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도물을

마시는 새

살건을 창출하는 나라 1





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문학  
출판

# The Bird That Drinks Tears - Chapter 00-03

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# The Rescue Party

When the wrath of a dragon that seared the sky is forgotten

When the tombstones of princes are buried under earth

And, when no one cares about such things

At an era in which survival is a crude joke

A man was walking the desert.

## *The rescue party*

Three goes against one. – An old maxim.

It was early morning, in which the travelers of Punten desert go to sleep, when a man approached the place called 'the Last Inn' for a lack of a better name.

The inn-owner was gazing at the man from the point he was an hour away from the inn.

Normally, the inn-owner finds travelers much earlier, as there are not many objects that obstruct vision in the spacious Punten desert. There are dunes, but even they are no obstacles for the inn-owner, as the inn is placed thirty meters atop a boulder. About forty meters in diameter, the top of the boulder was completely taken over by the inn. Because the inn was at such a unique place, the inn-owner was able to spot travelers walking towards the inn a couple of hours before they actually reached it. Those travelers came from the east, the west, or the north, stayed at the Last Inn, and went back toward the direction they came from.

But this man was coming from the south. It was a direction that the inn-owner didn't care much about, so the inn-owner did not see the traveler until he was about an hour away.

The inn-owner assumed that the man was considerably lost, and barely found the light of the inn before he passed it. Determining this about the man, the inn-owner looked at the man slowly but steadily closing the distance between him and the inn. Every now and then, the inn-owner turned his bored stare at other

directions, but did not see any other travelers.

The desert sky that resembled a dark solid matter was slowly saturated with colors of water. The silhouette of the man was considerably bigger. Determining that the man will arrive in about ten minutes, the inn owner got up from his seat to prepare a water kettle and cups.

Something strange entered the inn-owner's eyes as he rose. The inn-owner squinted at the man again, and realized what caught his attention.

There was a black line following the man. Under the now brighter sky, the inn-owner could see that the line was connected all the way from the horizon. The inn owner tilted his head, puzzled. Is the man dragging something heavy? There was not much wind and so if the man was dragging something heavy, the object would be making a shadow, since the light was getting brighter. Did the man's camel die and so he is carrying his valuables? The inn-owner tried to look behind the man's back but he couldn't, as the man was wearing a loose windbreaker.

Soon, however, as it got brighter, the inn owner realized that his imagination was way too conservative. The inn owner got up in surprise.

The black line behind the man's feet was a stain of some liquid. And no traveler would let water leak. The liquid, that even the dry sands of the desert could not completely soak up and left a dark-red stain, was blood.

"Sir, are you all right?"

The man, walking with his mouth and face covered with a huge piece of cloth, raised his head at the sudden sound of human voice. He looked at the inn-owner standing on top of a small dune and moved his hand towards his shoulder.

"Who are you?"

"I came from the inn over there. Were you not coming to the inn?"

Even after the inn-owner explained himself, the man kept his hand behind his neck.

"Do not come any closer. Are you unarmed?"

"I am not a bandit. What bandit goes around without a camel or windbreaker? I am an inn-owner and I am here to help you."

“What are you helping me with? You can’t be telling me where the inn is.”

The inn-owner felt something was weird. He looked again at the trail behind the man. Closer up, however, it became more clear that the stain on the sand was blood. The man followed the inn-owner’s stare, and shook his head.

“That? Don’t worry about it.”

“You’re bleeding that much and you’re telling me to don’t worry about it?”

“It isn’t my blood.”

The inn owner went behind the man’s back with curiosity. The man let the inn-owner take a look.

The man was dragging a big sack behind his back. The sack was saturated dark-red and that was causing the trail of blood. The inn owner flinched and looked to the man’s neck, found a great hilt sticking out of the windbreaker, and shuddered. A man carrying a giant sword and dragging a bloody sack.

“What’s inside the sack?”

“As I told you, it’s nothing you should worry about.”

“That’s blood!”

“It’s not human blood.”

The man replied bluntly and started walking again, leaving the inn-owner. As the man started moving, the inn-owner realized how heavy the sack actually was. The sack, which looked like it could carry at least two people, left huge marks on the sand as it was dragged. Staring briefly at the man with an angry stare, the inn-owner promptly walked past him.

“I will ready the inn before you arrive.”

The man did not answer. The inn-owner ran towards the inn.

Of course, he did not intend to do as he told. Until he reached the inn, the inn-owner tried to figure out where he had last put his sword. However, the location of the longsword, that he didn’t even know when he last used, could not be remembered. The inn-owner, who didn’t even think about confronting the man with just a sword, woke up his family with a scream as he got up the stairs.

His wife, who ran out without a clue, panicked at her husband's question about where the sword was. Fortunately, his son, who came out a little later, knew where the sword was, and as he realized that he will soon be using the sword, ran out with excitement. The inn-owner pushed his answer-demanding wife into the kitchen, and brought out the cups and water kettle on the table.

That moment, the man, who climbed up the boulder, entered the inn.

The man looked around and walked towards the table with the kettle. Behind the man was that horrifying sack, staining the floor with blood. The inn-owner frowned at that. The man reached the table, took off the windbreaker and put it on his chair, then took off his backpack. The man then brought his hand behind his neck.

The inn-owner, completely forgot about the bloody sack for a moment.

He had never seen a sword like that before. Above the grip that was about 30 centimeters long was a crossguard that was also about 30 centimeters long. It was obvious why the crossguard had to be that long, because two gigantic blades, each about 120 centimeters long, were attached parallel to each other. The sword looked like twin brothers that had a combined set of legs.

The strange twin-bladed sword was worn strangely, too. The man was wearing a complex accessory made of leather leash and steel rings on the top of his chest. A circular shoulderguard was on his left shoulder, and on his back, a little below his neck, there was a piece of metal that resembled a hook.

The space between the two blades of the sword was to be hung on the hook.

The sword didn't even have a sheath.

The man put down the twin-bladed sword on the table, satt on the chair, and started to unravel the cloth wrapped around his mouth and head.

Then, the inn-owner's son came back with the sword. Fortunately, the smart boy walked in, hiding the sword behind his back. The inn-owner glanced at his son to back off, and approached the man.

"Could you explain what's inside that sack?"

The man finished unraveling the cloth, and left it on the table. Dark hair

bunched up with dirt and sweat draped on his shoulders, and his beard, unkempt for days, covered in coal-black around his mouth. The man turned his unappealing face towards the inn-owner and asked a very random question.

“Is this the Last Inn?”

“So they say, since there are no inns to the south of this one.”

“That was so.”

The inn-owner, who almost let those words slide, soon realized what that man was implying, and opened his eyes wide.

“What kind of absurd joke... You came from the south?”

“I came from there.”

It would be more believable if the man told that he came from the sky.

“Hah, there is nothing in the south.”

“There is Keeboren.”

“Ha, Keeboren? Of course that’s there. Countless trees and a damnable number of beasts. And on top of that, Nagas, too. So, it’s just like there is nothing.”

The man, who stared at the snickering inn-owner, again asked a random question.

“Give me the letter.”

“Huh?”

“If this is the Last Inn, there should be a letter for Kaygan Draaka.”

The inn-owner again opened his eyes wide. There was, in fact, a letter. About a few dozen days ago, a monk of the Great Temple came from the north, looking like he would die any time, and gave the inn-owner a letter, telling him to give it to Kaygan Draaka. The monk, named Orenol, had rejuvenate himself for a few days to return north.

The inn-owner, almost nodding his head, suddenly realized something.

“First answer my question. What’s in that sack? And what do you mean you

came from the south?”

The man, named Kaygan Draaka, raised the kettle. The inn owner quickly interrupted.

“Two coins per cup. Expensive, I know. The water makes it possible for this inn to exist here.”

Kaygan, not even responding, poured water in his cup. Only after he was done pouring the water, he answered the question of the inn-owner.

“I came from the south to spend less time crossing the Punten desert. The place of my departure was Karabora. I went south from there and entered Keeboren. Then I went west and turned north to get to this inn.”

The inn owner snorted out loud. Kaygan wasn't wrong.

Karabora, the east end of Punten desert, was more than 200 kilometers away from the inn. So, to avoid a 200-kilometer-long journey through the desert, one should go around south, like the man said. From the south end of the Punten desert to the inn is only about 50 kilometers.

However, in other words, this means that one must walk through the Keeboren jungle for about 200 kilometers. A 200 kilometer journey crossing the Keeboren jungle, infested with Nagas; it is probably safer to walk on the ocean of the same distance. When the inn owner tried to make that point, Kaygan pointed at the sack.

“What's inside the sack is something I got from my journey. Look inside. You'll believe that I came from the south.”

The inn owner looked at the sack with suspicion and looked back at Kaygan Draaka, but Kaygan only quenched his thirst with water that cost 2 bronze coins per cup. The inn owner cautiously opened the sack.

Soon after, the inn-owner's wife in the kitchen collapsed at a skull-shivering scream.

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Even the skyfish that flies the highest skies cannot see the ground here; not at Keeboren, reaching all horizons from north to south to east to west.

Rain clouds laden with heat almost reach the apex of the forest. The trees of Keeboren, inexperienced with any kind of axeblood, is old, gigantic, and sly. The branches that grew without order for ages are tangled without a solution, and the branches that hold each other's hands in the empty space is bent down, carrying an abundance of dead, dried leaves. So, when harsh wind blows in Keeboren, leaves rise into the sky from the head of the forest.

Gigantic trees may fall to the ground when it dies, but smaller trees can't even fall and becomes its own tombstone, tangled in the branches. Many trees that are among them lay diagonally on their dead brothers, and so under Keeboren, which reminds of a green ocean on its top, perpendicular, horizontal, and diagonal lines that extend out chaotically are mixed with each other, forming a maze that even birds would lose their way. And this maze, almost like a delusion of a schizophrenic, grow, bend, rot, pretend to live, and sometimes crumble with a crack to scatter bits and pieces of bark and leaf to all directions.

However, most of the times, Keeboren spends its days in silence, imprisoning darkness under its green veil.

This is where the city of heartlessness is.

A place where even the mighty Leckorn wouldn't say its name without discomfort, where even the playful Dokkaebi wouldn't say its name without losing his smile, and where the humans, adept in fabrication, stubbornly calls it their own-given name, 'the city of silence.' Despite all this, this place is the city of heartlessness, and it is one of the greatest out of the great achievements that do not require praises and curses of others to testify for itself.

Haatengraju.

In the midst of the infinite green jungle of Keeboren, Haatengraju looks like a lonely white island. However, that lonely white island is an immense city that relatively belittles the 200 meter-tall heart tower in its center. Along the left and right of the road that extends straight forward, grand buildings stand showing off their magnificence, and the agoras that are even more prevalent than the buildings are decorated with spoils of war. Other Naga cities that are south of the Limiting Border also has high heart towers and beautiful constructions, but they are essentially a reproduction of this great city Haatengraju.

Like any of its reproductions, this beautiful city is very different in two ways from cities of other races. In this city, one cannot hear sound, nor find light that expels darkness in the night. Through the white pillars and galleries and agoras, Nagas come and go without a sound like ghosts, and no voice or singing can be heard anywhere.

So when Ryoon Fei opened his mouth, Hwareet Makerow had to receive a big shock.

“What would it feel like to live with a heart.”

Despite having the auditory sense of a Naga, which does not even recognize an army of Dokkaebis marching right behind one, Hwareet could understand his friend’s words because of the abnormal tranquility of Haatengraju. Hwareet was nonplussed and could not even think of pointing out his friend’s rudeness.

[Living with a heart? It would be living every day with the fear of death.]

Ryoon Fei detected that Hwareet’s neerm was very disorganized. Ryoon did not want to puzzle his friend any further, so he closed his mouth and neered.

[It could also mean that one feels alive every day, wouldn’t it?]

Then Ryoon raised his right hand and put it on his chest. If Hwareet did the same, he too would feel the heart beating inside his chest, but he did not. It was too embarrassing.

[Ryoon, you don’t act like this in front of others, right?]

[What do you mean, ‘act like this?’]

[You don’t touch your chest in front of others, right? Don’t do it. It’s rude.] Hwareet thought that he neered too harshly and added: [You’ll stop doing that after ten days, anyway.]

Ryoon lowered his right hand, and turned his body to look towards the center of Haatengraju. There, the heart tower towered a few dozen times higher than the highest buildings of Haatengraju. In the pupils of Ryoon gazing at the heart tower, disgust and horror was jumbled together. His hand, grabbing the balcony ledge, even minutely shivered.

Standing on the balcony of the Fei mansion, Ryoon Fei and his friend Hwareet

Makerow, are both 22 years-old, and according to the laws of the Nagas, could not yet be treated as adults. But, in about ten days, when the Shanaga hides behind the moon, they will be called to the heart tower.

There, they will open their chests and take out their hearts.

[I don't like it, Hwareet.]

[There is nothing to be afraid of, Ryoon. No Naga dies during the extraction ritual. Accidents may happen, and one or two every year never come out of the heart tower, that's just adults joking around to scare us.]

Hwareet neered nicely but Ryoon's face was grim.

[I'm not afraid of an accident. I just don't like the idea of extracting my heart.]

[Why is that, Ryoon? You don't like immortality?]

[Not exactly immortality.]

[Okay, half-immortality, then. Now, you're gonna tell me that's nothing? I think it's something, since we don't have to fear the attacks of our enemies.]

[Our enemy? Where is our enemy? There is no enemy on the south of the Limit Border and we do not go north of it. Where is this enemy that is a threat to the Nagas?]

Ryoon's neerm was agitated. Hwareet decided to explain calmly.

[Of course we don't go north of the Limit Border to the cold lands. But those, the warm-blooded unbelievers can come down south of the Limit Border. They eat grains, so they are numerous. But we can't be numerous like them. An immortal body is a weapon to defend the Nagas against these unbelievers.]

"They are coming?!"

Ryoon shouted again with his voice.

"How! Human's horses can't even take a step in our forest. The great Leckorns can't even take care of themselves! And they all can't see temperature. Unless maybe if they can prevent the night from coming, but how dare would those unbelievers enter our forest!"

Ryoon screamed like an angry skyfish. Looking at Ryoon treating him like a

unbeliever, Hwareet felt a little uncomfortable. But Hwareet beared with him, neered nicely once again.

[What about the Dokkaebis?]

The name of the arch-nemesis of Nagas made Ryoon silent. Nagas do not fear grain-eating, horse-riding humans, nor stone-shattering, flying Leckorns. However, Dokkaebis are a different story. Hwareet calmly neered facts that all Nagas knew very well.

[Dokkaebis counter Nagas, they say? We cannot distinguish between them and their damned flares. They can't see temperature, but we too can't see them. And their fire can make our beautiful forest into ashes in a split second. Think about what happened in Peshiron island and Arkinthrow valley.]

[Those instances are too extraordinary. Dokkaebis never like war. Unless, they think of it as some kind of a funny prank, that is.]

[But that's still possible, right? I don't think they have a limit in their pranks. If I were to hear that the world is going to end some day, I would think: ah, some Dokkaebi without self-control finally did it.]

At the joking neerm of his friend, Ryoon had to smile.

[I also know a few jokes about Dokkaebis, Hwareet. And those jokes are the only things I've ever heard about Dokkaebis, ever. But, I've never heard of a neerm that Dokkaebis are of threat. Yes, they are the only people that can daze our eyes, but at the same time, they are the only unbeliever that has no interest in war. If that is so, Dokkaebis can't be the reason why we need to live as heartless creatures.]

[In this big world, there may be threats we know not of.]

[Ah, there is. Enemies exist.]

Then Ryoon shouted using his voice, infusing it with disgust.

“Right over there!”

Hwareet's face was drawn with discomfort. Knowing his friend's recklessness and rudeness, he had a very high standard of generosity, but even he thought his friend's actions crossed the line. Ryoon Fei was pointing at the heart tower.

[Ryoon, do not voice. The heart tower cannot be a target of such blasphemy.]

Ryoon dropped his hand pointing at the heart tower, but did not answer Hwareet's neerm with neither neerms nor words. Hwareet suddenly felt as if he was a trespasser. Hwareet changed his complexion and tried to change the topic a couple times, but he could not get any reaction back from Ryoon. So, Hwareet decided to confront what Ryoon was silently asserting.

[You won't extract your heart?]

Ryoon still did not neer but his scales colliding with each other made an eerie sound. Hwareet's face saddened.

[You don't really want that, do you?]

[What if I do, what will they do?]

Hwareet neered full with despair: [That is impossible.]

[Please give me an answer. You should know about these things because you're an acolyte. If a Naga states that he will live and die with his heart, what do the guardians do? Do they force the extraction?]

[No, the guardians do nothing. But, I do know of some cases that might help you, though. There has been a few Nagas that could not get their hearts extracted because of some unavoidable events.]

[What happened to them?]

[The women, of course, were protected safely by their respective clans and waited until next year to get their hearts extracted.]

[And the men?]

[They had to hide themselves desperately until the next year came. But no men survived. They all got murdered.]

[Murdered? By who?]

[Don't act like you don't know. You're the one who neered that unbelievers can't come south of the Limit Border.] Then Hwareet added an explanation: [They were all murdered by other Nagas.]

Ryoon's scales collided with each other again and made a cacophony.

Hwareet sat down. On the table was a box that he brought. It was a gift for him and his friend to eat and enjoy, but the atmosphere was not at all for eating anything.

Hwareet neered as he looked inside the box slowly.

[Ryoon, after ten days, the Fei clan will no longer protect you, because you become a free man. But between a free man and a free prey lies a huge difference. If you extract your heart, the women will recognize you as a man, but if you don't, you're just a Vienaga. They will stalk you, and kill you.

And-]

Hwareet looked back at Ryoon, but his hand still hovered over the box. Suddenly his hand bolted into the box like lightning. When Hwareet's hand came back out, it it grasped a big rat. The rat desperately squeaked, but Hwareet neered, still looking at Ryoon.

[You may be eaten.]

