

The Tower 73

Chapter 73

There was a pub in the southern district. As a sudden commotion arose outside the rowdy pub, the door was violently flung open with a loud bang.

Bang!

Paladins, dressed in golden-patterned armor, rushed into the pub. Then, a paladin in silver-patterned armor entered the pub and examined the patrons inside.

"Where is the skeptic!" a paladin in golden-patterned armor shouted.

Another paladin standing beside that paladin looked around urgently and pointed at Vuela.

"There he is!" the paladin shouted.

He had pointed at an Elf drinking in a corner of the pub. Vuela, the Elf, seemed to enjoy his time at the pub, which had gone abruptly quiet.

"Are you finally here?" Vuela asked the paladin.

"Your courage is impressive," said Deva, the leader of the paladins.

Deva took out his sword. The other patrons hurriedly fled to the corners of the pub because it seemed like a fight was about to break out.

"Haha, I don't think you know whose courage is really impressive," Vuela said and laughed, looking at the paladin.

Swoosh—

The sharp sound of a sword leaving its sheath rang. Vuela's demeanor, which had seemed relaxed until a moment ago, changed instantly. He was now ready to fight.

"You're impressive. Just as I heard," Deva said, looking at Vuela.

Even though Deva had felt Vuela's change in aura, he remained calm and relaxed. So, Vuela rushed in first.

Clang—!

Their swords clashed fiercely. Vuela's mana and Deva's divine power intertwined, but how their swords moved seemed like a mess. Vuela was slightly surprised by Deva's strength, which was much higher than he had expected. His plan to immediately behead his enemy went down the drain thusly. Deva was also surprised by his opponent's strength, which seemed comparable to his own.

'Is he only slightly weaker than me? A bit lacking compared to me? Where on earth did this guy even come from?'

When Deva thought he was done evaluating his opponent, a whirlwind of mana gathered in Vuela's sword.

'Shit! That attack is coming.'

Even the paladin and the priest working together had failed to stop this attack from Vuela. And now, Deva was the target of this attack. When Deva finally felt the brunt of the attack, he realized that the priest and the paladin had undersold its might.

[Wave Cutting Sword]

The storm-like sword attack had collided with the divine shield that Deva had created.

‘Keugh!’

The attack tried to crush the shield by persistently attacking a small crack in Deva’s shield. Deva had a hard time believing that the paladin and the priest could block such an attack.

Bang!

Plop, plop, plop, plop

After the clash between the Wave Cutting Sword and Deva's divine shield, the pub was left in shambles. The furniture was all but sawdust now. As the dust gradually settled, an exhausted Vuela and Deva appeared, both panting.

"That was quite something," Deva muttered.

"Ugh... if it wasn't for this damn cowl," Vuela muttered.

Frustrated that he had to fight fiercely against such a weakling, Vuela wanted to throw away the cowl but could not because of Lee Shin.

"I've seen enough of his skills... so go get him," Deva ordered his group of paladins.

The surrounding paladins rushed towards Vuela. No matter how strong Vuela was, he couldn't deal with so many paladins simultaneously. And he was already too exhausted. Therefore, Vuela looked at Lee Shin desperately, asking him for help. However, Lee Shin just shook his head and stayed still.

‘Aren’t you going to help me?’

Vuela asked Lee Shin with his eyes.

‘Get taken away quietly.’

Lee Shin also answered with his eyes. There was only one reason why Vuela didn't discard the cowl and remained calm despite the many paladins rushing toward him: Lee Shin was with him. If Lee Shin stepped up, he wouldn't even have to do anything because he was confident Lee Shin could wipe them all out.

"Hey!" Vuela shouted, looking at Lee Shin.

Noticing Vuela looking at someone resentfully, Deva and the paladins also looked at Lee Shin.

"What's going on? Is that guy also involved in this?" Deva muttered.

Deva gestured to the paladins because Vuela and Lee Shin seemed to have something.

"Take him too," Deva ordered his group of paladins.

"Yes sir!" the paladins answered.

Just before being captured by the paladins, Vuela smiled at seeing the paladins approaching Lee Shin.

'You fools, do you think that monster will follow you so obediently?'

Two paladins approached Lee Shin, standing like a spectator, and grabbed his arms.

'Huh? What the hell?'

Was Lee Shin trying to fool them by letting them drag him away? Vuela could not understand what was happening because this wasn't what he had expected. As for Lee Shin, he just glanced at Vuela calmly as he was dragged away.

‘Oh, he’s so calm. There must be something I don’t know about yet.’

The sharp tip of Deva's sword grazed Lee Shin’s chin. The sword was so sharp that his chin began bleeding.

"Who are you, and what are you up to? I've never seen you before," Deva said.

"I came here not long ago, so you probably won’t know me," Lee Shin replied to Deva.

