"How are they building this? I don't think there were more than a hundred Watchers of Light."

"The angels are also helping build the fortress, but what helps with the construction the most is... Do you see this in the photo?"

"What's this rock?"

"I believe it's a golem that moves with some sort of magical contraption. They're using this golem to build the fortress."

Yeon-Joo tilted her head in confusion.

The scale of their forces was far too big for their purpose to be simply investigating traces of Lucifer.

"It's likely their goal has changed," Kang-Woo answered. "They must have concluded that taking care of the Demon of Prophecy is more urgent than Lucifer."

"Makes sense..." Yeon-Joo nodded.

The scale of their forces indicated that they were more concerned about the Demon of Prophecy.

"But considering they're building their base there of all places, they don't seem to have given up on tracking down Lucifer yet."

"I think it is safe to assume... that the goal of the angels is to eradicate all demons."

"Isn't that better for us?"

As the meeting continued, most of the topics covered were things that Kang-Woo was already aware of, so he wasn't able to get new information.

"There is a problem," Gaia said. "According to the revelation... Lord Raphael has put off his cooperation with the gods of Earth."

"..."

"We seem to have lost his trust," Gaia explained in a heavy voice.

The expressions of the other Guardians members darkened. It was obvious why they had lost Raphael's trust.

"...Ludwig."

The other Guardians members remained silent as that name left Si-Hun's mouth.

The saint who had been corrupted by Satan, the Demon of Prophecy... It seemed that Ludwig was an apostle whom Raphael cared for deeply. The angels were shocked and extremely enraged by Ludwig's death. Naturally, Raphael was angry at Guardians, who had failed to protect Ludwig.

It was as if a country had accepted another country's request for support and dispatched a soldier to help that country, but that soldier ended up getting kidnapped and brutally murdered by foreign terrorists. Even if the fault was on the terrorists, the country that had sent the soldier would be angry at the country they had tried to help.

"This is no time to be frustrated," Gaia said in response to the grim atmosphere. "Lady Gaia's agent, Lord Uranus, is currently trying to convince Lord Raphael. Thankfully, he hasn't completely refused to cooperate. Most importantly..."

Gaia hesitated for a moment before continuing, "Lord Raphael said he wants to meet Protector Kim Si-Hun."

"Me...?"

"Yes."

Si-Hun was surprised at the sudden mention of his name.

Gaia explained, "It seems like Lord Ludwig had given Lord Raphael a report regarding you. Moreover, you're the next person to be chosen by the holy sword after Ludwig, so Lord Raphael said he would like to meet you himself."

Si-Hun remained silent and lowered his head while making a grim expression.

He seemed to be wondering if he had the right to meet Raphael considering he hadn't been able to do a thing when Satan corrupted Ludwig.

Si-Hun hesitated for a bit and then raised his head.

"I will go," he said in a firm voice.

If he avoided it, it would be like turning away from Ludwig's wretched death.

If he were truly saddened by Ludwig's death and felt guilty... If he truly wanted to inherit Ludwig's sword and his beliefs... Si-Hun couldn't ignore Raphael's proposal.

"I will try to convince Lord Raphael."

"Protector Kim Si-Hun..."

Gaia extended her hand while making a worried expression. Si-Hun grabbed her hand.

They were not allies yet, so sending Si-Hun into Raphael's territory would be dangerous. In the worst-case scenario, Raphael might take the holy sword and make Si-Hun pay the price of not being able to protect Ludwig.

If things were to go wrong, there was a chance they might end up becoming enemies.

"It's okay, Gaia."

Si-Hun grabbed her hand tighter, causing Gaia to blush.

"I will convince Lord Raphael and have him cooperate with Guardians," Si-Hun stated.

"But..."

"I know very well what you're worried about, but if I don't go... our relationship with them will never recover."

"..."

Gaia remained silent.

Si-Hun's role was undeniably important in Guardians.