Ryoon Fei looked at Hwareet with a rigidly tense face, who then moved the mouse to his mouth.

With the sound of bones crushing, the squeaking stopped.

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Baiso mountain, north-west of the Keezoon mountain range.

A traveler was walking along the ridge of the Baiso mountain. His thin cane and thick clothing was no different from any other traveler, but his head was cleanly shaved. Clearly, he was a monk, but in this region of the Keezoon mountain, the monk seemed a little out of place. Around here, there are no temples, let alone a village.

However, it didn't look like the monk was lost. The monk was going down the Baiso valley, and next to the stream that flows on the bottom were clear shapes of buildings. Those buildings, which stood in the hollow place where there was not much wind, were huts that might have been built by gold-panners or hunters.

The monk diligently walked down towards those huts.

Suddenly, his surroundings became dark.

Behind the monk, who wondered if the sun went behind the clouds, suddenly blew a gust.

At the strong gust, the monk tripped forward. Fortunately, the monk rolled into a thicket, and was spared from tumbling all the way down to the valley floor.

The monk, his heart almost jumping out of his mouth, looked up at the sky, breathing heavily. Then, he couldn't close his agape mouth.

What popped out from behind the mountain the monk climbed down, was a gigantic skyfish.

Its ventral fin was too great to fit in a glimpse. The mouth looked like it could engulf a mountain, and the eyes scattered all over behind it glimmered fabulously in thousands of colors. Avoiding those eyes one couldn't dare look directly at, the monk moved his line of sight backwards, and soon let out an exclamation. The thing that everyone talked about, was there.

Collapsed towers and walls, pillars, and a dome blazing with sunlight.

The monk realized that it was not as luxurious as people said.

People talked about jewelled pillars and gold-coated domes.

Of course, that is a result of interpreting the reflection of sunlight according to vulgar greed. What was on the back of the skyfish were merely ancient ruins that fell before the heavy weight of time. There, instead of shiny rocks or yellowish metal, thickly layered time burned gloriously. The monk teared up.

Looking at the great fish floating in the sky bearing ruins on its back, the monk did not hear the ruckus down at the valley until much later. The monk got up and sat down, and turned his line of sight towards the valley floor, suppressing his reluctance. He could not hide his surprise and worry for what was happening there.

On the valley floor, three horses stood in a group. Their formation was similar to that of a carriage, but a little different. First, a rider was on the center horse of the three. And, the horses were wearing a yoke, but what was connected to the other end of the yoke was no carriage. A long and tough-looking rope was

attached to the yoke, and on the other end of the rope, people were tied to it. And those people tied onto their backs something the monk knew, but has never seen before.

It was a rectangular kite, only a few hundred times bigger than a regular one. The monk realized why the horses were needed and moaned.

Then, some signal that the monk couldn't hear must have rang. The horses suddenly started running.

The people on the bottom of the valley had everything minutely prepared. The horses ran to the direction where they could get the most out of the valley winds. The ropes pulled tightly, and suddenly the kites flew into the sky. There were five kites.

The monk understood that the kites were put in the air by the horses, but he questioned if the kite could sustain flight or be controlled. That moment, the monk found that there were ropes other than the ones connected to the horses with the power of the horses, but was doubtful that it could be controlled or kept in the air. Then, the monk realized that there was a separate rope connected to the kite, other than the one connected to the horse. The monk looked around to find out where that separate rope was connected to. The rope was connected to a gigantic pulley, fixed on the ground. The monk, once again, was astonished by their preparation. The horses only lifted the kite up. Once the kite was in air, it was controlled by the pulley, which served as a gigantic reel.

As the monk predicted, the people tied to the kite pulled out their dagger. Those people cut the rope connecting the kite and the horse, and the kites separated from the horses, flying up. But another rope was connected to the pulley, and muscular men firmly grasped the handles of the pulley.

These people were attempting to climb on the back of a skyfish using kites, an extremely daring plan. The monk didn't believe in its possibility but was still impressed by their adventurousness, and encouraged them silently by clenching his hands.

Then the monk realized there was a problem with one of the kites.

There was one kite that shook unstably unlike the other four kites that flew properly. The monk examined the kite with his surprised eyes, and soon realized

that the kite was still connected to the horses. What happened? The monk opened his eyes widely and observed. Soon the monk realized that the person on the kite cut the wrong rope.

That person cut the rope connected to the pulley instead of the rope connected to the horses. From under the valley, people screamed profanity, and the rider on the horse connected to that kite was full of anger to the top of his head, spitting out vilification. The kite ascended with an unstoppable force, and the horses were about to fly away with it. The rider unsheathed his sword, as if he made a harsh decision. The monk screamed in disagreement but the distance was too great for his voice to be heard.

As soon as the rider disconnected the rope, the kite soared high into the sky.

The monk jerked up and looked at the kite. The kite, with both ropes disconnected, was shaking wildly as the wind blew, completely detached from the ground. The monk felt like he was going insane with sympathy for the one on the kite. The person on the kite could probably die from the fear itself.

At last, the kite slowly fell down. The kite came down towards the mountain ridge the monk was on like it was pushed. At the moment of the kite's crash, the monk had to turn away.

There was a large crash sound. The monk ran to the kite, suppressing his shaking heart. Bracing for the horrific scene he was about to see, the monk mourned for the death of that unfortunate person.

The death was so mortifying that he could not even die, but had to stand up and speak vehemently?

The monk was dumbfounded by this unbelievable scene. The person on the kite was roughly removing the rope that held him on the kite and cursing out everything that came into his view. Even if the kite slowed down the descending speed, the speed at its impact was enough to crush one's body.

What kind of a person was he?

Then the monk realized the person was almost 3 meters tall.

Because of the absurdly large kite, the monk could not realize until now how gigantic the person was. The monk soon realized what was happening. But his

excitement did not calm down so easily, and the monk said in a shaking voice.

“A...are you all right?”

“What are you! Are you kidding me!”

The other person turned his fearful beak towards the monk. The monk cowered.

“I saw the crash while I was passing by. Are you injured anywhere?”

The other person, flurried with anger, softened his voice a little.

“I’m fine, dammit. I’m fine! Are you relieved?”

“That’s incredible. Falling from that height and being fine. You would have died if you weren’t a Leckorn.”

The Leckorn snapped his beak. It was a gesture equivalent to snorting for humans. The monk could not hide his astonishment, and quickly looked over the arms and legs of the Leckorn. Having scratches here and there, the feathers were wet with blood in various places, but miraculously no bones were broken. The monk had an urge to touch him. But the Leckorn, not caring if the monk was staring at him or not, only looked up at the other four kites in the sky.

The monk too looked up at the sky. The other four kites were approaching the skyfish. The Leckorn stomped his feet impatiently.

“A little further! Just a little! Goddess who is lower than all, please! Loosen more rope, you lowlives!”

But luck was far away from these daring adventurers. To add, about a 100 meters too far.

The rope ran out at a point about a 100 meters away from the skyfish. The kites shook everywhere, not knowing what to do, and the skyfish leisurely passed over their heads. The people at the valley floor had to make a decision before the kites were in danger. Seeing that they were pulling back the rope, the Leckorn screamed.

“No!”

The Leckorn sank to the ground, pulling his comb. The monk consoled the

Leckorn.

“It was truly a daring plan. I almost thought it succeeded. If the skyfish flew a little lower, it would definitely have succeeded.”

The Leckorn was not listening to the monk at all. He was only staring at the dorsal fin of the skyfish that swam leisurely to the opposite side of the sky. The skyfish swam without changing its form at all. The fact that the skyfish could have contacted the beings of the earth after thousands of years since it started its flight, and that this contact failed by a mere few hundred meters, did not seem to affect the skyfish at all. The skyfish, completely indifferent, disappeared to the other side of the sky.

A lot of time passed when the skyfish disappeared to the other side of the mountain range. The monk immersed in emotion heard the Leckorn stand up and dust his feathers, and looked back at him. The Leckorn looked back at the broken kite and ranted, then screamed full of anger.

“Robbes, you bastard! I will kill you! 100 meters short!”

The monk did not know who Robbes was, but he could still presume that his life was in danger. The monk tried to stop the Leckorn but the next moment, the Leckorn was already running down the slope of the mountain. The Leckorn strided down the slope, his motion closer to that of flying than running, and the monk hastily chased the Leckorn.

Unable to catch his breath, the monk reached the bottom of the valley only to find out the situation was not as severe. The Leckorn was screaming at this furry human assumed to be Robbes, and surprisingly, Robbes did not cower one bit against the Leckorn. He even made the Leckorn fluster.

“You motherfucker, we would’ve had enough rope if you didn’t go batshit crazy to get on the kite! I let you on the kite and you cut the wrong rope and destroy the kite!”

The monk opened his eyes wide. A human can’t do that. Only fellow Leckorns can talk like that to a Leckorn. Observing Robbes in surprise, the monk could realize what Robbes was after a moment.

“Dammit, I got excited. I got too excited to finally get on the back of a skyfish...

Wait, even if I did cut the right rope, we would've failed regardless! All the other kites didn't make it up there!"

"So you shouldn't have even tried to get on the kite in the first place! We dissuaded you! We didn't have enough rope because of your stubbornness! We didn't have enough rope because we had to lift your butt up there!"

The Leckorn breathed out like a storm but could not say anything back. The people that gathered only sneered like they knew this would happen, not worrying about the life span of Robbes. At that moment, Robbes recognized the monk.

"Hmm? A monk? What do you want?"

The monk did not rage at this impudent question. If his assumptions are correct, Robbes is currently not human. So the monk joined his hands politely and bowed.

"I am Orenol. I have some business for the Leckorn here."

The Leckorn blinked in surprise.

"What do you mean? I thought you said you were just passing by?"

"I was coming here. I came to meet Tinahan, the conductor of the people here. It appears that you are him."

"I am Tinahan, why have you come to meet me?"

"I came from the great temple Hainsha."

Suddenly Tinahan's comb stiffened. Robbes also said quickly, looking around.

"Ah, is that so. Would you like to come inside for a moment?"

"Did you change into a human?"

"Huh? Ah, no. I'm a Dokkaebi. Would you prefer a Kim?"

Orenol smiled, and nodded at the Legionae of souls.

"Since your outer form is a human, surely I would prefer you to be a human."

Like Orenol predicted, Robbes was a Legionae. If he wasn't a Legionae with multiple souls in him, what human would abuse a Leckorn like he did?

Confronting Tinahan, Robbes probably put forth the soul of a Leckorn.

Robbes, putting forth the soul of a human like Orenol requested, brought Orenol to the shack nearby along with Tinahan. Others tried to follow, but Robbes shooed them away.

Inside the shack was dirty and dark. Tinahan lifted up a corner of a table topped with all kinds of tools and sundries to clean it and sat Orenol on a chair next to it. Robbes brought out a bottle of liquor and cups from a chest, but Orenol, a monk, refused the liquor. Robbes shrugged and put away the cups, taking a sip out of the bottle and handing it to Tinahan.

“I have nothing else. Would you like some water?”

“No, thank you. I came just at the right time. I got to see a magnificent sight.”

“You would have seen us succeed. Only if Tinahan wasn’t so stubborn.”

As he said this, Robbes glared at Tinahan. Tinahan snapped his beak, and Orenol smiled. When everyone stopped talking, the table was surrounded by a dreadful silence.

Tinahan shouted as if he couldn’t take it anymore.

“Okay! Orenol, was it? How long has it been?”

“Half a year.”

Tinahan looked back at Robbes with a face full of horror. Robbes spoke with a pale face.

“It’s been that... no, when did time pass like that? I apologize. I did not keep track of time, being at such a secluded place. I did not intend to scam you.”

“Yes. The Great Temple does not doubt the fidelity of you. We thought that there was an obvious misunderstanding, and I was sent to investigate.

Orenol, after saying this, smiled apologetically.

“I hoped to see you succeed.”

“We could have succeeded! You saw that too!”

Tinahan slammed the table, and naturally, the table became pieces. Orenol and Tinahan looked dumbfoundedly at the broken table, and Robbes groaned as

he pulled out his hair.

“You make us broke, dammit.”

Tinahan’s face sunk. Robbes pushed away the broken table lightly and spoke quietly, as if he had calmed down a little.

“I will tell you the truth. Right now, we can’t even pay the interest, let alone the principal. We would even have to give you this table, but unfortunately, our respected conductor demolished it. However, we can succeed. Since you saw it yourself, there would be no need to explain further. Our plan is perfect.”

“Ah, yes. It was a magnificent sight. When I left the Great Temple, I was dubious. But, I think I can fully believe now. Of course, it looks extremely dangerous, but it also looks like it could succeed. So, how did you plan to get down if you did succeed?”

“We would climb back down on the rope. When the kite reaches the back of the skyfish, the rope would be cut from the pulley’s end. Then the climbers could come down by using the rope any time.”

Orenol became doubtful if the people in front of his eyes even had this thing called rationality. Climbing down a height of about two thousand meters; Orenol couldn’t even attempt it even if he died and came back alive. To avoid this image from showing up in his head, Orenol quickly changed the topic.

“I understand. However, you are yet to succeed, yes?”

“We can succeed! Please give us more time. What happened just now was like a last rehearsal. Yes, that’s it. The preparation and rehearsal is all done, so next time, we succeed no matter what!”

“Yes, I hope so.”

Robbes opened his eyes wide at Orenol’s response.

“Are you giving us more time?”

Tinahan also looked at Orenol with eyes full of expectation. Orenol fidgeted with the rosario on his wrist and spoke.

“Until when should we wait?”

Robbes's face became full of discomfort. Robbes, after struggling to speak for a while, finally opened his mouth.

"We need about six months."

Orenol directly stared at Robbes and Robbes blushed at that glare. Orenol spoke quietly.

"You are telling me to wait another six months?"

"We can definitely succeed after half a year. We already researched so much about the migration of the skyfish. Give me a second. I'll show you the journal we recorded."

Then Robbes brought the thick journal that he stashed at the corner of the hut. The journal made out of parchment had ragged edges, showing how many times it has been referred back to. Robbes drove Orenol half insane with the numbers and symbols recorded in the journal. Orenol did not quite understand what Robbes was saying, but he could somewhat understand the conclusion. Robbes seemed to be confident that there will be seven skyfish flying over Baiso valley in the next six months, and two of them would fly through at the appropriate altitude.

"The other five are much bigger in size. No one knows why, but skyfish fly higher the bigger they are. Of course, the bigger they are, the greater the ruins on their back, but its difficult to fly to such a height. Even here at Baiso valley where we thought the wind would be most appropriate, we can't fly that high. Only the small ones like the one flew over today-" Orenol moaned at this phrase. "flies at a height we can reach with our kites. We need to wait six months for another one of those tinies."

"Thank you for your explanation. But hearing your explanation, I cannot help but worry."

Robbes's eyes glared sharply.

"Worry! Do you have any objections against our predictions?"

Seeing that Robbes's speech tone changed in the middle of it, Leckorn's soul probably came forth again. Orenol spoke cautiously.

“How could I. I saw a skyfish for the first time today. My worry is for you. You told me that you couldn’t even pay back the interest, then how did you plan to live here for the next six months?”

Robbes blinked a couple times and closed the journal, sighing. Tinahan spoke as he creased the skin between his eyes.

“Dammit, it’ll be hard. But we can do it. There are plenty of things to eat in Baiso mountain. So we’ll survive six months somehow. So don’t worry about that. You just need to extend the payback time.”

“There is a lot of you, including horses.”

“We can still manage. Since we have horses, we can reap and sow if we have to.”

“If all of you starve to death or run away, we can’t be paid back the money you owe us.”

“That won’t happen! I will get on the back of a skyfish!”

Orenol started to fidget with the rosario again. Tinahan was discomforted by the rosario, but had enough judgment to not say that out loud. And Robbes wanted to block his ears, afraid that the young monk would say that he will confiscate all the tools because their plan was unrealistic. Then Orenol spoke.

“I will make a proposal.”

“What? What proposal?”

“The Great Temple requires a Leckorn.”

“A Leckorn?”

“Yes. The Great Temple wants to ask you, Tinahan, a favor. If you take this favor, we will get rid of all the debt, and lend you money for the next six months.”

Tinahan and Robbes was dumbfounded at this amazing offer. Robbes first got a hold of himself, and spoke.

“What is this favor?”

“Are you human again? I’m sorry to tell you that this favor could only be told

to the person that will take the favor. But I can tell you that it will take about four months, and it is very very dangerous.”

Robbes thought that Orenol’s last words were pointed at Tinahan. No Leckorn runs away from a dangerous task. Indeed, Tinahan spoke like it was nothing.

“Hmph, how dangerous?”

But Orenol meant his words. Orenol looked at Tinahan with worrying eyes.

“I’m not sure how this analogy might work, but it’s as dangerous as falling into water.”

Tinahan’s comb stiffened.

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When the humans dragged a part of day into the night with lamps and candles, the part of night that was exiled by day wandered without a place. A Dokkaebi brought this piece of night into the day. By gaining the night, he also gained the five daughters of night, which are chaos, charm, imprisonment, concealment, and dream. The Dokkaebi constructed a gigantic castle with their assistance.

He had a gracefully Dokkaebi-like reason why. He thought that it would be funny.

Chaos determined the inner structure of the castle and Charm determined the outside. Imprisonment determined the countless labyrinths, mazes, and traps, and Concealment determined the trap-hallways, trapdoors, and passwords. But, it is unknown how the fifth daughter of night influenced the construction of the castle. The youngest daughter of night, Dream, is completely different from her four sisters. Dream is the most resembling to night, but also completely contradicts night. Night hides and conceals and covers, but dream reveals and discovers and opens, and these characteristics of Dream, unfortunately, are like day. However, the character of Dream, that can only be seen in darkness but not in the brightness of day, proves, like stars, that its essence is a part of night. The youngest daughter of night, with such complicated characteristics, intervened the construction of the castle like her older sisters, but the property of her intervention is unknown.