"Do you know this heretic?" Deva asked Lee Shin demandingly.

"No, I don't know him," Lee Shin replied.

At those words, Vuela, who had opened his eyes wide, glared at the back of Lee Shin's head.

"But... I don't think that heretic over there agrees with you," said Deva, looking back and forth between Lee Shin and Vuela.

"Well, we met just a while ago and had a few drinks in the pub," Lee Shin replied.

"Hmm... the circumstantial evidence paints you as a suspicious individual, though. Besides, whether you are a heretic will be revealed in the Church, so just follow me for now," said Deva looking at Lee Shin.

"Then, do I just have to prove that I'm not a heretic?" Lee Shin asked Deva.

"You want to prove it...? How would you do that?" Deva asked Lee Shin, surprised.

The tip of Deva’s sword had already scratched Lee Shin’s chin, so he slightly pressed against it to make his chin start bleeding more. Soon, his blood oozed out and started to trickle down his neck.

Then, Lee Shin placed his palm above the cut.

[Divine Healing]

The divine power from Lee Shin's hand instantly healed the wound on his chin.

"Was that divine power?" Deva was stunned.

Deva looked surprised because he had not expected Lee Shin to show such proof. And the others around them also showed similar reactions.

"I am a believer chosen by God. So how can I be a heretic?" Lee Shin said shamelessly.

There was no doubt of his innocence. Besides, what Lee Shin had shown them was enough for the Church to welcome him and not question him like a heretic.

"I didn't expect to meet a believer chosen by God here. I am so sorry; I apologize for the rudeness." Deva apologized to Lee Shin, and he really meant it.

Deva smiled contentedly at Lee Shin as he apologized to him.

"You, you, you!" Vuela started to stutter because what he saw made no sense.

Vuela wondered whether human beings were naturally so shameless and just kept wondering that.

"Shut up, you heretic! How dare you insult a believer chosen by God?" Deva shouted at Vuela.

Wearing shackles that sealed mana, Vuela collapsed helplessly when the paladin kicked him.

"Ugh! Hey...!" Vuela hesitated to say anything to the paladin.

In a moment of confusion, Vuela could not think of what to say, so he glared at Lee Shin with eyes burning with anger.

"What's your name?" Deva asked politely.

"My name is Lee Shin."

"Nice to meet you. My name is Deva. Did you come to this city to visit our Church?"

"Yes, that's right," Lee Shin replied.

"Then will you come with us? I'm sure the Church will welcome you," Deva said to Lee Shin, looking at him.

"Umm, well... I have something to do right now, so I'll visit the Church when I finish my business," said Lee Shin.

"Hmm... Is that so? I wanted to talk to you on the way, but I guess that's untimely of me," said Deva, disappointed.

"I'll find you later and talk to you in the Church," said Lee Shin.

"All right then, I'll see you later," said Deva.

Vuela looked at Lee Shin with a bewildered look on his face. Lee Shin had deceived the paladin so naturally. Vuela even wondered if Lee Shin had intentionally brought him here to be killed mercilessly by the paladins. Was that why Lee Shin had put this cowl on Vuela?

Vuela had a million thoughts galloping across his mind, but he still just glared at Lee Shin as the paladins dragged him away. And Lee Shin, the receiver of that burning gaze, just turned his head away as if he had not noticed anything.

'It's like he is almost cursing at me with his eyes.'

Lee Shin felt sorry for leading Vuela into such a situation, but he had no other choice. There was something Vuela had to do at the Church. Vuela could not remember it right now because he was too upset, but he was carrying a note from Lee Shin that he had given Vuela to read the next day. Therefore, Lee Shin was sure that Vuela would act accordingly after calming down and reading the note.

"All right, let's go back!" Deva ordered his group of paladins.

As Deva gave his order to the group of paladins, the paladins left the pub. Immediately after the disturbance, the pub collapsed. And the furniture had already turned into dust during the fight. In the name of enforcing God's will, the Church members did as they pleased without caring about the innocent, ordinary citizens.

"Ugh, what a mess..."

"Oh man... How will we clean this all up?"

The pub patrons started to grumble and began cleaning the pub. Meanwhile, a woman, who had been inside the kitchen, approached Lee Shin. Lee Shin noticed that it was the same woman they had encountered earlier.

"Was abandoning your colleague the way to resolve things?" the woman asked Lee Shin with great disappointment.

Unlike before, the woman's eyes were filled with contempt toward Lee Shin. She was truly disappointed in Lee Shin because she had thought that Lee Shin was a responsible person who cared about others. She had never imagined that Lee Shin would even abandon a colleague.

"Are all the guests around you from your group?" Lee Shin asked the woman.

"Sorry? Don't try to change the subject here...!" The woman said harshly to Lee Shin.