Satan was strong. As the Demon of Prophecy, he possessed tremendous power known as the Demonic Sea, and he could freely use hundreds of different Authorities. He had been so powerful that not even Gaia, Goddess of the Earth, had been able to fully stop him even while consuming all of her Divinity.

'Although Lady Gaia has sealed most of his power...'

It had been two years since Gaia had used her Divinity to seal the Demonic Sea. Even if Satan was the Demon of Prophecy, there was no way he'd be able to unseal it in just two years, but still...

'The Demonic Sea is...'

It was an undeniably incredible power, and they couldn't relax just because it was sealed.

'We need the help of angels.'

After Gaia exhausted most of her Divinity, the gods of Earth lost most of their power to interfere with what was happening on Earth. Consequently, help from the celestial realm was necessary in such a situation.

"...I will trust you, Protector Kim Si-Hun," Gaia expressed, nodding with a smile.

After talking to Gaia, Si-Hun stood up and walked over to Kang-Woo.

"I'll get going then, hyung-nim," he said.

Kang-Woo lightly patted Si-Hun's shoulder and replied, "I have no doubt you'll be able to do it."

If possible, Kang-Woo would have wanted to go and see Raphael with Si-Hun, but what Raphael wished for was to talk with Si-Hun alone. If a third party went along with him, there was a chance that it could cause Raphael to turn hostile.

'But of course, I'm not just gonna sit around and do nothing.'

* * *

After the meeting, Kang-Woo secretly followed Si-Hun to Africa and saw the angels who were in the process of building their gigantic base.

'They really are building it like a fortress.'

He could feel their determination to find and kill Satan.

Whoom.

A communication crystal orb rang. It wasn't the one used by Guardians; it was the one he used to contact Lilith.

"What is it?" Kang-Woo asked.

[I have information that I must convey to you.]

"What sort of information?"

[The Demon Cult is making their move.]

"...Now?"

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

The timing was too good.

[How should we proceed?]

"Stand by for now."

He didn't have the leeway to deal with the Demon Cult at the moment. He had to focus on getting the cooperation of the celestial realm through the meeting between Raphael and Si-Hun.

[Understood.]

The call was cut.

"Now then..."

Kang-Woo closed his eyes and used an Authority.

Riiing.

[Activating the Authority of Subordination.]

[Sharing senses with your Familiar.]

He saw the angels through Si-Hun's eyes. They wore silver armor and emitted a soft radiance.

Among them...

'That must be Raphael.'

Kang-Woo saw an angel with eight wings, enveloped in brilliant light. The angel was around five meters tall, and his build was similar to Balrog's.

'But he looks more like a human.'

His stature couldn't be considered to be that of a human, but in terms of his looks, he certainly appeared very much like one. Furthermore, he was very good-looking. His blond hair resembled a lion's mane, and there was his angular face gave off a sense of wildness.

'That's not fucking fair.'

Kang-Woo thought it would've been nice if demons looked like humans too. He recalled Lilith and quickly shook his head.

Si-Hun knelt on one knee in front of Raphael, who was sitting on a giant chair.

- So, you are the human who has inherited Ludwig's sword.

- That is correct.

Kang-Woo heard Raphael and Si-Hun's conversation. He couldn't hear any animosity in Raphael's voice. It seemed to be a fairly decent start.

'For him to gain a bit more trust...'

[Sending sacred power to Familiar Kim Si-Hun.]

Kang-Woo sent the sacred power that he had to Si-Hun.

- You have even accepted sacred power.

"All right," Kang-Woo muttered.

Raphael's tone had brightened a little. He seemed to find humans with sacred power more trustworthy than others.

- I have come here today to offer my apologies... for my friend Ludwig's death.

"Nice line."

Kang-Woo nodded after hearing Si-Hun's sincere words.

Asking for the angels' cooperation right off the bat was not a good idea. Untangling the negative emotions that had arisen from Ludwig's death was more important.

"Well done, my boy!" Kang-Woo cheered for Si-Hun.