Of course, letting aside the intervention of dream, the Millemundos is a

mysterious construction on itself.

The only person that knows the exact number of floors in Millemundos, and the number of rooms and hallways and stairs in those floors, is the castellan. Of course, there are some facts well-known to frequent visitors to Millemundos. For example, the fact that the 4th floor of the main building can only be reached from the 7th floor, the fact that turning right on three corners anywhere in the castle leads to the dining room, and the fact that spinning left twice on the top of the east tower teleports one butt-first to the center of the castellan's study are such. So the former castellans of Millemundos, according to their taste, placed a pillow, a bunch of iron nails, or a lit candle.

Sabin Hasooun, the chief of force of Millemundos, saw that the castellan was carrying a bucket full of beetle feces moments ago, and so he looked up at the black sky with a face full of melancholy.

Usually, it was the job of Bihyung, who is the butler of the castellan, to land butt-first on the floor of the study. But right now, the chief of force had a letter that had to be delivered personally to the castellan. Sighing, Sabin spun twice in self-abandonment.

As his surroundings changed, he landed butt-first on the study floor.

Sabin got up a little confused. There was nothing on the study floor. Sabin got up dusting his hip, and looked at where the desk of the castellan is.

The 11th castellan of Millemundos, Bawoo Muridole, was looking at Sabin with a trowel on his hand. Sabin at last felt relief when he saw the bucket and flower pots near the window.

“Have you been dreaming well, castellan? Was that bucket for manure?”

“Yes?”

“Oh, I thought maybe you would spread that on the floor...”

Sabin stopped talking because he saw the castellan's eyes gleam.

“Hmph!”

As he heard the castellan hem, Sabin apologized to the next visitor. At the same time, he started making a list of people to tell ‘that the castellan called

you.' Who should it be? As Sabin was engulfed in his imaginations, Castellan Bawoo spoke to Sabin a little frustrated.

“So, what’s your business?”

“Ah, castellan. Wouldn’t it not be the manure, but the amount of sunlight? Millemundos is dark, for sure.”

“What’s your business!”

Sabin smiled. The castellan probably wants to kick him out right now. So, Sabin decided to cooperate. Sabin dragged a chair and sat.

“The beetle of Kims that shave their head had a message for you.”

“Ah, the Kims that call themselves monks. But why did you come yourself? What’s Bihyung doing?”

Bihyung is the name of the butler of the castellan. Sabin shrugged.

“The Kims wanted it. You know, how they process business they think is important?”

“How do they process it?”

“...They think that only a minimal amount of people should know about it.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“This is my theory, but Kims think the importance of an important business is kept when only a few people know about it. Such a weird way of thinking, right? The more the people know about it, the more help they’re going to get.”

“There can be more people that try to sabotage as well.”

“If its such an important business, why would someone try to sabotage it unless they’re crazy?”

“Kims think too much, that’s why. Anyways, that’s what they want, so let it be that way. Let only us two know. What is the message?”

“The Kims requested a dispatch of one Dokkaebi.”

“For what?”

“They’re forming a rescue party to go south of the Limit Border and rescue a

Naga. They need a Dokkaebi that will be a part of that rescue party.”

Castellan Bawoo looked at his chief of force with a surprised face. The castellan knew that his chief of force dedicates most of his time every day to come up with pranks for his castellan. He also knew that his chief of force respected him. This gave castellan Bawoo Muridole a kind of comedic entertainment. Sabin Hasooun detects a few dozen chances every day to pull a prank on his castellan, but only executes not even a tenth of them. So, the castellan would enjoy the joys of purposely let his guard down and putting his chief of force in an internal conflict. But, the words of the chief of force were no joke.

“Those Kims decided to bring a Naga north of the Limit Border? Why?”

“Can’t say. They never told me the reason. It’s probably a part of their secretism.”

“Is the rest of the rescue party a secret too?”

“Ah, they told me that one. Those Kims seem to follow that old maxim that says only three can go against one. The rest of the rescue party consists of a Kim and a Leckorn.”

“Interesting. What reward are they offering?”

“They will give 200 gold bars.”

“That’s pretty unconventional. That makes me want to go. Hey, wait, what’s with that face?”

“Nothing, really. You can call it the face of a chief of force contemplating who to support for the next castellan election.”

The castellan growled until his chief of force was satisfied and spoke seriously.

“So who should we send.”

Sabin was a little startled.

“You intend to send someone? Three going against one is merely an old maxim. That silly rescue party is going to get murdered the moment they set foot in Keeboren. It’s impossible.”

“Why is it impossible?”

“They don’t know. Who knows so well about Nagas or Keeboren?”

“That Kim will.”

“Huh?”

“That Kim that’s a part of the rescue party. I can guess who that will be. There is only one Kim that knows a lot about Nagas and Keeboren and is capable of leading such a rescue party.”

“There is such a Kim?”

“Kaygan Draaka.”

Sabin was surprised. He knew that name. That was the name of a legendary Kim wrestler that went undefeated among Dokkaebi wrestlers.

“That Kim wrestler is still alive?”

“Yes he is. He lives near the Limit Border, eating Nagas.”

Sabin tried to laugh. He didn’t understand the castellan, but he thought it was some kind of a joke. But the castellan’s face wasn’t expecting a laughter.

“What do you mean, ‘eating?’”

“Take it literally. He hunts Nagas, and eats them.”

Sabin held out his hand with a confused look on his face. Sabin made a gesture of him grabbing food with his hands and moving it to his mouth. The castellan nodded, and Sabin’s face became blue.

“Is he insane?”

“He cooks them, so I heard.”

“Ah, is that so... what?”

The castellan locked his fingers together on his lap, and spoke with a face like he didn’t know what to say.

“Um, Kaygan hates Nagas. He hates them so much that he literally eats them. That’s why he does it. He ambushes Nagas near the Limit Border, butcher them, and boil them.”

Sabin gulped.

“If he hates them so much that he would eat them, wouldn’t people call him ‘mentally deranged’ than ‘a man of his words?’”

“I don’t know, he has his reasons. As you know, a heartless Naga is very difficult to kill.”

“Oh, is that why he boils them? So they don’t regenerate? But he doesn’t have to eat them, right?”

“It’s a waste of meat.”

Sabin, chief of force, looked at the castellan as if he was mad. The castellan smiled and waved his hand.

“That was Kaygan’s answer. I asked like you did, and Kaygan answered as such. But he has other reasons. Hm. Give me a second.”

The castellan looked for something in his desk drawer. A little after, the castellan took out an old piece of parchment.

“This is a letter from Kaygan from 6 years ago. Give it a read.”

Sabin carefully received the letter and started reading.

Peace be with you, this is Kaygan.

I was secluded for quite some time. As you know, in the outback near the Limit Border, it’s much easier to obtain weapons than writing utensils. A habberdasher that I met by coincidence yesterday happened to have some parchments, so I was able to contact you at last like this.

I considered about your suggestions on the last letter. But I’ve decided that I cannot stop this act. Yes. I still eat Nagas these days. I do not want to sound morbid, but I do not feel the need to circumvent, either.

Do you know the story of the Kithalger tiger hunters? When a tiger hunter of Kithalger is eaten by a tiger, the son of the dead tiger hunter becomes the son of all the other tiger hunters. Then, the hunters teach all of their techniques to him. When the son is ready, they go on a tiger hunt. When they cat a tiger, they open the tiger’s stomach and take out its liver on the spot. They make the son eat it.

I am that survived son, castellan.

Nagas engulfed everything that was precious and meaningful to me other than my disgusting body. So, I eat them. Maybe one day, I too may be eaten by them. I try not to go south of the Limit Border, but as I pursue a faltering Naga, I realize myself standing in the rainforest. When I realize that I gave up that one advantage I had over the Nagas on my own, castellan, I feel chills like the Nagas even in the scorching heat of the rainforest. I quickly make my way back north, but I get myself in a same situation a few days later.

And one day, once I cannot swing the Yearner anymore, I will die. I wouldn't mind if you dismissed it as a death of a madman and forgot about me.

There is no way I can't go mad.

Under the letter was not a signature, but weird symbols. Sabin looked up and the castellan explained.

"Those are the hunting symbols of the Kithalger hunters. Black lion and dragon."

"Black lion and dragon?"

"Both were made extinct by the Nagas. It's read 'Kaygan Draaka' in Kithalger hunting language. He got his name from this."

Sabin asked as he returned the letter to him.

"Ah. So that name isn't his real one?"

"Yes, but I cannot tell you his real name without his agreement."

Castellan Bawoo returned the letter into his drawer and looked back at the chief of force of Millemundos.

"So, what do you think?"

"So this wrestler is taking revenge on the Nagas by the way of Kithalger hunters who vanished hundreds of years ago? Murdering and eating their nemesis?"

"You could say that."

"What did the Nagas do to him to make him deserve such an insane revenge?"

"Something very horrible."

Sabin waited for the castellan to continue with his words but he did not. Sabin, almost unconsciously nodded his head, but noticed something strange about the castellan's face. The castellan's face was contorted. "It was very horrible." Sabin, not knowing how tense he got, asked carefully.

"What happened?"

The castellan, engulfed in painful thoughts, shook his head.

"Like his real name, I cannot tell you his past without his agreement. Anyways, you can assume that he will know about Nagas and Keeboren better than anyone, right? It's obvious that the predator knows a lot about his prey."

Sabin spoke uncomfortably.

"That is true, but I would prefer having confirmation that my companion is sane if I'm going somewhere so dangerous. It would be very unfortunate if that Kim decides that he's bored of Naga meat, and would like to try some Dokkaebi meat for a change, wouldn't it be?"

Castellan Bawoo laughed out loud, even though it should not been laughed at.

"Don't worry about that. All of Kaygan's rage is directed towards the Nagas only. You can't incur more anger from him, either."

"I can't incur more anger?"

"Yes. Like it said on the letter you read, there is nothing left to take away from him. The Nagas took it all. It may sound ironic, but Kaygan could be the safest person to people that are not Nagas. They can't make him angry."

"That is sad."

"Yes, it is. True, too. I can confirm Kaygan's safety."

Sabin could not completely agree with the castellan. But also, Sabin did not feel an urge to attempt to refute the castellan's decision, either. There are a few things that need not be done to a castellan of Millemundos, and logical refutation against his statements is one of them. So, Sabin returned to the original topic of conversation.

"If that wrestler Kaygan is so safe and deals with Nagas like he deals with his meal, there can't be anyone better to go on the rescue party into Keeboren. So,

you're sending someone?"

"Only three can go against one. A Dokkaebi makes it three. Therefore I will send someone."

"Who will you send?"

"You can't qualify for these kinds of things, can you? No Dokkaebi knows even a little bit about Nagas or Keeboren. Therefore, all Dokkaebis are equally qualified for this task. There is no need to think about this longer. I will send the first Dokkaebi that enters this room."

"...The first Dokkaebi?"

"Yes."

If he was outside of Millemundos, Sabin Hasooun would have gently ignored everything the castellan had said just because the castellan had said them, and would not have considered it being disloyal. Anyhow, Sabin knows that Castellan Bawoo is not very wise. And it is a known both to himself and the castellan, that this fact does not affect Sabin's loyalty towards the castellan. But, inside the Millemundos, the words of the castellan must be fully accepted just because the castellan had said them.

So, Sabin did not require further explanation. He did complain for a short moment, though.

"Can I wait here with you? If I go outside, I may become that unlucky Dokkaebi."

Castellan Bawoo guffawed. Then the castellan and the chief of force started waiting.

They didn't have to wait long. Moments later, an angry Dokkaebi landed hip-first on the center of the study. The Dokkaebi saw the chief of force and started screaming loudly.

"Chief of force! Are you trying to take away my job? Then by the name of the God who kills Himself, I'm the chief of force from now on! Do you accept?"

Bihyung Srable, the butler of the castellan, was a young fellow that loved his job. Sabin Hasooun shook his head, thinking that was his misfortune. Castellan

Bawoo spoke, tittering.

“That won’t do. Because you need to be a rescuer.”

Bihyung Srable repeated what the castellan said, blinking his eyes slowly.

“A rescuer?”

“Yes. You need to get inside a place that no one has ever been for a couple hundred years, and rescue someone.”

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Translator : Imblygon

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# Silver Tears (1)

The Hero King spoke: “What? Nagas can shed tears? Let me give you some advice. Next time, look when it’s sunny outside. Your thought might change a little from when it’s raining.” – Penzhoil’s <The Hero King, Not a Hero, Nor King>

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Ryoon Fei was lying on a cold stone altar.

There was no one besides him. Nothing had certainty but the stone altar he had he back against, so Ryoon Fei thought that he was a character in a picture that had no background.

Suddenly, Ryoon flinched. Fine art, like music, is a culture that does not exist among Nagas. But unlike the indifference towards music which results from their poor hearing, the reason why Nagas do not have fine arts is because of their astounding vision. To Nagas, who can see temperature, the masterpiece of the greatest human painter is not much more beautiful than a piece of cloth of the same size. Nagas can see a very wide spectrum of colors, but since no hot or cold paint exists, Nagas do not draw.

Hence, it is not natural for a Naga to imagine himself in a picture.

Ryoon Fei knew well how he thought of ‘picture.’ He also knew that how he obtained this knowledge was not the something he could naturally neer to someone else. This was a shameful secret. Ryoon looked around quickly to see if his thought was read.

From the darkness, cold shadows emerged.

Ryoon could see the daggers colored even colder than them, grasped in their hands. Ryoon screamed, but ‘sound’ does not influenced Nagas much. The Nagas approaching the altar did not falter even a little bit. Ryoon, who was screaming, scurried to neer. But Ryoon was shocked. He couldn’t neer.

“Am I not a Naga?”

Ryoon tried to shake his hands, but only then he realized that his hands were tied to the altar. While Ryoon futilely struggled, the shadows surrounded the altar.

One of them ripped Ryoon's shirt. At the horrific sound of cloth ripping, Ryoon panicked and looked down at his exposed chest. Under the hard scales, he could see vaguely his beating heart. Because it was beating with such heat, he could see it. Ryoon looked around at those who were surrounding the altar, and shivered as he only saw cold darkness in their chests.

All of them had their hearts extracted.

And now, they were going to extract Ryoon's.

"Wait! I'm not a Naga! It's a mistake! If you take out my heart, I'll die!"

Ryoon screamed like his vocal chord would burst. Even though they would have heard it despite their poor hearing, they did not budge. Actually, there was one that moved. The one to the right held his dagger high in the air. In the darkness, the dagger shined flamboyantly reflecting all kinds of colors and temperatures. When Ryoon tried to scream again, the dagger struck down without mercy.

Ryoon couldn't even scream.

What Ryoon saw was not red. The red blood drops that poured out like an explosion looked like a fountain of all kinds of flamboyant colors to Ryoon's eyes. The circulation of air that became a carnival of colors atop his open chest even looked beautiful. It was because hot body temperature was released into the cold air. Ryoon, forgetting pain for a moment, was fixated at the scene.

Suddenly, the one on the right threw his hand forward. Ryoon, as he saw another person's hand enter his open chest, felt like his breathing was stopped. As that hand moved roughly, from inside the chest came out something like a river of lights. Of course, it was the blood of Ryoon himself.

The hand that went through inside the chest finally pulled out something that looked like a fiery jewel. The pulsating heat flow spread around like aurora. It was the heart. Because it was beating with such heat, the heart was setting fire on the darkness that surrounded it. And because of that light, Ryoon was able to see the one that took out his heart.

It was the face of Ryoon himself.

[The dream can't even be neered, Ryoon. First of all, the extraction ceremony does not happen like that. Also, the heart that you described is just like that of the warm-blooded non-believers. Too much imagination. Well, I'll give you that it was mystical.]

Hwareet Makerow smiled as it was amusing but Ryoon did not. Hwareet took back his smile, and calmly neered.

[I'm sorry. It was a horrifying dream. It looks like you're more worried about the extraction ceremony than I thought. But this is just an illusion created by your paranoia. The only ones that believe that dreams foretell anything are the Dokkaebis.]

[Humans believe in dreams too.]

[Is that so? That could be. They're level of foolishness match each other.]

[And I want to believe too.]

Hwareet closed his mind and looked at his friend. He could not think of an appropriate neerm, so Hwareet shifted his interest to the top of the dining table.

There were rats on the top of the table. The rats were not hurt anywhere, but they merely trembled lightly instead of running away. This fine touch was probably done by Samo Fei, Ryoon Fei's second sister.

The reaction incurred by the name 'Samo Fei' from the citizens of Haatengraju are two opposite poles. Those who show positive reaction are mostly men. This is because Samo is kind to the men even when she is not luring them into her bed. Kind in heart but valuing honesty as an important virtue, Somero Makerow, the first sister of Hwareet, has expressed her opinion about this conduct by saying 'What use are men when you don't sleep with them? She is pretentious.' Also, those who dislike Samo are mostly women. Because all the men come to the Fei clan. Because the men can stay and relax without the worry of being dragged into the bedroom.

Picking up the warm rat, Hwareet wondered if Samo's weird behavior was some kind of a point of negotiation that she found. Hwareet decided that he will see if this is true.

[How many men are staying over in this house?]

[About eight.]

Hwareet nodded. There can't be more than two women that are in their fertile window. If two women are paired with eight men, the chances of impregnation is very high. Soon enough, the Fei clan will give birth to many next generation Feis. And the clan will flourish. Samo Fei gained her own peace and the approval of her family by giving up the joys of bearing and nurturing of a child.

[Eight men. Your extraction ceremony would be extravagant, Ryoon. There can't be too many people that can walk to the Heart Tower guarded by so many men. Samo Fei really is great.]

[I think so too. It's too bad I'll only see her for nine days, though.]

Hwareet looked at Ryoon with a surprised face. Hwareet realized that his friend is not only fearing the ceremony itself. But before he could neer anything, Ryoon got up from his seat.

[I don't feel like eating. Are you eating before you return?]

[That is my plan.]