"I'm asking you because these people don't seem like fanatical Church members. It seemed like they were lowering themselves to the Church's people, but they aren't displaying the same attitude toward me despite having seen me manipulate divine power," Lee Shin said to the woman.

Lee Shin's calm voice and reply surprised her.

"Yes, that's right. My group put them in place as backup. On second thought, I shouldn't have done this," the woman muttered.

The woman's eyes, which were full of disappointment, peered into Lee Shin's eyes. When she saw how calm and peaceful his eyes were, the woman wondered if she had misjudged him.

"I did not abandon him," said Lee Shin.

"Sorry? What did you say?" Lee Shin's response surprised her again.

"Don't make a fuss about those paladins taking him away. You know, they're only paladins. If you have the time to worry about him, take me to your master instead," said Lee Shin.

"What do you mean they are only paladins? Do you even know what happens when you are taken to Church?" the woman shouted at Lee Shin.

"The paladins can't do anything to Vuela with their skill level," Lee Shin explained.

The woman looked at Lee Shin and wondered if he was just bluffing, but Lee Shin did not seem like he was just showing off.

'Is he serious?'

What Lee Shin had shown her so far did not make Lee Shin seem trustworthy in her eyes, but her instincts were telling her to just trust him.

"Well then, there is one other thing I want to ask you," said the woman.

"What is it?" Lee Shin asked the woman.

"What was that divine power you showed us earlier? You're not a Church member, are you?" the woman asked Lee Shin with suspicion.

"..." Lee Shin was speechless.

Lee Shin looked at the woman as if saying, 'Are you seriously asking me that?' When she noticed the look, she realized the foolishness of her question. Her face turned red in embarrassment, so she turned away her head.

"I mean, I just a-a-asked, but I d-d-didn't really mean it! I'll take you to the master, so let's get going," said the woman.

* * *

Lee Shin and the woman arrived at the group's secret headquarters in the southern district. He followed the woman and entered the secret headquarters through a hidden passage.

"This is where the master is," said the woman.

She was permitted to come in when she knocked on the door.

"You can go in now," said the woman to Lee Shin.

"Okay," Lee Shin replied to the woman.

Squeak—

The old hinges made a creepy noise as the door opened. A man was sitting alone in the dark room. The man only had one arm, which was quite muscular, but the missing appendage was what caught Lee Shin's eye. The man's roughly-worn outer coat revealed numerous wounds, seemingly caused by sword attacks.

Only a faint lantern illuminated the dark room, but that was enough to see the man's gently closed eyes.

"Are you... Lee Shin?" the man asked.

Sitting with his legs crossed, the man brought a cigar to the lantern with his left arm.

Sizzle—

Puff?

The man took a long drag on his cigar and exhaled, filling the room with pungent smoke.

"Yes, that's right," Lee Shin replied.

"Nice to meet you," the man greeted Lee Shin.

This man was the leader of the secret organization [Black Night], which Lee Shin must cooperate with to clear this stage on the 18th floor. This secret organization opposed the Church's ideologies.

"My name is Lakers," The leader of Black Night, Lakers, introduced himself.

From the day he was unjustly abandoned by the Church, Lakers had been waiting for the day he could exact his revenge.

"He Who Knows Death... Death Ruler, Pioneer of the World, and the winner of Gret Ciel..." Lakers mentioned numerous titles of Lee Shin.

"Pioneer of Magic, Wizard of Steel, Successor of the Seven Elements and... the Man Who Destroyed the Head of the Demon Monarch." Lakers continued to list the many titles Lee Shin had acquired.

Despite the widespread rumors and reputation surrounding him as the Pioneer of the World, Lee Shin found it strange that the Lakers knew all of his titles.

"That's impressive," Lakers muttered, looking at Lee Shin.

After the admiration, a bitter smile appeared on Lakers' face.

Sizzle—

The cigar burned slowly.

'Is that so...?'

Lee Shin's eyes sank. The cigar smoke from Lakers' mouth disappeared as if it had assimilated into the darkness. And the dimly lit lantern was barely holding fire.

Creak—

The door slowly closed, creating a lengthy creaking sound. The sense of death that Lee Shin had felt on the 17th floor and when Patriarch Ahn Jin had used the Destruction Wave again pressed down on him.

"Only..." Lakers said.

Each syllable spoken by Lakers slowly reached Lee Shin's ears. Suddenly, Lee Shin noticed Lakers' shoulder twitching slightly.

Wooong—

The flickering lantern light extinguished, seemingly swept away by something.

"A challenger like you," Lakers muttered.

Suddenly, Lee Shin felt the space around him being rent.

"On the 18th floor," Lakers muttered again.

In the pitch-black space with no light, a single line passed through.