That was all he could do. From here on, it all depended on Si-Hun.

'Authority of Coloring.'

Kang-Woo used an Authority that changed the colors of objects to create two sticks with fluorescent colors on them.

"Good luck, Si-Hun!"

He waved the light sticks.

- I see. Such a thing...

- Yes. When I arrived, he had already been...

The conversation went smoothly.

Just as Kang-Woo was thinking that they would easily be able to acquire Raphael's cooperation...

- L-Lord Raphael!!

- What is it?

- An apostle of a demon has appeared!

"What?"

Kang-Woo frowned at the unexpected development of events. He checked what was happening through Si-Hun's eyes.

He saw a woman covered in bandages.

- Oh, apostles of light... My name is Julia, a being of darkness who serves Satan.

- ...You dare come here so brazenly?

- I have come to tell you the truth, Lord Raphael.

- The truth?

Julia Vilkova, who was kneeling in front of Raphael, continued, - We were not the ones who had corrupted the Watcher of Light. The true culprits behind his corruption are...

She turned her head and looked at Si-Hun with eyes full of resentment.

- Guardians.

There was a heavy silence.

"Hah." Kang-Woo's expression crumpled in anger. "How dare they..."

He clenched his hands into fists.

"How dare they try to fabricate a lie?!"

Rage boiled within him after hearing the Demon Cult's blatant lie.

Chapter 230 - The Truth Will Never Die (2)

"Damn scumbags..."

Oh Kang-Woo's hands trembled as anger rose within him. He grimaced.

'Guardians corrupted Ludwig?'

That was complete nonsense. The Demon Cult had no idea about what had happened inside that dungeon, the content of the call, nor how Ludwig had died.

There was absolutely no proof to back up their accusation. What they were doing was purely agitation and fabrication; they were just throwing out a random fantasy they had thought up.

'They're trying to make the celestial realm distrust us.'

Thanks to what happened with Ludwig, the angels had started to distrust Guardians, and the Demon Cult was trying to take advantage of that. Instead of persuasion through evidence and logic, they were agitating the angels through lies.

"Hah," Kang-Woo forced a laugh in disbelief.

It was so absurd that it wasn't even funny. It was a foolish attempt.

'But...'

Kang-Woo's eyes narrowed.

'It's not good.'

He wasn't sure what kind of fake scenario they would lay out to enforce their lies, but the most important thing was what would happen if Raphael believed them.

It was possible that might be the case. There were many things about Ludwig's corruption and death that weren't clear, so Guardians didn't have a way to counter the Demon Cult's lies.

'And most importantly...'

Si-Hun had ultimately been the one to kill Ludwig. Even if Ludwig had already been corrupted at that point, it didn't change the fact that Si-Hun had killed him.

"I wonder how they're gonna go about this..."

Kang-Woo pondered while looking at Julia Vilkova through Si-Hun's eyes.

'I'm sure she won't just implore Raphael to believe her.'

It didn't matter if it was true that Guardians had corrupted Ludwig. Satan and the Demon Cult were both forces of darkness, so they would never be able to come to a compromise with Raphael. There was no way that they would use a strategy that relied on who Raphael trusted more.

"I would guess..."

Kang-Woo narrowed his eyes.

'Authority of Insight.'

He expanded his vision through Si-Hun's eyes.

'I knew it.'

Kang-Woo saw the item that he had been thinking about. He smirked.

'So, that's your play.'

Kang-Woo got up. He put his finger on his ear and called his subordinate.

"Vaal Zahak."

- I am here, Master.

"Are the preparations complete?"

- Of course.

There was no need to ask what preparations he was referring to.

Kang-Woo nodded.

"Send it over right now."

He cut the call.

'Two can play that game.'

Kang-Woo wouldn't stand for their poor scheme of pulling the angels and Guardians apart through agitation and fabrication.

'Actually...'

It could be a great opportunity.

Kang-Woo raised a communication crystal orb as he walked.