[Then I'll bid you goodbye now. Have a safe trip.]

Before confused Hwareet could neer anything, Ryoon left the dining room. Hwareet thought of following his friend, but decided not to moments later. Knowing his friend's personality, Hwareet knew that stopping his friend now will most definitely cause trouble.

After Hwareet Makerow ate he looked for his escorts, and at the neerm that two of them decided they will stay at the Fei clan, let out a laughter at this nonsense.

The matriarch of the Makerow clan Dusenna will rampage in rage. Hwareet didn't mind the fact that he had less escorts but was bothered by his matriarch's wrath. There were five women in their fertile window in the Makerow clan, but only four men. They lost two of those men overnight to the Fei clan, and Dusenna Makerow will not tolerate the fact that they faced such a loss because of her son that will no longer be related to the Makerow clan in nine days.

For a moment, Hwareet thought about remaining in the Fei clan himself. Staying over at his friend's place waiting for the extraction ceremony together didn't sound like a bad idea. The Fei clan will not be interested in Hwareet who will soon become a guardian, or in other words, will not impregnate their women, but will be satisfied that two more men are staying because he is staying. (Of course, there is already ten men staying over, so the joy won't be too great.) But if this happens, there won't be any men staying at the Makerow clan. Having no men staying over when there are five women in their fertile window is an immense loss. And Hwareet Makerow did not want to cause such loss to the clan that raised him for 22 years.

In the end, Hwareet left the Fei clan with the remaining two escorts.

The roads of Haatengraju was silent, as it was since the construction of the city. Of course, if one was to open his mind, he would hear the countless neerms going back and forth in the silence, but because Hwareet wanted to think, he closed his mind for the time being.

In the silence, Hwareet thought about Samo Fei.

A woman that wants to remain a virgin, extraordinary for a Naga. But her maidenhood, ironically, promises fertility for the next generation. Naga men do not have lingering emotions for their birthplace, but if they felt such a thing, it would be like the atmosphere that Samo Fei creates in the Fei clan. The atmosphere that not only aims to impregnate a woman, but makes men stay over for a couple of months preparing for their next journey. Even so, men leave many children for the Fei clan before they depart.

Out of nowhere, a sharp neerm penetrated Hwareet's mind.

[Do you want to sleep with her.]

Hwareet looked over. One of his escorts that he was walking with was looking at him. Hwareet uncomfortably neered.

[Did you look inside my mind, Karoo?]

[It was 'open.' You thought too deep about Samo Fei.]

Hwareet was embarrassed. Karoo neered, slowly looking around his surroundings.

[Unfortunately, there are three reasons why it's impossible.]

[Three? Not one?]

[First of all, you're going to become a guardian. You will become the groom of the Goddess without footsteps, and cannot impregnate a woman.]

[That's the reason I thought of. What are the two that I didn't think of?]

[Samo Fei herself would refuse. As you know, her will is accepted. Because of her, the other women can easily get men, and so her clan respects her will to remain a virgin.]

[The third?]

[The third is the reason that we both know.]

[I know. I didn't forget.]

Because it hasn't been long since Karoo last shed his skin, his skin was smooth. But he is a very old Naga, and his neerms showed the depth of his experience.

[Many acolytes forfeit becoming a guardian right before the extraction ceremony. Because they become a guardian after the ceremony, and they can't go back. Some people criticize their acts as a result of weak willpower but I don't want to. Their emotions are natural. But, if that emotion that makes them forfeit becoming the groom of the Goddess shouldn't be dominating you. You haven't forgotten your calling, have you?]

[I never forget my calling, Karoo.]

Hwareet didn't like the fact that he was seen as such a weak person.

[I am ready. But how are the other preparations? Is the rescue party ready?]

[It seems like it is almost.]

Hwareet felt uneasy about the rescue party that consisted of other racers. Of course, because the acolyte's training curriculum included facts about the other races, Hwareet knew more about them than his friend Ryoon, but there is always a big difference between knowing from learning and experiencing it. Karoo neered, sensing Hwareet's uneasiness.

[It would be easier if one of us could bring you near the Limit Border.]

[No, you have your own duties. I actually thought of going to the Limit Border alone. Why should they dangerously come down to Keeboren and guide me? Wouldn't me going beyond the Limit Border alone and meeting them there be safe for both sides?]

Another escort, named Svachi, neered.

[Hwareet, you're thinking like the Limit Border is some kind of a defined line like a fence or wall, but it's not. Between our northernmost city Visgraju and the unbeliever's southernmost city Karabora is where the Limit Border is the narrowest, and it's still 200 kilometers wide. The other points of the Limit Border is about 500 to 1000 kilometers wide.]

Hwareet was stunned.

[They call that 'border?' Such a wide area?]

[That 'border' is determined by temperature. This thing called temperature does not change abruptly a few meters in front of you. It changes gradually over a few hundred kilometers. Even Visgraju, if it wasn't for the gold, there would be no reason to construct a city at such a cold region. Anyways, it doesn't make neerm that you'll walk through such a frigid land. Even with Sodrak it's impossible. But those warm-blooded unbelievers are not immobilized even at Keeboren. Evidently, they must come down to pick you up. Do you understand now?]

[I understand.]

[Good. Are you practicing your song?]

[It's awkward. That song.]

Suddenly Karoo spoke in his voice. "Sing it."

Hwareet confusingly looked at Karoo. The place they were walking through was the main road of Haatengraju. There were many Nagas walking alongside them and there should be many Nagas in the buildings surrounding them as well. Hwareet couldn't dare answer in his voice.

[Here? Are you crazy?]

"Hwareet, if we thought that your singing would draw other's attention, we

wouldn't have planned to have you sing.]

[But that's in the rainforest. In the rainforest, the birds chirp and animals make sounds too, but we're here at Haatengraju.]

"So it's better. Here everyone is talking with their neerms so they don't pay attention to the sound around them. I'm speaking in a very loud voice right now. But no one's paying attention, are they?"

Hwareet looked around and admitted that Karoo was right. If himself, a Naga, could clearly hear Karoo's voice, he must be talking a very loud voice, but the Nagas around them weren't paying them attention.

But Hwareet couldn't open his mouth easily. Alien, inappropriate, weird, uncomfortable, displeasure. These were the emotions Hwareet felt about singing, and he was yet to feel any emotion that was more positive than this. After Karoo insisted a couple more times, Hwareet made some sounds that sounded like singing.

Then, Hwareet was surprised by the fact that no one was actually paying attention to him just like Karoo said. Hwareet raised his voice, encouraged, but there was no one that gave him even an indifferent look. Hwareet looked at Karoo with a bright face and Karoo nodded. Hwareet thought. 'Is this what it feels like to wear a Dokkaebi Gamtu?' Like how no Dokkaebi could see what the Dokkaebi wearing the Dokkaebi Gamtu is doing, other Nagas were not hearing Hwareet's song. (In reality, they would hear a very small sound, but because they don't care, it's as good as not hearing it.) Hwareet became completely confident and raised his voice even higher.

And Svachi and Karoo thought to themselves. It's so fortunate that the others can't hear that song. Both in a good way, and a bad way.

Ryoon Fei leaned towards the fading sound with a dumbfounded face. The reason why Ryoon was confused was not because it was Hwareet's voice. He could not know why his friend was walking away while saying such crazy things in such a weird pronunciation. 'Rotting limbs? King? What does that mean? Awaken the spirit?' Ryoon pondered shaking his head, but he couldn't figure out why, and his mystical feeling only deepened.

The next moment, Ryoon realized a surprising fact.

'Music... It's a song!'

Ryoon sprang up and grabbed the fence of the balcony. He leaned his upper body forward, but the song was already fading away. Ryoon turned his body half way as if he was to follow Hwareet, but then realized that his urge was impossible to come to reality. It is extremely dangerous for an immature Naga to go outside without escorts. Like Hwareet's warning, they could be 'hunted.' Of course in the Fei clan stayed so numerous men, numerous enough to be envied by other clans, but Ryoon did not want to ask a favor to those despicable people. Ryoon thought about his aunts and sisters, but none of them would go outside for their younger brother.

[Can I come in, Ryoon?]

Ryoon changed his mind again. There was one person that would stand up for him. But he couldn't ask that person. Ryoon neered as he hurriedly walked to the center of the room.

[Please come in.]

The door opened. Because Ryoon was looking down, he could only see a pair of graceful feet. Those feet slowly walked towards Ryoon and stopped in front of him, and Ryoon had to tilt his head downward even more to not stare into the person's eyes.

[Pick your head up, Ryoon. Your neck must hurt.]

Because he was permitted, Ryoon slowly raised his head. An expression he was too familiar with was looking up at him. Eyes that opened wide as if surprised by something. But on her lips under her eyes dangled a smile that distanced itself from everything of this world. Ryoon forced himself to open his mind.

[What's the matter, Samo?]

[I heard that Hwareet just left. I thought he would stay longer. If it hasn't been too long since he left, can I call him back?]

Ryoon almost neered to her to do so.

[There is no need for that.]

Samo again looked at Ryoon with those surprised eyes and sat down on a

chair, nodding. Ryoon waited standing still and Samo neered as if she was a little troubled.

[Were you going to wait until I told you to sit?]

[Of course I was.]

[Sit. Ryoon Fei.]

Ryoon sat on a chair. Even though she sat her brother down, Samo just looked at him with a face that didn't know what to do. Ryoon neered like he was helping her.

[Please stop calling me Fei.]

[Huh? What are you talking about? You're still a Fei.]

[Only nine days are left.]

[You're a Fei until then.]

Ryoon gestured to show that he didn't want to argue. At the same time, it also meant that told he would follow the will of the woman as a man without his own opinion. Samo did not like that gesture.

[It was me who called Hwareet, Ryoon.]

Ryoon showed a twisted smile.

[Yes, I congratulate your success. Two men? Madame Dusenna must be greatly annoyed.]

Confused for a little while, Samo soon neered like she was chagrined.

[Ryoon, I didn't invite Hwareet to steal men.]

[Dusenna Makerow might think otherwise.]

[Whatever Dusenna thinks is not true. I invited Hwareet because you looked so anxious before the extraction ceremony, and I thought calling a friend might be helpful. Hwareet came because he agreed, too. But why did you send him back after just a day?]

Ryoon answered impertinently, as if he misunderstood Samo's mind.

[Then again, if he stayed for a few more days, we could have stolen the other

two men. I'm sorry for acting on my own. But according to my insufficient wit, I thought it would have caused a serious discord between the Makerow clan and...]

[Ryoon Fei!]

Ryoon closed his mind. From Samo's body emitted sharp sounds of her scales crashing into each other. She looked angry, but when her mind opened, her neerm was closer to sadness than anger.

[Why are you being so sarcastic? We don't have much time to spend with each other anymore. Like you neered, only nine days. Why should we spend this precious time being angry at each other? You don't talk to me, and you just send back the friend I called over for you. Ryoon. Neer to me. What should I do?]

[You need not to do anything. Don't waste your precious time for a person that will not be a Fei anymore in nine days.]

Samo Fei looked at Ryoon with an awestruck look. She knew that her brother was trying to coldly cut off all relationships. And this isn't irrational. Relationships disappear since he loses his Fei name and he is never allowed back to the clan. But Samo thought they could remain to be good friends, and believed that her brother would want that too.

But Ryoon maintained stubbornly a stance that opposed her humble wish.

[Ryoon, do you want us to be complete strangers? Why do you do this?]

Ryoon stared at Samo sadly and neered, dropping his head forward.

[Samo.]

[Yes? Go ahead.]

[I don't want to be a replacement for the child you'll never have.]

With a loud bang, the chair fell down. Samo sprang up from her seat and glared at Ryoon with fearful eyes. But Ryoon, instead of looking up at his sister, continued to neer while staring at his knee.

[If you want a child, have one. Compete with your sisters and aunts. If you don't want to, if you're afraid of the competition, give up the child. There is no such thing as a middle ground. Your brother can't be your child.]

[How... How dare you neer that!]

Samo's scales emitted a frightful sound. No one has ever seen Samo Fei this angry. Ryoon felt terror but kept his mind open.

[It'll be troublesome if it's too late. You're already too late at this point. There are women that have two or three daughters already. Since there are ten men in this house, it shouldn't be difficult to have...]

Ryoon could not complete his neerm. Because Samo slapped his cheek with all her strength.

Ryoon looked up at Samo carousing his cheek, and was surprised.

A silver fluid was flowing from her eyes. It isn't shown often by Nagas, and because of its surprising color, the other races believe that its magical, but it's merely tear. But for Ryoon, it wasn't just a normal tear. Ryoon looked at Samo dumbfoundedly, even forgetting to carous his cheek.

Samo too looked like she was surprised that she was crying. Her trembling fingers grazed her eye. Soon her finger shined in silver. Ryoon carefully called for Samo.

[Samo.]

Samo Fei did not receive Ryoon's neerm. Her mind was completely closed.

Suddenly, Samo threw her hand sideways.

Then, drops of glimmer flew across the dark room.

Ryoon could not look away. The silver lines that flew across, cutting through space, shimmered on the floor like small explosions. To the eyes of a Naga, which can not only see their silver but also their temperature, it was an explosion. When Ryoon woke up from the daze and turned, Samo was no longer seen. Instead, drops of silver tears leading to the door shined on the floor.

The reason why Dusenna Makerow did not exert physical force to Hwareet was not because he was her son. It also wasn't because she didn't want to leave bad memories for her family member that does not have much time left to spend together. Dusenna Makerow was an exemplar matriach of a Naga clan that was far from these absurd reasons. Even after spewing on him terrifying amounts of

verbal abuse and profanity, the reason why Dusenna ended up not laying a finger on Hwareet, was because Hwareet was an acolyte.

[Listen well, you Dokkaebi! Thank the fact that you can't make children for other clans. If you gave children to other clans after hindering our own childbirth, I will not tolerate that!]

Hwareet was astounded at his mother's wisdom. Dusenna admitted that she cannot touch the Naga that will one day become a guardian, but she neered so that it did not look like she was submitting to a Naga that will one day become a powerful social figure, but because she was pitiful for a Naga that won't make any children in the future. Hwareet, to fit this magnificent speech, made a miserable face – in other words, pretending to grieve the fact that his body cannot make children for other women, was able to mollify Dusenna.

Dusenna was satisfied, but the passion of Hwareet did not end easily. Because his three sisters and two aunts who were in their fertile window was waiting for their turn to spit fire.

Fortunately, Karoo and Svachi, who escorted him, volunteered to go to his aunt's bedrooms. Somero, the oldest sister, had enough judgment, like her mother, to not to scold her brother that will one day become a guardian. Also Karindol, who consider all men to be mentally challenged, thought this to be a dumb mistake only stupid men could make, and did not scold him much.

However, despite all this, Hwareet had to be baptized in fire by Viias Makerow.

[Would you neer to me how old I am?]

Viias's terrifying neerm burned Hwareet's mind. Hwareet thought to close his mind, hiding behind his position as an acolyte, but soon changed his mind. Nothing good could come out of that.

[You're thirty-four years old.]

[Yes, thirty-four. It's been 12 years!]

[It was my fault, Viias. Forgive me.]

[Forgive? This was absolutely my turn. I should have had my own child! But you went and lost two men! Is this matter forgivable?]

Hwareet, with a disturbed mind, wished Karoo or Svachi would sleep with Viias. Viias Makerow, unlike Karindol or Hwareet, was not a child of Dusenna. And, unlike Somero, she wasn't the oldest, either. Somero was the child of Dusenna's sister, but was adored by the matriarch with her age and her actions that fitted it. But Viias Makerow had nothing to show off. This was why she was so desperately clinging to having a child.

Hwareet knew from a certain experience from a past how much Viias wanted a child. That experience was a terrifying one, and Hwareet cautiously neered, getting rid of that memory.

[I couldn't do anything. It's not like I could have just dragged them back when they decided they would stay at the Fei clan.]

[This wouldn't have happened if you didn't go to that bitch's house!]

Hwareet didn't think that this 'bitch' was referred to Jikuren Fei, the matriarch of the Fei clan. It had to be Samo Fei.

[Viias, Ryoon Fei is my friend. Am I not obliged to visit a friend that's distressed about the extraction ceremony? It is a duty, for an acolyte like me.]

[And you have the duty as a member of the Makerow clan to watch those men! Even though there's only nine days left, you're still a Makerow! Two men! My aunts won't give them away!]

'And you'll get more sisters before you get any children.' Hwareet thought maliciously. For a woman that is not the oldest nor has any children, but yearns to become the matriarch, having more sisters would be like a Dokkaebi's prank.

Hwareet neered unconsciously.

[Some women without children are still respected by all clans for their moral excellence.]

Viias looked at Hwareet with a shocked face. Hwareet realized his sarcasm and became nervous. But soon, Hwareet reminded himself that he is an acolyte, and will become a guardian soon enough. 'Okay, then.' Hwareet drew a portrait of a certain person in his mind and opened his mind a little.

Viias sent neerms like an angry skyfish.

[Samo Fei?]

[She intends not to have children, but I don't know. If she ever wants children, it feels like she won't have the trouble that you're struggling with right now.]

[You!]

[Don't call me in vain. Also, I would like to refuse being reprimanded for something not of my fault. I am an acolyte, before I am your brother. One that will become the groom of the Goddess without footsteps one day. I solicit that you treat me according to my status.]

Vias growled as if she was going to attack Hwareet any moment, but could not do it. It was obvious which side the matriarch Dusenna would be on, between the son that will become a guardian, and a daughter that has no children. Penetrating into his sister's thoughts, Hwareet smiled coldly and neered.

[Also, let me give you some advice as an acolyte. Vias, be virtuous. Unlike having a baby, this can be done without a man.]

Hwareet waited for the explosion after he finished his neerm. But Vias did not lose self-control. Instead, Vias neered, her face becoming like that of a Dokkaebi.

[Thanks for the advice, dear brother. Let me give you some advice in return.]  
"Be careful of that."