"Lilith."

[Yes, Master Kang-Woo.]

A reply came immediately.

"Have you heard any information about the situation?"

[I have only just heard that one of Satan's apostles entered the angels' base. My apologies. I should have been quicker...]

"No, it's fine. More importantly..." Kang-Woo said quietly, "I need your help with something."

Lilith laughed lightly at Kang-Woo's words.

[Anything, my king.]

* * *

"What...?"

A suffocating amount of pressure emanated from the angel, with his five-meter stature, wide shoulders, bulging muscles, gold armor, and his eight brilliant wings...

Archangel Raphael grimaced upon hearing the words of the Apostle of Evil who had come out of nowhere.

"Nonsense!" Si-Hun exclaimed as he stood up and stomped on the ground.

He extended his hand, and a white light gathered, taking the form of a greatsword.

It was the holy sword Ludwig... The Mythic-grade weapon imbued with the power of Archangel Raphael and the blessing of a high elf exuded light.

"Stop," Raphael said, raising his hand. He looked down at Julia with deep, sunken eyes. "What do you mean?"

Julia lowered her head and answered, "It means exactly what I have said. Lord Satan and the Demon Cult have nothing to do with this incident. It was a plot self-fabricated by Guardians."

"Hah." Raphael feigned laughter and looked at Julia in absurdity. "Do you expect me to believe that?"

Julia's words made no sense, and there was no way Raphael would believe something like that anyway. What she said would be hard to believe even if the words had come from one of his apostles, let alone a servant of evil.

There was no need for him to think about it.

"Fufu." Julia smiled and slowly stood up.

"..."

Julia seemed confident.

Raphael grimaced when he saw her unashamed, confident demeanor. She was acting far too confidently despite being a servant of evil in a fortress of angels.

"In that case, are you absolutely sure that Guardians had nothing to do with this incident, Lord Raphael?"

"Well..."

"I am sure that is not the case. It is only natural since the one who had ultimately killed Ludwig was..." Julia slowly raised her finger and pointed at Si-Hun. "...That human over there."

"Shut up!!" Si-Hun shouted angrily while glaring at her. He expressed with difficulty, "Ludwig... was already at a point... of no return."

He remembered Ludwig's grotesque veins and pained appearance. He thought of Ludwig's final message, desperately telling them not to go to him and to escape instead.

"There was nothing else... I could have done," Si-Hun said, lowering his head.

Julia smiled brightly and replied, "There was nothing you could have done, you say? Do you have any proof of that? Was anyone else but members of Guardians present on the scene?"

"..."

"Tell me. Who else was there aside from Guardians members? There was nobody else... was there? Then—"

"Enough." Raphael raised his hand and glared at Julia. "How dare you try to trick me, servant of evil?"

"I apologize if that is how you interpreted it, Lord Raphael," Julia said, turning her head toward him. "But do you not find it weird? They said that Ludwig suddenly fell into a demon's trap, but... how exactly did he end up falling for it?"

"..."

There was a heavy silence.

"Since we're being falsely accused, we secretly took a look at the report made by the Watchers of Light," Julia explained with bright eyes.

"According to the report, Ludwig used the Gate in the Hall of Protection, the base of Guardians, that led here. Fufu. Isn't that too much of a coincidence? To think he would get dragged somewhere else while using a Gate within the base of Guardians..."

"You sons of bitches!!" Si-Hun yelled.

He couldn't hold back the anger anymore and stood up. The holy sword in his hand shone intensely.

Right when Si-Hun was about to leap forward...

Raphael commanded, "Wait."

BOOM!

"Kurgh!"

A huge amount of pressure weighed down on Si-Hun's shoulders, and he fell to his knees.

Raphael silently closed his eyes and began to organize his thoughts.

Five minutes... Ten minutes... Raphael kept thinking in silence.

Then he slowly opened his eyes and said, "Even if that is the case, it is not enough for me to trust —"

"I had a feeling you would say that," Julia interjected, cutting Raphael's words short.