Vias left without him. Until she completely left the room and closed the door, Hwareet stood still. It was the first time he heard Vias's voice.

But the real reason why Hwareet was shocked was because of the content of her voice. When she spoke in her voice that he heard for the first time, she was pointing at the heart tower. And Hwareet couldn't help but to remember that no more than a few days ago, his friend acted the same way. Ryoon spoke in his voice that the heart tower is the enemy. And Vias spoke in her voice to be careful of the heart tower. The fact that both his friend and his sister used their rarely used voice to 'speak' similar things, left a deep impact in Hwareet.

So Hwareet began thinking about the heart tower.

Svachi turned away, shaking his hand and groaning painfully.

[Please let me be. I don't have the energy to do that this early. It was too much last night...]

[Svachi, wake up! It's me! What ever 'that' is, I won't do 'that' with you!]

Svachi laid down straight, feeling puzzled. He sighed in relief as he realized that the Naga that shook him awake was not a certain woman of the Makerow clan, demanding to do it.

[Hwareet? Thank god. Dammit, your aunt almost killed me last night.]

[It's been quite some time since her last birth.]

[Yeah, she was so pushy, I might not go near other women for a few years. Anyways, what brings you here?]

Svachi got up slowly because of the cold temperature of early morning. And because Hwareet knew his status, he waited patiently until he was completely fine, enduring a little frustration. A little later, Svachi was at a state in which he could talk, and Hwareet brought up his business.

[I must not go through the extraction ceremony.]

Svachi blankly stared at Hwareet and turned to Karoo, who was sleeping next to him. But Karoo also was saturated in exhaustion as much as Svachi. Svachi decided he'll let Karoo sleep a little longer.

[Your friend. Ryoon, was it? I think his fear infected you, Hwareet. Only very rarely someone dies during the extraction ceremony.]

[It's not about that.]

[If you don't extract, you can't leave Haatengraju. That neerms that you can't complete your calling. No, even before that, you yourself can't survive. Would you neer to me why you're neerming that?]

[Yesterday, I angered my sister Viias. It might have been because she was enraged, but she left me with a very impressive allusion. That she'll kill me.]

Svachi felt his mind awaken abruptly. He looked around, confirmed that he didn't sense any temperature around him, and cautiously neered.

[Are you sure?]

[I believe so.]

[Why does Viias Makerow want to kill you?]

[Because she couldn't have children for 12 years.]

Svachi looked at Hwareet, perplexed. Hwareet sent calm neerm.

[Sister Viias has never had a child before. So she desperately wants men, but on the contrary, extremely hates her brother that can never make children for her. Therefore, being mad at me even the slightest would be enough reason for my sister.]

Svachi found some strange implication hidden in Hwareet's neerm, and became utterly confused at what he found.

[Uh, this question might not even make neerm, but did she...]

[As you think, Svachi.]

[Oh, god.] Svachi couldn't come up with any other neerm, so he neered again.  
[Oh god.]

Hwareet nodded, smiling sadly.

[Yes, my sister is crazy. She has a strange obsession.]

[Did she really.... demand that from you?]

[I could only stop her with the neerm that if she touched the acolyte of the Goddess, she will be cursed.]

Svachi looked at Hwareet with eyes full of sympathy, and neered.

[That is horrible. Okay. What if my and Karoo visits her bedroom? If we give her what she wants, will she be satisfied and forget her hatred towards you?]

[Can you impregnate her in eight days?]

[If we visit her taking shifts, she might believe that her chances of impregnation is high.]

[Viias herself won't want that.]

[Hmm? What are you neerming about? Didn't you say she wants children?]

[Yes, but the reason why Viias wants children is to become the matriarch. My

sister is not the direct child of the matriarch, nor the oldest like Somero.]

[Ah. You neerm that she can only count on a daughter.]

[Yes. If all she wanted was a daughter, she wouldn't have given you up so easily to her aunts. But she has an ambition, and therefore won't do anything that will anger the other women of the clan. If this is so, you will only be able to visit her about once or twice over the eight days. I don't think Viias would believe her chances of impregnation is high.]

[What method do you think she'll use to kill you?]

[She neered to be careful of the heart tower. I believe some accident will happen during the extraction ceremony.]

Svachi neered in a confused face.

[That doesn't even make neerm. Are you neerming that she'll bribe the guardians? That's impossible.]

[I didn't say such absurdity, Svachi. I probably know more about the guardians than you. Because I am an acolyte. But Viias is a phenomenal medicinologist. I do not like my sister, but because I trust her skill, I stole some of the Sodrak she made. With her skill, she might be able to forge a drug that makes an accident happen during the extraction ceremony. And over the eight days left, she'll make me take it.]

Svachi repeated Hwareet's neerm, maintaining his confused look on his face.

[A drug that causes an accident during the extraction ceremony? Is something like that possible?]

[I don't know. But if it's not interpreted that way, nothing can explain her allusion to be careful of the heart tower. Most definitely, something will happen in the heart tower. During the extraction ceremony.]

[Okay, a drug. What if you eat nothing in this house?]

[How would I do that?]

[What if you eat outside the city with us? Karoo is an adept hunter. You might not have eaten anything bigger than a rat yet but that's not such a big problem. You have to do it anyways when you're an adult. What if you eat an animal

outside that's big enough for you to last eight days?]

[Svachi, do you think I can go outside with you again? I don't know about anyone else, but I feel that my dear aunt won't allow that.]

Svachi groaned and closed his mind. Hwareet felt anxious. 'Dammit, what are you thinking about. The conclusion is obvious. A change in plan. I need to escape, now.' After the moment that felt too long for Hwareet, Svachi opened his mind again.

[Hwareet, I can feel that you're nervous, but the more I think of it, these are all merely conjectures.]

Hwareet was surprised.

[Huh?]

[You don't have any objective evidence that Viias will kill you, nor know for sure how she'll do it. Of course you neered to me a conjecture, but I've never heard of any drug that does what you told. You too probably haven't heard of such a drug, have you? Is my neerm correct?]

Hwareet had to accept it. Svachi got up as if he was reminded of something and put on his clothes.

[There is another interpretation that does not involve such a drug that no one has ever seen or heard about.]

[What interpretation?]

[You might want to disagree, but I do want to neerm you this. Hwareet Makerow, do you intend to accept that you're under the influence of an anxiety that all Nagas face right before the extraction ceremony? No, don't answer so quickly. You were probably going to neer that you're an acolyte and that you're a perfectly rational Naga that's distant from such absurd anxiety.]

Hwareet complained in his mind a little, because he was about to neer that. Svachi kept on neering.

[There is no such thing as a perfectly rational creature. Think about it. You might be as anxious about the extraction ceremony as your friend Ryoon, because you might be too embarrassed to accept it, and projecting that anxiety

on your sister. Don't you think it all makes sense?]

[Svachi, I don't have extraction...]

[Wait, first answer me this question. If Viias wanted to kill you, why didn't she do it in the past 22 years? She should have had many chances.]

Hwareet looked at Svachi, mouth agape, and Svachi smiled. With difficulty Hwareet could come up with an answer.

[It's not 22 years. She must have decided yesterday. Because I made her angry yesterday.]

[Hm. You neerm that the hatred not yet substantialized turned to an urge to kill just yesterday. Well, okay. The last drop always makes the cup overflow. But can you explain to me why she is trying to kill you in front of the supreme authorities?]

[The supreme authorities?]

[The guardians of the heart tower. If an accident happens during the extraction ceremony, the guardians will examine your body thoroughly. I don't know how good Viias is, but I won't play with fire in front of a Dokkaebi.]

Hwareet felt that he had nothing more to neer. Svachi neered as he walked to the window to raise his body temperature.

[I won't make fun of your anxiety, Hwareet. You probably know more about Viias than me. And, if there is any kind of threat to you, our duties are in peril too. So, I will confess now that your neerm sounds a little absurd, but even so, I will consider it seriously. Let's do this. Karoo and I will visit her as much as we can. We will try to amuse her, and at the same time, observe her. And you, should look for a more objective evidence. And be careful.]

Svachi's neerm was rational. Suddenly Hwareet felt like he was an idiot. Like Svachi neermed, he might be neerming that Viias is going to kill him during the extraction ceremony. The more he thought about it, Hwareet felt embarrassed. My god. That absurd drug.

At last, Hwareet decided to agree with Svachi's plan. And, at the same time, be very very careful

Kaygan looked at the Punten desert. Over the scorching white desert, the color of the sky was closer to dark blue. The sky of a desert rarely looks blue. Sky looks blue in regions that are more humid. But right now, Kaygan was looking out through a southern window, and to the south of the Punten desert was the humid Keeboren rainforest. Because of this, the sky on that side was blue, and looked dark blue like blight contrasted to the eerie white of the desert.

There was a knock on the door. Kaygan told to come in. After the door opened and a few footsteps, Kaygan turned his head.

“Sir, should I leave it on the table?”

Kaygan nodded. The young son of the inn-owner, Morty, put the pot he brought on the table. And let out words that he wasn't even asked for.

“My mother won't even touch this. And so won't my father. So I brought it.”

Then Morty made a face like a puppy that brought back a stick. But Kaygan, instead of complimenting Morty, tilted his head a little. As Kaygan's stare became longer, Morty started to feel nervous.

“Uh, do you need anything else?”

“Nothing for the time being, Morty. You can leave.”

Morty hesitated and spoke suddenly.

“Ah, almost forgot. My father asked me to ask this, but how long do you plan to stay?”

“I won't stay for long. I am waiting for a Dokkaebi and a Leckorn. They will arrive soon.”

Morty, who had nothing to talk about, left the room as if he was kicked out. Left alone, Kaygan blankly stared at the pot on the table. And in the inside, thought about Morty's attitude.

How strange of a creature are humans. It's been only two days since he met the inn-owner of the Last Inn, but he could already know what kind of a person he was. It is very easy to assume how sturdy a man is, when he has defended his inn against the desert and its infinite threats. But that same inn-owner forced his wife to cook, who probably cried in protest, and made his young son carry the

dish. Maybe he did the cooking himself. But it was his young son Morty that brought the pot. Kaygan did not want that.

Kaygan sighed and opened the lid of the pot that Morty brought.

And he bit off and ate a chunk of Naga meat.

At Karabora, Kaygan led a quieter life. In his hut at Karabora, there is a kitchen that is bigger than all the space in the hut combined. In there, Kaygan prepared all kinds of knives, saws, pinchers, hammers, mortars, and skewers, and a fireplace spacious enough for three large cauldrons. He could go south for two to four days, capture a few Naga scouts faltering in the cold (in Naga's standards), and return to his hut without encountering anyone. There was no inn-owner that screamed at his game, nor the stupid son of the inn-owner that felt astonishment about things he couldn't handle with his immature values. In that pacific place, Kaygan lived peacefully, butchering and boiling Nagas and eating them.

Those were idyllic days of carnage.

But the Hainsha Great Temple sent him a letter and now Kaygan was waiting for the companion of two others in this weird inn. As Kaygan reminded himself of this fact, he threw the bone that he was gnawing on on the table and covered his face with his hands. In the letter than Orenol left him, it said that his two companions will be a Dokkaebi and an Leckorn. Kaygan could not know how to treat them. He couldn't even remember how to treat humans.

What kind of people were Dokkaebis.

As he broke a shower of sweat tracing back in his memory, Kaygan could at last remember the winning streak from 20 years ago. This led to other memories. It was castellan Bawoo Muridol that stepped up at last to prevent a Kim – even though it was commonly known, Kaygan barely remembered that all Dokkaebis called humans this – from going undefeated. By that time, Kaygan was already regretting ever participating in this wrestling match. But he also thought that he didn't want to lose. Kaygan was slightly startled as he remembered his emotion from back then.

Maybe back then he had some competitive spirit left. Feeling like he was looking at the past of some other person that wasn't himself, Kaygan wondered

about that last match. Was it a single-leg takedown? Or a duck-under?

After a short ponder, Kaygan lost his interest. Why does it matter. Since the winning streak didn't break, he probably won that match. Kaygan stopped thinking about that wrestling match. He didn't even have interest.

And after three hours later, he regretted his decision.

The inn-owner of the Last Inn found the Dokkaebi Bihyung Srable from quite a distance. But the inn-owner could not have guess that he was a traveler headed to the inn, because the inn-owner was yet to greet a traveler that came from the sky. Only when Bihyung approached the Last Inn very closely the inn-owner realized that it was a Dokkaebi riding a beetle.

The beetle landed next to the boulder causing a sandstorm, and by the time the storm settled, the Dokkaebi was up the stairs. Bihyung glanced at the inn-owner as he barged in the inn, and the inn-owner, without hesitation, pointed at the second floor.

"There, first room from the left."

Bihyung looked up. The center of the first floor of the inn was empty to the ceiling, and the circular hallway surrounded the space, allowing the rooms of the second floor to be seen. As he found the room the inn-owner was pointing to, Bihyung smiled.

"Did you dream well! You can put my beetle in the stable! You have a stable, right?"

The inn-owner nodded and Bihyung ran upstairs to open the door of the room. And he questioned the human that looked at him with surprised eyes.

"Did you dream well! How did you faceplant our castellan on the sand?"

"I'm Kaygan Draaka."

Kaygan and Bihyung looked at each other awkwardly. Kaygan thought that he might have said something wrong, but could not figure out what. Don't people tell their name first when the meet? Was it different for Dokkaebis? And also

Bihyung felt that he did something wrong. Fortunately, Bihyung realized his mistake. Bihyung laughed cheerfully.

“Ah, pardon me, I’m sorry. I’m Bihyung Srable. You’re not offended right?”

Kaygan could not know why Bihyung was smiling apologetically, nor why he should be offended. Thinking that his back was breaking a sweat, Kaygan carefully spoke.

“From Hainsha Great Temple... Yes?”

“You’re correct. You waited for me?”

“Yes.”

Silence.

“Uh, how did you faceplant our castellan on the sand?”

“I apologize, but I forgot what I used.”

“Huh? It was the single-leg takedown! No Dokkaebi doesn’t know this. I was asking you how you pulled off a single-leg takedown on someone like our castellan that tilts his body forward so much. But you said you didn’t remember what you used? How could you? If I ever went undefeated, I would have told the story until the day I died. You forgot? Completely? Definitely? Without a doubt?”

“I don’t know, I think so.”

Bihyung looked at Kaygan with so much disbelief. Kaygan felt nervous. Do Dokkaebis respect things they don’t understand? He couldn’t remember. His head started aching. Kaygan bit down on his molar and looked at Bihyung.

Bihyung shrugged and put down his bag by his feet.

“That could happen. It’s been 20 years, and you might not love wrestling as much as we do.” Kaygan was relieved. But, Bihyung’s speech pattern that always added a question at the end gave Kaygan another subject to think about. “But how old are you this year?”

Kaygan hesitated a moment and pushed a chair for Bihyung. And by the time Bihyung sat on the chair, he could think of an answer.

“Why do you ask that?”

“Since you went undefeated 20 years ago, I thought I would meet someone old. But you don’t look that old. Ah, you were probably very young when you went undefeated, right?”

“Yes. I was.”

Kaygan thought that Bihyung’s speech pattern that always ended in a question had its positive side. ‘I could either agree, or return the question.’ Kaygan tested this, and was relieved to see it work. By the time Kaygan gave Bihyung the letter from Orenol, he recovered some composure to observe the Dokkaebi in front of his eyes. While Bihyung read the letter, Kaygan slowly restored his knowledge about Dokkaebis by comparing past memories and Bihyung.

After Bihyung finished reading the letter, Bihyung put it on the table and tilted his head in confusion.

“This letter only has things I already heard. You, me, and the Leckorn. Ah, is he not here yet? Ah, okay. Anyways, us three will enter Keeboren and follow down the Murun river. Then, we find the Naga singing a song that followed up the Murun river, protect him, and bring him to Hainsha Great Temple. This part about using the song as the signal is amazing. It’s likely that only us could hear this song south of the Limit Border. Of course, only he would be the Naga that sings a song. It’s a signal that won’t cause confusion, nor reveal us. Anyways, is that it?”

“It is.”

“I’m curious about the things that aren’t on this letter, though. The other person would feel the same way too. Things such as this: Why do the Kims want us to bring this Naga? Who is this Naga?”

“I don’t know anything beyond your knowledge, nor do I have speculations.”

“Then could you explain me this? I heard of this Murun river for the first time today. Can you find this river?”

“Yes I can. The Feldori river is one of the main major branches of the Murun river.” Kaygan thought this explanation was enough, but changed his mind as he saw Bihyung with his mouth agape. “So if we follow the Feldori river, we will reach the Murun river.”

“Where is this Feldori river?”

“We can find it in a day’s time after we go south of the desert. This is probably why the Great Temple chose this inn as the rendezvous point.”

“You know so well about the south of the Limit Border.”

Kaygan nodded.

“I’m probably the ‘guide.’”

“Huh? You articulated ‘guide’ like there is a meaning behind it?”

Kaygan regretted mentioning this. He was too lazy to explain. But Bihyung was staring at Kaygan like his eyes were lighted up. Kaygan gave up.

“Do you know the old maxim about only three can go against one?”

“Yes, I do! Doesn’t it mean that to go against one of the four chosen races in this world, the other three races must gather their force? Now that I think of it, we are three races gathered to rescue one Naga. Do you mean this?”

“Yes. But that maxim is followed by a more archaic explanation. When three is gathered to go against the one, the three must be a guide, a sorcerer, and an antagonist. You’re probably the conjurer.”

“Huh? But I can’t do sorcery.”

“The sorcerer is a trickster or a joker that disrupts order with deception. You don’t need to be an actual sorcerer. Also, your will-o-wisp sufficiently looks like sorcery to others.”

“So the guide doesn’t need to actually guide the way?”

“Yes. I think the monks of Hainsha Great Temple believe that I need to be the guide that makes all the decisions. Because I know well about Nagas or Keeboren.”

“Then the Leckorn that’s not here yet must be the antagonist. What’s an antagonist?”

Kaygan nodded slightly. As much as the human being the decision maker and the Dokkaebi being selected as the deceiver, Leckorn fits the role of antagonist well. Dumb monks obsessed with old fairy tales.

“Simply put, it’s a destroyer that demolishes everything that hinders our way. Fitting for a Leckorn.”

Bihyung, after two hours, came to completely agree with Kaygan’s words.

Leckorns do not like traveling in the desert. It’s natural, as the luscious feathers of a Leckorn provide obvious support against withstanding the enemy’s attack or preserving body temperature, but only provide disadvantages avoiding heat. If a Leckorn must travel in the desert, he crosses it faster than anyone. (Of course, not counting a Dokkaebi on a beetle.)

So, when the inn-owner saw the silhouette of a traveler that became bigger and bigger from the horizon, he immediately realized that it was a Leckorn. The Leckorn, running while causing a sandstorm behind him, was almost terrifying even, but because the inn-owner already encountered the previous two guests, he remained calm. The Leckorn ran away in a speed close to flying and leapt over the 30 meter tall cliff as if climbing the stairs is too much work. But he had to slow down when he entered through the inn door. Everyone that carries around a 7 meter long iron spear and is entering through a door, must be careful.

The Leckorn looked around after he entered the inn. And he found Kaygan and Bihyung eating dinner on a table, and promptly walked towards them. The center of the first floor had a high ceiling because it was hollow to the top, but for a 3 meter tall Leckorn that walked with an a pillar-like iron spear, it looked like it was enough to cause him claustrophobia. Bihyung couldn’t stop him from being amazed. And Kaygan again felt nervous. He somehow treated the Dokkaebi properly, but Kaygan couldn’t remember how to treat a Leckorn.

Thankfully for Kaygan, the Leckorn opened his beaks first.

“Dokkaebi and a human. I came to the right place.”

Kaygan was relieved again. Bihyung answered the Leckorn.

“Bihyung Srable. This is Kaygan Draaka. You came for the Great Temple’s request?”

“Hm.”

Leckorn, after saying this, looked around and leaned his iron spear on the ledge of the second floor. Bihyung again put a smile on his face, and when the

Leckorn sat on the floor because he couldn't find a chair big enough for him, smiled even bigger. The Leckorn sitting on the floor still looked down on Bihyung and Kaygan looked amusing to him. But when the Leckorn opened his beak, Bihyung could not smile anymore.

“I am Tinahan. I have some complaints for the Dokkaebis.”

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Translator : Imblygon

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## Silver Tears (2)

Fortunately, Tinahan did not mention any characteristic flaw or cultural vice that he deplored about the Dokkaebis. There was one complaint Tinahan had about the Dokkaebis, which was the fact that the Dokkaebis never try to approach the skyfish. Bihyung asked why that was a problem and screamed in excitement when he heard the answer.

“You’re that person! Skyfish ruin excavator! Right?”

Tinahan, opening the lid of the cask the inn-owner brought, spoke depressingly.

“Yes. If you Dokkaebis helped, I would already be stepping on the back of a skyfish.”

“But what can we do when the beetles refuse to approach the skyfish. Among us, there are people that want to know what’s in the skyfish ruins. But the beetles just don’t listen. Even the most well-trained beetle runs away like mouse against cat when it sees a skyfish. Have you never heard of this before?”

“I have. I couldn’t believe it so I even experimented once. It really ran away. God dammit. If you can teach body language to beetles, why can’t you teach them that the skyfish are docile, huh?”

“If the skyfish are actually not aggressive, why would there be an expression ‘like an angry skyfish?’

“I’ve heard that silly expression until I got tired of it. But I’ve never seen an actual angry skyfish, ever. It’s probably not even true. Since skyfish are so gargantuan, some idiots who can’t think and got too scared probably...”

Then Kaygan who kept quiet suddenly opened his mouth.

“That’s not always the case.”

Tinahan and Bihyung looked back at Kaygan. Kaygan spoke without emotion.

“There was an angry skyfish. It’s not known why it was enraged. Because the kingdom that enraged it was wiped off the face of the earth.”

Tinahan tilted his head.

“Kingdom? Ah, is this from when there was this thing called ‘king?’ Fairy tale.”

“It’s a myth from the old age. But there was such an incident.”

“But how do you even believe that fairy tale? This story could be made up by some lowlife too.”

“You can probably confirm it when we get to the Hainsha Great Temple. Since in their library are the records the monks so obsessively. Speaking of the Great Temple, I would like to talk about our schedule now.”

Kaygan was relieved inside. Bihyung and Tinahan nodded in agreement. Kaygan soon laid down words he could best lay down, which were dead words.

“As far as I know, a beetle can be rode by two. And you, Tinahan, can run as fast as a beetle. So I want to sleep during the day tomorrow, and depart here at sunset. Bihyung and I will ride the beetle, and Tinahan will run. That’ll be enough to reach the southern end of the Punten desert by the morning of the next day. At that point, let’s return the beetle home and enter Keeboren.”

Bihyung and Tinahan was confused. They expected a discussion, but Kaygan’s words were more like commands. Of course his words were more of a request than commands, but for those who had no foundation of knowledge, they had nothing else to do but agree. Assuming that this situation will continue, Bihyung raised his hand to halt Kaygan’s speech.

“I’m sorry to cut you off, Kaygan, but I feel like we have nothing else to do but nod our heads. Honestly I don’t know much about Nagas other than the fact that they extract their hearts and do not talk, and I only know that there are horrifying numbers of trees in Keeboren. How about you, Tinahan?”

Tinahan twisted his beak a little and nodded. Bihyung looked back again at Kaygan.

“Since our state is such, I don’t think you need to ask our agreement for everything. Wouldn’t it be better if you gave us commands and we followed them? You’re the ‘guide,’ are you not?”

“But you need to know the necessary facts. What if I die in Keeboren?”

“That should never happen, but if it does, I’m going to set fire on everything around me and run north as quick as I can. If you do die, only two remain. Two cannot go against one. Only three can go against one, right?”

Kaygan sighed.

“You need to know some things. You performing your talent is not a good idea at all. Nagas, who see temperature, will recognize the fire before anyone else. It might repel the Naga scouts around you for a moment, but soon, you’ll be calling for all the Naga scouts within a three day radius. Those arbophiliacs will never forgive you who set fire on their trees. Against the countless Nagas that will assault you overdosed in Sodrak, even Tinahan’s iron spear will be futile.”

Leckorns feel insults against their weapons more disgraceful than insults against themselves, but unfortunately, Tinahan could not rage at this statement belittling his iron spear. He had too many words that he didn’t know the meaning of in Kaygan’s statement. So Tinahan asked what ‘see temperature,’ ‘Naga scouts,’ ‘arbophiliacs,’ and ‘Sodraks’ meant, and Bihyung also made a curious face.

Kaygan was shocked.

Only then Kaygan felt how long the north and the south of the Limit Border was disconnected. A few hundred years ago, when the storm-like march of the Nagas was stopped by the absolute limit of temperature and concluded the Great Expansion War, the world was split in two. The Naga’s world Keeboren and the world north of it. The latter, which has mountains, badlands, deserts, grasslands, forests, and glaciers, is the normal world.

But the former world only has rainforests. One and only rainforest named Keeboren, that covers half of the world. Kaygan found something comedic in this. Only one person, other than a human that prepared facilities and tools to butcher-process-cook Nagas in the southernmost part of Karabora, the closest city to the Limit Border, and eats Nagas for a living every day, everyone now conceived the Nagas and their domain Keeboren as beings of mythology. If Nagas were to find someone to attest for their existence other than themselves, they would have to find the one that hates them the most. The clever monks of the Great Temples knew this.

Hatred is such.

“Why are you crying?”

At the worrying voice of Bihyung, Kaygan returned to reality. When Kaygan felt around his eyes, he realized that the tip of his fingers got wet. Tinahan, who dislikes crying, was glaring at Kaygan with an angry look. Kaygan wiped his eyes.

“I don’t know why I cried.”

“Did you remember something unpleasant?”

Kaygan ignored that question. And answered in a dry tone Tinahan’s question.

“Naga’s ears are mediocre but their eyes are extraordinary. Their eyes can see temperature, and because of that, even in the darkness of the night, they can see warm-blooded creatures like us. The old saying ‘Dokkaebis hunt Nagas’ derives from this. Back in time, some clever Dokkaebis made a person or animal-shaped will-o-wisp to deceive Naga’s eyes. With will-o-wisps as cold as body temperature.”

Bihyung completely forgot about Kaygan’s tears. Even from other Dokkaebis, he never heard this story.

“Wow, really? My will-o-wisp can trick Nagas?”

“Yes. If we enter Keeboren, you’re going to have to use that talent. I told you that you’ll be a conjurer, right? And you can probably guess what arbophilliacs mean. They consider trees their friends. It’s not completely wrong, since they plant trees everywhere in their domain. Therefore, they strongly dislike burning trees. They too burn trees out of necessity, but they give them a tree funeral in that case. Ah, and this is the second reason why Nagas dislike Dokkaebis. Because will-o-wisps can trick Nagas and burn down trees.”

Bihyung, astounded, kept on nodding his head. Kaygan turned to Tinahan and explained the rest.

“Naga scouts are scouts that wander around in Keeboren. Of course they’re all women, and mostly consists of adventurous Nagas or Nagas pushed away in the power game. Each Naga city has two to three scout parties. The area they scout usually is the southern part of the Limit Border. They watch out for the

trespassing of unbelievers, or in other words, people like us. And they take care of the trees. They cure plagues among trees and restore forests struck with forestfire. Their duty most of the times is the latter, in reality. Since no one goes down to Keeboren. And Sodrak is a potent drug of the Nagas. As they near the Limit Border region, Nagas' movement dramatically slows down because of the cold. But if they take that Sodrak, for a short time, they could move like they're in the hottest region of Keeboren. So, Naga scouts that wander around the area near the Limit Border always carries Sodrak. It's red. If, during a skirmish, they try to swallow a red pill, we must stop them. It gets difficult. If we can stop that, I'll say that there won't be any critical disadvantage fighting Nagas near the Limit Border."

The knowledge Kaygan spat out like a waterfall made Bihyung and Tinahan breathe heavily. Tinahan and Bihyung both looked at Kaygan with a same stare, which was a stare that asked where he got all that knowledge. But Kaygan did not answer the stare. Instead, Kaygan got up from his seat.

"Where are you going?"

"I should go cry more. It might remind me why I started crying. I want you to not follow me."

Then Kaygan picked up the twin-bladed sword that he leaned against the table and went outside. The left two looked at each other with a confused face. Then Bihyung realized that the inn-owner was peeping at them.

"Sir? Do you have anything to say?"

The Dokkaebi's kind words encouraged the inn-owner. The inn-owner made up his mind and ran to the kitchen. Then came back with a pot. The inn-owner put down the pot on the table the two were sitting by and spoke, peeping outside.

"I'm sorry but I eavesdropped some of your words. You two seem to be meeting that man for the first time today, yes?"

"You're right. Why?"

"Keep away from him! He's insane!"

Tinahan wondered for a moment whether to consider Kaygan as his companion. If he did, he would need to take care of this rude inn-owner for his

companion so that he couldn't even walk or crawl. But, realizing that it hasn't even been one day since they've met, Tinahan decided he'll let this one go. The inn-owner, not knowing that he almost got into terrible danger, desperately looked at the Dokkaebi. Bihyung tilted his head in confusion.

"I don't know, He didn't drool nor show the white of his eye nor claimed that he determines the law that governs everything. Why do you think so, sir?"

The inn-owner gravely grabbed the pot lid and opened it abruptly. Bihyung and Tinahan was deeply impressed by his action, so they couldn't hide their disappointment at the content of the pot.

"Hm, looks very dangerous. Cold meat stew."

Bihyung and Tinahan looked at the inn-owner dubiously and the inn-owner realized his mistake.

"This is Naga meat!"

The inn-owner was satisfied. Tinahan and Bihyung at last showed the reaction he expected. Bihyung retreated with his face pale, and Tinahan leaned forward into the pot and stared at its content.

"That man told me that he came into the desert through Keeboren. When I didn't believe him, he showed me this and asked me to boil it! So that he could eat it! Oh, god! Is this even real life? But I couldn't do anything because I was so scared. He stared at me with his eyes, and I've never seen such eyes before in my life! I would show you the rest of the meat but this is all it's left. That man ate it all! He ate this!"

"Uh, hm. Was it an actual Naga? Not any other animal? Even if the Punten desert is so close to Keeboren, you probably never saw a Naga before."

Tinahan spoke dubiously. The inn-owner shook his head.

"Yes, it was my first time! But I knew it the moment I saw it. What other animal has arms covered in scales? I thought I was going to faint when I took that arm out!"

Tinahan suddenly picked up a pair of chopsticks. While Bihyung and the inn-owner stared at him, Tinahan went through inside the pot and picked up each

chunk of meat. And thoroughly examined the shape of the bone. Soon after, Tinahan put down a chunk of meat and stared at it as if he was piercing a hole through it. Bihyung also saw the chunk, and as soon as he saw what was attached to it, leaned forward and vomited. There was no doubt. It was a fingernail on the end of the vague trace of scales. A flat fingernail that animals do not have.

Kaygan sat on the edge of the cliff, looking up at the dirty sky.

Watery stars saturating the black night sky, and a moon shining pale like the belly of a fish. The night sky of the desert was contemplating how filthy light actually was. Under the stains of light, the desert flowed in pure darkness.

In front of Kaygan's eyes that stared into sky that looked like stirred-up sewer water appeared a huge hand.

Kaygan stared at that hand. On top of the huge palm, there was a small piece of meat. It was a piece with the fingernail.

"Dammit, it wasn't a monkey, since it had scales. It was probably a Naga."

Kaygan, slowly turning his head, looked at the distant Tinahan's face, and Bihyung's face to the side, which was much lower, and turned away again.

"If you want to talk, I would like you to sit. Too high for me."

The two sat next to Kaygan. Even so, the heads of the two were much higher than that of Kaygan. Tinahan stared blankly at the piece of meat on his hand and threw it into the desert.

"Hm. Let us hear some explanation?"

"It was a piece of the Naga scout's corpse that I met on the way to this inn. They would have regenerated if I just left them there, so I cut them to pieces and grabbed a few important parts. One of them must have been the hand."

Kaygan's speech was calm. Tinahan couldn't raise his voice.

"They regenerate that well?"

“Only once, but I’ve seen a Naga that regenerated her head.”

Tinahan’s comb erected.

“H...head?”

“Yes. When I defeated her, I was very tired, and I couldn’t buy more time. So I cut her head off left the rest in the rainforest. I brought the head back and ate it. 2 years later, I met her again. She was delighted to see me. She was probably looking for me after regenerating her head over 2 years.”

“God damn... What happened?”

Kaygan looked back at Tinahan for moment and turned away again to the darkness.

“I don’t think I’ll ever see her again.”

Tinahan decided he won’t ask what was the result. Instead, he asked something else.

“So, for at least 2 years, you’ve been doing this silly thing?”

“I did it for longer than that.”

“You ambushed Nagas, and boiled their corpses?”

“I sometimes grilled them. What is it that you want?”

“What?”

Kaygan said monotonously.

“Be specific in what you want. Are you trying to reprimand? Do you want to eat Nagas too? If it’s neither, are you trying to pointlessly interfere with my life?”

Tinahan was perplexed. In reality, he didn’t know what he actually wanted. Then Bihyung, who kept his mouth shut until now, screamed.

“I will reprimand! I will reprimand and reprimand and reprimand. Do you get it?”

Kaygan looked back at Bihyung. Bihyung shouted, swinging his clenched fist in the air.

“Nagas are people! Like you! How can a person eat another person! Can you

refute this?”

“I won’t.”

Bihyung was puzzled. He faltered momentarily, not knowing what to do with his hand, and spoke.

“Then you admit to the immorality of your act? Completely? Absolutely? Without question?”

“I admit if you want me to. It doesn’t really matter to me.”

“What? What do you mean by that?”

“To put it in the simplest words, it won’t matter what you say to me. If you want to revile me, revile me, and if you want to curse me, curse me.”

“That is not what I want! Admit what you’re doing is wrong and stop doing it! That is what I want. Do you understand?”

“I get it.”

“Then will you repent and stop your acts?”

“I will not repent, nor stop.”

Bihyung was frustrated.

“Then can you convince me? Try it! Why do you do such things?”

“I won’t explain.”

It was like screaming to a tree. Bihyung felt that way. What caused chaos in Bihyung was the fact that Kaygan did not look like a villain at all. Kaygan did not laugh like he was crazy nor showed a disturbing glare. He was speaking quietly dry words that weren’t rude. When Bihyung felt a ridiculous urge to scream, Kaygan spoke again.

“If my actions bother you so much, I am sorry to tell you that I have only one thing to give you. Bihyung, you can practice the right that all Nagas have for me.”

“Right? What right are you talking about?”

“The right to attempt to murder me.”

Bihyung flinched. Kaygan stood up slowly and looked at Bihyung. His eyes were pacific.

“That is the only way to stop the ‘act of a person eating another person’ that you abhor so much. Bihyung, kill me. But if you attempt, I cannot guarantee your safety.”

“Does that mean that if I try to kill you, you’ll kill me?”

“I will if I must.”

“Then that means you don’t want to die yourself! The Nagas will feel the same way too. They won’t want to die. Why are you doing to other people that you yourself don’t want?”

“Because I know they don’t want to die.”

“What?”

Kaygan slowly moved his right hand. Bihyung could only see the twin-bladed sword then. Kaygan had it in his hands until this moment, but it was hidden from Bihyung’s eyes because of cunning body motion, shadow, and the darkness. Bihyung was surprised by the fact that such a great sword was hidden like it was a dagger. Kaygan, slowly raising the twin-bladed sword, spoke as he mounted it on the hook behind his shoulder.

“I do it because they don’t want it.”

Kaygan walked to the inn.