She took out something from her pockets that she had prepared in advance. It was a black crystal orb.

"What is..."

"A mere servant no longer has the right to intervene." Julia smiled brightly. "I believe it would be better for the misunderstanding to be cleared through direct conversation."

Whoom.

A black light flowed out from the black crystal orb. The light then spread out radially like a hologram and showed a pitch-black darkness. A red mask appeared amid that darkness.

"You are..." Raphael said.

[I had never thought a day would come when I would be speaking to you in this way.]

"Could you be... Satan?"

[My appearance has changed quite a lot, but yes.]

Yellow eyes became visible from behind the mask.

[I am Satan.]

Raphael closed his mouth.

"Sa... tan," Si-Hun uttered.

His expression distorted into a scowl, and intense rage rose within him.

The culprit who had dared to corrupt Ludwig was trying to frame Guardians for the act.

Crack, crack!

"A-Arggh."

Si-Hun pushed against Raphael's sacred power, which was weighing him down. He straightened his knees and stood up.

"What...?" Raphael uttered, his eyes widening in surprise.

He hadn't expected a human to be able to withstand his energy and stand up.

Bam!!

Si-Hun stomped on the ground.

"SATAAAANN!!!" he roared and charged forward.

Just then...

Crash!!

"Si-Hun!!!"

Someone grabbed Si-Hun's arm and pulled him back.

"H-Hyung-nim?"

"Calm down. If you act recklessly, you'll only be doing what he wants."

Kang-Woo had crashed through the ceiling of the fortress and stopped Si-Hun before he completely lost his sense of reason in a rampage.

"...You must be the older brother of that human known as Kim Si-Hun," Raphael remarked.

He was not bewildered. It seemed that he had already heard about Kang-Woo.

"I apologize for eavesdropping on your conversation," Kang-Woo said while bowing.

Raphael answered with deep, sunken eyes, "No, it is alright. From the beginning, I had not expected Guardians to send this human alone."

He was aware of the unstable relationship between angels and Guardians.

[What an interesting flow of events,] Satan, who was watching the scene unfold, commented while laughing.

Kang-Woo glared at Satan and said, "Bastard..."

Satan spoke in a relaxed voice, [Let us get back to the subject at hand, Raphael.]

"...Speak," Raphael replied.

[I did not lay a hand on the man known as Ludwig. If you suspect me so...]

Satan spread his hand.

A dense darkness contorted and took shape as a black sphere.

[This is my demonic energy. Track it down. If traces of my demonic energy are within the Hall of Protection, then that would be proof that I was involved in this incident. But if there are no traces of it...] Satan snickered. [It will prove that it was an act that Guardians fabricated.]

"..."

Silence fell once again.

Raphael's gaze wavered. He could not take this simply as a plot from Satan.

An angel's ability to track demonic energy was exceptional, and there was no way Satan didn't know that.

'If he is willing to go so far...'

He couldn't help but have some qualms.

No, he already had many suspicions regarding Ludwig's death. It was true that Ludwig had fallen into a demon's trap after using a Gate located in the Hall of Protection, and it was also a fact that the only ones who had testified to Ludwig's corruption were Guardians members.

A sense of doubt appeared in Raphael's eyes.

"You..." Kang-Woo uttered, grimacing.

He looked as if he'd been hit unexpectedly on the back of his head and that he had not expected Satan to do this.

[So, what do you think?] Satan laughed. [Is it not suspicious?]

* * *

A giant black sphere hovered in the darkness of a giant cave made of transparent ice.

Satan's fragment, which had been severed from the black sphere, was touching the mask on his face while shrouded in darkness.

[Hmm...]

There was a black crystal orb in front of him.

[What is going on?] Satan mumbled uncomfortably. [Hurry up and connect the call, Julia.]

The expected time had already passed, but still, there was no reaction coming from the crystal orb.

[Why is it taking so long?]

Satan tilted his head in confusion.