.

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Even though Nagas do not have much forms of art that could be shared with other races, it doesn’t mean they don’t have art. They don’t have painting because of their superior vision, and they don’t have music because of their inferior audition, but they too have a body that can move very well. Therefore they can dance.

The dance of Nagas, in term of the essence of dance in which one feels pleasure in moving one’s body, is not very different from the dance of other races, but difference happens in the appreciation of the dance. Other races also

know to enjoy the flow and beat created by the movement of the body, but Nagas, in addition to this, see the air flow around the dancer.

Often when Nagas dance, they hold a unique object in their hands, and if a human saw this object, which is a wooden handle attached to a long metal pole, they would think of it as a soldering iron. This object, called the dance stick, was derived from the soldering iron, and is heated in a brazier like a soldering iron. But in its usage, the dance stick has nothing to do with a soldering iron.

Naga dancers dance holding heated up dance sticks. They sometimes use torches when they don't have dance sticks, but it is ineffective, as its temperature is too high. Heated iron rod, or two illuminating rays of light in the hands of the dancer, is most appropriate. The dancer, with those rods, harass, excite, and frenzy the air. Therefore, Nagas, and only Nagas, can see the carnival of light around the dancer that cannot be described with words.

The women of the Fei clan and the ten men currently staying at the Fei clan were all together dazed at the brilliant movements made by Samo Fei.

A set of motions that walk, crouch, leap, and spin. Riding the flesh of light that Samo lays out in the air, flows of air dance flamboyantly. During the moments in which the motions separate, Samo returns to being a Naga, but as the next motion starts, she already turns into a creature made of light. The audience all together could not look away from Samo.

The dance finished.

The men dipped their hands in the water bowl in front of them and splash drops of water on the surface of the brazier. And because the dancer was Samo, the women too expressed their complimentary praises without trying to hide it. Samo bowed lightly, and stuck the dance stick in the brazier, leaving the center. The women who didn't want to be compared to Samo kept their place, and two men jumped out at the same time, then stared at each other awkwardly. While the two showed humility and concession, Samo left the circle of audience.

When Samo was passing by a pillar, a hand came out from behind the pillar.

Samo looked at the hand, surprised. The hand held a cup of water. Moments later, following the hand, Ryoan Fei appeared from behind the pillar. Samo

awkwardly accepted the cup of water.

[Great performance. Your brazier is cold.]

Samo smiled. Because the all the audience competitively threw water, the surface of the brazier was stone cold. When cold water drops are splashed on the hot brazier, the temperature change and the abrupt movement of air looks more intense than the shine of a comet. It is enough to be used as an expression of praise. Therefore, the Naga idiom 'the brazier is cold' means great praise given to astounding skill.

After Samo drank the water, neered as she returned the cup.

[You didn't even splash water.]

[I didn't want to go in front of them. I got tired of those neerms that are supposed to be jokes or even encouragements. Of course, I know well they are good-willed.]

Ryoon kept on neering, staring down.

[Instead, I clapped. Did you hear me?]

Samo tilted her head.

[What's a clap? Hear you?]

[The unbelievers can hear very well. So when they want to praise something, they clap their hands to make a sound.]

Ryoon demonstrated it himself. Samo focused on her hearing and heard the sound coming from her brother's hands, laughing out loud for a moment.

[That's weird. I don't get how that means an expression of praise. But how do you know this? Ah, did Hwareet tell you?]

[No. Another person did.]

[Another person?]

[Yes, another person.]

[Ah.]

Samo realized who Ryoon was neerming about. This kind of silent empathy

brings brief silence to even Nagas, and so Samo and Ryoon closed their minds and stared at each other for a moment. Ryoon awkwardly looked around and neered.

[Would you like to get some air?]

Samo led the way. They opened the door and left the hall. The outside hallway in which the pillars stood in rows directed them to the garden. Samo walked to the center of the garden and Ryoon realized that they were headed to the pavilion.

The stone chair of the pavilion was heated up by the sunlight, and was very pleasant to sit on. Samo, as she sat down, suddenly neered.

[Sit, Ryoon.]

Already leaning his waist half-way, Ryoon stopped in an awkward posture and looked back at Samo. Samo laughed joyfully, and Ryoon also smiled in embarrassment, sitting on the other side of Samo. Samo neered teasingly.

[You're such a polite man that you only sit when you're told to.]

[I was so rude yesterday, Samo.]

[Oh, such a polite man. Your solemn apology makes me embarrassed.]

Ryoon Fei didn't know what to do. Samo neered soothingly.

[I was so pitiful yesterday. I'm sorry. You seemed so baffled. I didn't think I would cry like that.]

[I do not mind.]

[You neer that you minded it a lot.] Ryoon again was confused, and Samo leaned back a little to look up at the sky. [This might be too much to ask, but you can stop minding it.]

Ryoon was staring at the stone table, sitting without neerming. Samo looked down directly at Ryoon.

[Even if you can't be my child, you'll be my friend, right? All I want is simple. We can write letters to each other filled with insipid chatter, and once in a few years when you come near Haatengraju, we can meet and have a conversation.

Sometimes, I could even go on a trip to meet with you. Would this be too uncomfortable?]

[Samo, I...]

Ryoon closed his mind without completing his sentence. Awaiting a moment, Samo neered as if she was making sure.

[I don't deceive myself with some replacement. But if I was reflected to you in such a way, something in my actions or behavior may have suggested this. I will fix that. So from now on, take my neerm for a neerm that is closest to my heart. I want a friend, not a child.]

Ryoon shook his head.

[You already have so many friends.]

[In this world, such as good jokes and neerms of gratitude, are things that are better the more you have. Good friends are such things too.]

Ryoon did not neer in that sense. A woman like Samo Fei who is loved by everyone in her family cannot be hungering for a good friend. She is asking Ryoon to leave a little string. She is suggesting that she would be on the other side of that string.

Out of the blue, Ryoon realized how much he loved Samo Fei. Losing his heart meant losing his Fei name, and losing his Fei name was losing his string between Samo Fei. A relationship that was nothing, not her brother, nor a man that can sleep with her. But, when Ryoon thought all relationships will be gone, Samo newly connected a string called friend. Even after him inflicting such a great wound, and her shedding silver tears because of that.

Ryoon nodded. Samo smiled brightly.

[Thanks. Ah, would you like to dance inside?]

[I would stay here a little more.]

[Okay.]

Samo got up from her seat. Before she turned away, Samo stretched her arm across the stone table and tapped lightly on the back of Ryoon's hand. And, she neered what Ryoon wanted to neer.

[Thank you, Ryoon.]

Ryoon let Samo leave without being able to neer anything.

Besides Ryoon who sat in inattentiveness, moments that could have meant a million things flowed away without becoming anything. The moment some object crossed Ryoon's eyes, which wasn't looking at anything, was after quite some time had passed.

Ryoon was looking at the heart tower.

From anywhere in the city, the 200 meter tall tower is seen with bare eyes. Looking at that beautiful tower, Ryoon surprised himself. Recently, whenever he looked at the heart tower, his sight was colored with anger. But right now, he was looking at the heart tower barely any anger. Ryoon thought about why he wasn't feeling any anger.

The answer was simple. The heart tower is the place where his heart will be stolen away, and therefore, where the people that will take away his relationship with Samo Fei resides. But moments ago, Samo presented to Ryoon a relationship that they cannot take away.

Ryoon put his hands together and placed his forehead on them.

Suddenly a violent cry poured out.

His anger was gone, but fear that made him feel that his scales were ripped off assaulted him.

The fear that was always there but was clouded by anger arose from the deep abyss of his heart. Ryoon thanked Samo, but at the same time, resented her. When he was angry, he was able to glare at the heart tower. But now, Ryoon could not do anything besides wetting his face and hands with his silver tears. 11 years had passed, but a part of Ryoon was bound onto his 11-year-old-boy self, and Ryoon was crying as a 11-year-old boy.

11 years ago, when a certain hand inside the heart tower exercised death upon a man ever so easily, the scene of the man collapsing with blood spewing out from all his holes became Ryoon's permanent nightmare.

The man's name was Yosby.

Ryoon's father.

At last, Shanaga hid behind the moon. And Hwareet Makerow was saturated in utter hopelessness.

Karoo and Svachi could not find any definite evidence that Viias was forging a poison. However, this fact did not help at all, because even if Viias laid down a dozen bottles of poison in front of them, unless they were labeled 'poison', Karoo and Svachi wouldn't know. Karoo and Svachi plainly admitted to this point. But Karoo, at the same time, indicated that Viias, who wants to become the matriarch, would not commit to something so risky, and Hwareet had to agree to that point.

[If someone died during the extraction ceremony, it would cause some serious commotion, Hwareet. Even if it was a man that died, there'll be a great accusation for sure. For sure, there will be a thorough investigation about who is responsible, and Viias being a skillful medicinologist, she will be the first to be accused. Viias wouldn't want to take that risk. Especially not for the sole reason that she hates you. Rationally, Viias has no reason to kill you. Viias is a rational Naga, right?]

Of course, Viias is a rational Naga. Who could be more rational than Viias who is controlling herself perfectly after 12 years of infertility? Hwareet determined to take Karoo's neerm.

But until he put on the cleanly washed clothes that the clan last gifts, Hwareet felt no joy.

For the son that will be leaving forever, the Makerow clan prepared presents that lived up to their name. Clean clothes for the next few days, a pile of gold and a sharp dagger. The fact that even a pair of dance sticks was prepared made Hwareet sneer. For Hwareet who has no talent in dancing, it is hard to say that preparing a pair of dance sticks is from thoughtful consideration. It was probably to show off that the preparation was flawless.

Hwareet shoved everything in a small backpack that the clan also prepared and left to salute the women of the clan.

Dusenna Makerow and Somero Makerow each showed superb demeanor. They gave him a few well-wishing remarks – ones such as to be always respectful and polite to others – and a little bit of ostentatious feeling of loss. Hwareet also showed gratitude for being raised for 22 years and answered their remarks with a neerm that promised them that he will never forget this favor. Of course, this neerm concerning favors is completely meaningless. As he steps out the door, there will be no relationship left over between Hwareet and the Makerow clan.

But, Karindol Makerow surprised Hwareet. Visiting Karindol expecting scary neerms, Hwareet almost fainted when Karindol suddenly hugged him.

[I'll be left alone when you leave me.]

Hwareet thought he knew what she was neerming about. He and Karindol are both children of the matriarch Dusenna. But the one that is most likely to be the next matriarch is Somero Makerow, not Dusenna's own children. Of course, Somero is of enough nobility to be deemed the next matriarch, but if she does become the matriarch, Karindol being the direct child of the matriarch, would feel some awkwardness. Merely a man, Hwareet wouldn't be much of a support for Karindol, but seeing him leave completely like this, Karindol was overcome with emotion. Hwareet hesitated and gave her neerms of consolation.

[Dear sister, Sister Somero is a noble woman.]

Karindol glared with fierce eyes at Hwareet.

[You idiot. Yes. All Somero has is morality. If only she had some ambition and slyness...]

Hwareet was baffled as he did not know what Karindol was neerming about. When he realized what Karindol was neerming about was when he came near to Viias's room.

Because of shock, Hwareet had to stop in the middle of the hallway.

Karindol was worried that Somero, because she has 'no ambition nor slyness,' will be stolen of her inheritance to be the matriarch by Viias, and feared the outcome that would bring. Somero is a Naga with morality and therefore will not cause more harm to Karindol other than a little discomfort. However, if Viias became the matriarch, the remaining days of Karindol will not just be

discomforting.

‘Can Viias really become the matriarch before Somero? What evidence made Karindol think such a thing?’

Engulfed in his thought, Hwareet realized a long time later that there was a ‘keep-out’ sign in front of Viias’s door. She was probably conducting another dangerous medicinology experiment. Hwareet, not wanting to see her, thought all was well and turned away quickly. Karoo and Svachi waited at the front door, fully armed. Looking at their anxiety-ridden faces, Hwareet realized that they were worried about him. Hwareet shouted somewhat cheerfully.

[Now, let us go extract my heart!]

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At the Fei clan, Ryoon Fei was getting readied for the extraction ceremony. Unlike his friend who received flawless but insincere gifts, Ryoon Fei received gifts that were more earnest. But Ryoon wasn’t joyful.

[A man needs a weapon, Ryoon. When you wander in the jungle alone, you never know what you’ll face.]

Ryoon was taken aback as he looked into Samo Fei’s armory. The talent of dance has its commonalities with the talent of martial arts, and so Samo Fei, a great dancer, was also a great martial artist. Her weapons were undoubtedly excellent. But their numbers were way too many, and Samo recommended that he wield all of them at least once.

Wandering the wall with insincerity, Ryoon’s eyes stopped on a Syker suspended on the wall.

The Syker is the traditional sword of the Nagas, and its sharpness is neermed that if a ‘Syker’ is unable to cut through ten layers of parchment, it is considered unworthy of its name. What Ryoon saw was of greater quality, even among the Sykers. But it wasn’t that Ryoon, who didn’t know much about swords, saw the excellence of the sword. Ryoon just liked the wave pattern inscription on its blade.

Ryoon picked up that Syker and swung it around a little. When Ryoon looked back at Samo, he was surprised at Samo’s weird expression.

[I'm sorry. It must be something precious to you.]

Ryoon tried to hang the Syker back. But Samo stopped him with her hand.

[No. It's okay. It's not something I use. I was just surprised that you picked that up right away.]

[Is it a special Syker?]

[Uh, yes. That Syker, was used by that person.]

Ryoon flinched. He looked at Samo and turned his eyes down to look at the Syker in his hand.

[That person?]

[Yes. That person.]

[Didn't you... have to purge all of them? His belongings?]

[We have to.]

Samo smiled. Ryoon felt his hand tremble, and because he felt like he was going to drop the Syker, he grasped it with two hands. Ryoon thought the Syker writhe in his hands, and was surprised. Of course, it was because his hands trembled. Ryoon held the Syker up close to his eyes, and noticed a trace of something erased near the hilt. To neer more precisely, it wasn't erased, but someone, with finesse, added a pattern onto the already existing letters, disappearing them into the pattern. Regular people wouldn't have seen the hidden letters, but Ryoon was able to.

[How did you hide this?]

[I gave them one of my Sykers. Have that one. I don't think that person would disagree.]

And Samo opened a box, took out a fitting sheath, and gave it to Ryoon. Ryoon awkwardly tied it around his waist. Just about to show his gratitude, Ryoon neered almost spastically.

[Because I thought none would be left, I gave up that hope long ago. But, I really wanted to have at least one. One of my father's belongings.]

Samo was surprised a little by the word 'father' that Ryoon neered.

[Father?]

Ryoon's face showed trouble.

[Uh, a father is...]

[No, I know what that neerm means. It's a superstition of the unbelievers.]

[A superstition?]

Samo awkwardly laughed. Because she did not want to argue. But Ryoon did not seem to want to back off.

[Yes, a superstition. There is no such thing as a father.]

[Then why, dear sister, did you preserve this Syker? Wasn't it because you are my father's daughter too?]

Samo's face again flashed emotions of amazement.

[You knew that too? Yes, you're correct in that my mother's mate was he. But I did not preserve that because of some weird superstition that he is my father. Yosby was my martial arts teacher. I preserved that because of the memories I had with my teacher.]

Samo's cold-hearted response made Ryoon painful. Samo took a step forward and looked directly into Ryoon, neering.

[Ryoon, you and me alike, we are not made of only what that man gave. If you really want to use that silly word 'father,' you have to call all the animals that our mother ate and all the water our mother drank 'father' too. That doesn't even make neerm, doesn't it?]

[I know. I know very well.]

[I also believe that you know it very well. So, before you leave, take back that neerm.]

[What neerm do you want me to take back?]

[That neerm about a father. Take it back. Promise me that you will never use that word again. When you're captured in such a silly idea, you can't think straight.]

Ryoon bursted in laughter inside. 'How she neerm about promising such

things. Unless she can purge my memories from 11 years ago.' But Ryoon nodded. He did not want to disappoint the only Fei he loved before he lost his Fei name.

[I will do so.]

After he addressed lightly the rest of his family members, Ryoon came outside. At the front door, the ten men currently staying over at the Fei clan was waiting.

Ryoon was lightly taken aback. They were all casually dressed.

In many instances, these escorts move onto another clan following the maidens that leave the heart tower after their extraction ceremony. But the fact that they were casually dressed indicated that after they escorted Ryoon, they will all return to the Fei clan. Ten, casually dressed men. Walking through Haatengraju escorted by these people meant that he would be a target of much praise and jealousy. Ryoon inquired a man close to him.

[Is everyone coming back?]

[Yes, Ryoon.]

The Fei was gone already. Ryoon carefully asked.

[You might see many maidens that became adults at the heart tower.]

The man smiled.

[I like this clan. The others do too. Those maidens can probably seduce you or others that will become adults today.]

Ryoon suddenly felt a turbulent sense of jealousy. These men can return, but Ryoon who was born and raised in this house, can never return to this house.

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Translator : Imblygon

## Silver Tears (3)

Tinahan clarified his position. Tinahan talked about the contract between him and the Great Temple, and stated that Kaygan's oddity will not hinder their mission.

"I only consider one thing when I work with someone. Is he helpful or not. But Kaygan is the greatest expert about Nagas and Keeboren. He freakin' feeds on them. So I will accompany him."

"Do you think that attitude is right? That attitude that doesn't care if anything happens next to you as long as it's not happening to you?"

"It might not be right. But being nosy about things that are not your business is also a bad habit. And the way I see it, Nagas and I have nothing to do with each other. I mean honestly, there is no reason for me to be considerate for those who take over half the world and declare that they will leave by themselves. So I won't care if Kaygan boils them or fries them."

"Nagas are people too. You know this, don't you?"

"Do you think Dooukshinis are people too?"

Bihyung closed his mouth. He could not think that. Tinahan fiddled the tip of his beak.

"Are people born as people? People are people because they act like people. Nagas don't act like people. So I won't care for those freaks. And Kaygan's attitude is fair, too. Kaygan didn't speak like a stupid coward. Stupid cowards talk like 'I can curse you, torment you, hurt you, and kill you, but you can't do those things to me. That's absolutely absurd.' But Kaygan did not. Instead, he said that all Nagas have the right to attempt to kill him. It's fair, but it's hardly spoken out loud."

"That may sound admirable in hindsight, but it actually mean that we should all target each other in our glorious massacres, doesn't it?"

"Massacres are only used when it's done against other people."

In the end, that was the problem. Bihyung determined this. Can you see Nagas

as people. Then, Bihyung found a personal reason to partake in this journey. To evaluate the strange behavior of Kaygan Draaka, he needed to know more about Nagas.

When Bihyung and Tinahan said that they accept his accompanying, Kaygan did not show any reaction other than lightly nodding his head. Instead, Kaygan started to check over the practical matters, and Tinahan and Bihyung had to feel again like they were idiots, which they did not welcome very much. It wasn't that Kaygan treated them like novices. On the contrary, Kaygan's attitude was closer to kindness. But the two felt that Kaygan's kindness was used after being measured precisely based on necessity.

For example, Kaygan gave them instructions that completely contradicted common sense. Wear thicker clothes the warmer you are. Be noisy as possible when you think there is a Naga nearby. Run away as slowly as possible when you're being stalked. If you think you're going to be found, go on top of a rock that is completely exposed. Tinahan and Bihyung showed their bafflement with their faces and Kaygan explained those instructions. The warmer it gets, the more likely you are you encounter a Naga, so you must wear thick clothes that hide your body temperature. Nagas can't follow you with sound, so if you think there is a Naga nearby, you need to be noisy to scare away the wildlife of Keeboren to deceive the Naga's eyes. There is no reason to scurry and increase the body temperature and become good targets for Nagas, therefore when you're stalked, you need to move slower. A rock exposed to the heat of day in the rainforest is very hot, so when you get on top of it, there is a chance that a Naga will not distinguish between a hot person and a hot rock. Bihyung and Tinahan exclaimed and prepared to laugh. If Kaygan said something like 'that's strange, right?' after his speech and smiled a little, the two would have smiled in agreement and joyfully had a conversation about those things. But Kaygan started talking about the next instructions without jokes nor smile, baffling the two.

Kaygan's kindness was like that. When he thought it was necessary, Kaygan persistently explained one thing until the one listening felt sorry. But in no part of that explanation, he laughed or smiled. After a few hours, when Kaygan asked "Are you familiar with all that I taught you?," even though the precious

knowledge was no where near familiar, but confused all over the place, the two hurriedly nodded. "Of course we are."

Next day around twilight, they left for the southern part of the Punten desert leaving behind the inn-owner that had both hatred and relief on his face. Bihyung and Kaygan got on the beetle, and Tinahan ran behind them.

When Bihyung found out Kaygan was familiar with the beetle, he felt disappointed. Bihyung planned to show Kaygan how an explanation is properly done. But Kaygan calmly got on the beetle, and distinguished where on the body segment plate to touch and not touch like he was a master at it. And he stared at Bihyung, who desperately looked for flaws, like he was weird. Not finding anything wrong in Kaygan's sitting posture, Bihyung hurried to sit in the front of Kaygan.

The three crossed the night of the desert.

If any wanderer saw them from afar, he would have been astonished by their magnificence and noise. The sound of the beetle's wings was furious, and behind Tinahan who ran the desert like gust followed a small sand storm. So they looked like a nameless, ancient monster roaring and running through the desert. An incomprehensible monster that had a head resembling a beetle and a body consisting of sand. But the three that crossed the desert with so much noise was also the most reticent travelers. Kaygan and Bihyung was unable to have a conversation because of the flapping wings that thundered next to them, and Tinahan who ran under them obviously could not have a conversation with them. So, since the creation of Punteh desert, they were the noisiest travelers, and at the same time, the quietest.

As such, they kept silent in the ruckus, running towards Keeboren.

Haatengraju, the city of heartlessness, was loud within its silence.

Even today in which the most important event of Nagas happen, Haatengraju, as it was since its construction, was silent. No kind of speech nor singing could be heard. But a being that could hear the language of the spirit, would be completely overwhelmed by the neerms that filled to the brim the roads and buildings, streets and agoras. The young, overly excited Nagas were almost

violently opening their minds and their escorts, instead of stopping them, were encouraging them. There was a reason for this that even those who use their voices would understand. In places such as the battlefield, at a place where the agitated crowd uncontrollably chatter and scream, the human that keeps silence feels uncomfortable and anxious. Because he cannot synchronize to the violent emotions and minds around him. Nagas, who use neerm, react much more sensitively to such phenomenon, and therefore, to forcefully lock one's mind in this place, where everyone's minds are open and everyone is chattering, is very harmful to one's mind.

So Ryoon Fei kneeled in the middle of the road like he was collapsing.

So far, he's been stubbornly locking his mind.

The men that were escorting Ryoon looked around, baffled. They were surrounded with other Nagas that headed to the heart tower for the extraction ceremony, and they were being peeped on. Fortunately, an old and experienced Naga among the escorts quickly gave directions. The escorts picked Ryoon up and sat him leaning to the stairs of a nearby building. The old Naga, named Thorba, ordered the other escorts to block his surroundings and carefully observed Ryoon.

[Ryoon? Wake up, are you okay? It's Thorba.]

Ryoon's two eyes were towards Thorba but he acted like he saw nothing. Looking at Ryoon carefully, Thorba soon realized that Ryoon was mumbling something. Realizing that Ryoon was voicing something, Thorba was confused, and focused on his hearing. Because it has been so long since he last used his hearing, only after a while Thorba could hear Ryoon's words clearly.

"No... I can't go... No..."

Thorba thought he knew why Ryoon was showing such behavior. In his past experience, there were young Nagas who acted like this before the extraction ceremony. Of course, none of them were as serious as Ryoon.

[Ryoon, wake up! It's okay. Nothing's happening.]

"I don't want to die... I don't want to die!"

[You won't die. You just take out your heart. You avoid death. Now, calm

down, Ryoona.]

“No, it’s death. I will die. Just like him. Me too, me too!”

Me too? Was there a Fei that met an accident during the extraction ceremony? Thorba looked around the escorts with a puzzled look, but no one answered him. The men couldn’t possibly know the past events of the clan. Looking back on Ryoona again, Thorba found that Ryoona was firmly grasping the Syker on his waist. Afraid that Ryoona would start swinging his sword, Thorba pressed down on Ryoona’s shoulder.

[You won’t die. That will never happen. Ryoona. Now, get up. You’ll die if you don’t go through the extraction ceremony! You’ll be hunted because of your warm blood!]

“No, no! I will not! No one can take my heart away! Let me back home! Let me back home!”

Thorba didn’t know what to do because of frustration. He looked around as if he was searching for someone that would solve this situation. Then, someone caught his eyes. Thorba emitted a sharp neerm.

[Hwareet! Acolyte Hwareet!]

Hwareet, who was walking through the road, was surprised at the sudden neerm directed towards him. Karoo and Svachi who were escorting him even grasped their swords. The three Nagas soon found a mob of Nagas grouped in a weird shape. Hwareet found his friend Ryoona sitting behind their backs.

[Ryoona?]

Hwareet tried to walk quickly. But then, Svachi grabbed Hwareet’s arm. Svachi, focusing his mind on Hwareet, neered.

[No. It may be a trap.]

Hwareet was confused but he could focus mind. [Trap?]

[Our plan may have been exposed.]

[Ryoona has nothing to do with that! I’ll be more suspicious if I don’t go.]

Svachi wanted to shake his head. There were too many Nagas surrounding

Ryoon Fei. But Hwareet was already moving. Svachi and Karoo, frowning his face, quickly followed him.

Their curiosity was dissolved when Thorba sent them a greeting neerm.

[You're Ryoon's friend, right? Can you calm him down? I think its extraction anxiety. We know nothing about this fella here.]

Hwareet nodded and sat next to Ryoon. Ryoon, as if he didn't notice Hwareet, kept on mumbling towards the sky.

[He's voicing something.]

When Thorba explained this, Hwareet too realized it. Hwareet focused on his hearing. Soon he could hear Ryoon's whimpering voice.

"Go back home! No, not home! I can't go home! I have nowhere to go. I'll die. I..."

Hwareet could see right away that Ryoon's state was very serious. Grabbing Ryoon's shoulders, Hwareet condensed his mind as much as he could into a needle-like shape.

[Didyusryoono Largand Fei!]

The highly focused neerm of Hwareet was not heard by the nearby Nagas. But the people could see that there was a change in Ryoon's state. Ryoon blinked a couple times and turned to Hwareet. On his eyes that wandered without focus slowly reflected the form of Hwareet.

[Aashwareetal Sephabil Makerow?]

Ryoon's unfocused neerm was heard by people nearby. The others were curious about this weird name but Karoo and Svachi flinched at the neerm. They quickly looked at each other and confirmed that they did not mishear. Hwareet kept pressing down on Ryoon's shoulders and neered to Ryoon only.

[Good, Ryoon. Wake your mind. Can you stand up? Ah, forget that neerm. It'll be better if you sat for a little.]

Hardly realizing that Hwareet was using a focused neerm, Ryoon focused his mind.

[What happened to me? Where is this place?]

Hwareet quickly looked around.

[You're in front of the door of the Sen clan. I want to ask you what happened to you.] Hwareet did not bring up extraction anxiety. [What did you think about?]

[Think?]

Ryoon neered that, but his face expressed that he did not want to think about anything. Thinking that he needed to change the subject, Hwareet caught with his eyes a Syker that Ryoon was firmly grasping. Hwareet pointed at the Syker with his chin.

[Is that your gift from the clan? Looks fabulous. All I received was a dagger that couldn't be more useful than for cutting rope.]

Ryoon, with a face that said he didn't know what Hwareet was talking about, looked down at his waist. Ryoon's eyes were soon fixated on the Syker. Hwareet saw Ryoon's face twist. Moments later, when Ryoon opened his mind again, his neerms were almost awkwardly calm.

[It seems that I've caused quite a scene. Thanks for the help, Hwareet.]

[Huh? Ah, yes. Can you stand?]

[If that hand pressing down on my shoulders are gone. They kinda hurt.]

Hwareet could barely smile bitterly. Hwareet moved his hands, and Ryoon got up like nothing was wrong, like he got up after tripping on a rock. But Ryoon flinched and stopped again. Hwareet followed where Ryoon was looking at, and saw the heart tower.

Hwareet lightly tapped on Ryoon's shoulder. Ryoon looked back at Hwareet with dim eyes, as if he was waking up from sleep. Hwareet did not know how to neer in situations like this.

[Ryoon, let's go?]

[Huh? Ah, yes. Let's go.]

But Ryoon still did not think to step off. Hwareet wanted to be with his friend a

little longer but he could no longer ignore the impatient stare of Karoo and Svachi from afar.

[Then I'll see you at the heart tower. You'll make it there, right?]

[Of course.] It did not feel that way at all, but Ryoon neered repeatedly. [Of course I'll make it there.]

Ryoon's escorts did not deem weird that Hwareet was not accompanying Ryoon. When there is a difference in number of escorts between two clans, the two clans would not accompany each other. It was likely seen that the clan with a fewer number of escorts was entrusting protection from the clan with more escorts. A clan of high stature would never do such a thing. Of course, if their imaginations were a bit more rich, they would have realized that Hwareet would not care much for the pride of the clan that he will become unrelated to in no time. But they did not have such imagination, and so, Ryoon's escorts thanked Hwareet, and walked passed him with Ryoon.

Hwareet, left behind, looked back at Ryoon with a sad face. Hwareet's emotions told him to walk with his friend and cover his pain, but his reason advised that he stay with his company. Approaching closer, Karoo neered while shaking his head.

[Your visit ten days ago must have not helped much, Hwareet. I've heard of extraction anxiety before but never a case this serious. I worry that he might cause a scene at the heart tower.]

[The guardians will take good care of him.]

[I hope so. He carried a pretty big sword. It'll be troublesome if he starts a commotion.]

Hwareet did not want to talk about Ryoon anymore. He changed the subject, stepping off.

[So let's come back to our previous topic. How do I recognize the Murun river?]

[Don't worry about that. There is no other river like that one. If you head north and see a river so big that you can't see the other side, that's the Murun river. It's hard to just pass by.]

[I might see a sea or a lake.]

[If you taste the water, you'll know that it's not a sea, and if you see it flow, you'll know that it's not a lake. Once you find the river, you just have to go upstream. Very simple.]

Then Svachi and Karoo started to enumerate advice on living outdoors. To arrange the wisdom told competitively, it is the following: 'It is almost impossible for a Naga in Keeboren to starve to death, but until one is familiar with hunting, there lies a small possibility for such unlikely and even embarrassing death. Remember that a Naga without his heart cannot die from an accident, and always act daringly.' Karoo, who got excited, dazed Hwareet by telling a quite an unbelievable tale about his first hunt, in which he was dragged around impaled by the tusk of a boar, but ended up strangling the beast. If Hwareet saw a boar before, or in other words, saw its thick neck that was impossible for strangulation, he would have laughed.

Entering the heart tower parting his escorts, Ryoon Fei solidified his determination. 'I will run.' But he had to be careful of one thing, and that was the fact that now was not the first time he determined this. Ryoon Fei determined this when he was 11 years old. So, as he set foot in the heart tower, 11 years out of Ryoon's life dissolved like dirt under rain. As a result, Ryoon, at that moment, became a 11 year old boy again. Of course, Ryoon himself did not realize this, and he believed that he was acting from the reason and judgment of a 22 year old adult. It was dubious, however, whether standing in the middle of the first floor hall like he didn't want to face anyone and suddenly bolting for the hallway is a mature behavior. There were more than seven Nagas that looked at Ryoon with surprised eyes when he ran.

Vacating the place when he didn't know when the guardians will come to take him was not a practical choice of action. But even before the startled Nagas called his name, Ryoon disappeared into the hallways. The Nagas were perplexed for a moment, but because they did not want to leave where they were like Ryoon did, they decided to quietly wait.

Ryoon was thinking of only one thing as he ran through the hallway. 'I need to

find another exit.' He couldn't just walk out the front entrance. He didn't know what would happen if he went out the front entrance still having his heart. He no longer had any escorts either. Ryoong's escorts, who weren't interested in the maidens that will soon exit the heart tower would have all returned to the Fei mansion, and even if some of them stayed, wouldn't protect Ryoong having his heart.

As his trail of thought reached his heart, Ryoong flinched and stopped.

He felt his heart, and was apprehended by fear, realizing how violently it was beating. Of course, the guardians of the heart tower won't be surprised to see Ryoong with his heart, and think of him as having lost his way. But, if found by the guardians, Ryoong would without a doubt be dragged into having his heart extracted, and that was a conclusion that Ryoong wanted to dismiss at all cost.

Fortunately, Ryoong knew the inside structure of the heart tower. His knowledge was not perfect, but he had enough to estimate where he was.

Looking around and fumbling for old memories, Ryoong realized that he was near the eastern staircase. Reminding himself that the eastern staircase led to the exhibit, the storage, and the special library, Ryoong realized that all those facilities were not related to the extraction, and internally screamed in joy.

All the guardians of the heart tower must be distracted with the extraction ceremony. Making his decision, Ryoong quickly moved towards the eastern staircase.

But, reaching the exhibition room and the storage room on the 2nd floor, Ryoong had to feel some disappointment. The guardians who were busy with the extraction ceremony locked all the doors to those facilities. It was natural, but Ryoong even felt an irrational fear that the guardians predicted that he would come hide and locked the doors in advance. Climbing up to the 3rd floor, Ryoong could not rid his nervousness. The special library on the 3rd floor is always open, but there would be a librarian.

Reaching the 3rd floor, however, Ryoong discovered that the librarian's seat was empty. Ryoong, without a moment of hesitation, quickly opened the door to the library. Only after he opened the door, it occurred to Ryoong that the librarian might be inside the library, and he immediately froze up. But the library was

completely empty.

Ryoon quickly jumped in the library and closed the door. At that moment, Ryoon was a Naga that did not care about sound. The door closed with tremendous noise as if it was going to break.

Entering the hall of the heart tower, Hwareet felt something similar to anxiety, looking at the Nagas everywhere talking to each other. To a Naga that forwent back and forth from his home, the heart tower, and his friends house for 22 years, the massive group of Nagas naturally came as a shock. Of course, he could see this many Nagas on the streets, but he would always have escorts. But now he was alone.

With difficulty, Hwareet remembered that the others would feel the same way. This led to Hwareet even feeling a little superiority. To Hwareet, being an acolyte, the heart tower was a familiar building. The others were definitely more scared than Hwareet.

But looking around the hall, Hwareet knew that his thought was wrong. The Naga maidens were very occupied with the men promising that they will visit after the extraction, so they looked like they had no interest in the internal structure of the heart tower. Also, the men were busy talking amongst themselves about who in which clan is in her fertile window and which clan is good for staying over in a leisurely manner.

The contents of these conversations were irrelevant to an acolyte, so Hwareet, without being a part of any conversation, quietly crossed the hall. While he was crossing the hall, Hwareet could hear that the name of the Fei clan being brought up many times. Hwareet bitterly smiled. There can't be many who are brave enough to visit the Fei clan right after their extraction. If a freshly extracted man went to the Fei clan in which many visitors stay over all the time, he will be treated to be a neophyte without a doubt. Most likely, the majority of the men will realize that the vanity following the extraction is not false, and leave Haatengraju to start wandering. So, the impatience for men of the maidens, will probably end in failure. Instead of paying attention to them anymore, Hwareet decided that he will look for Ryoon.

[Hwareet Makerow.]

Someone called him. Turning his head without a thought, Hwareet was surprised. The one that neered to him was a guardian standing inside the shadow of the hallway next to the hall. But, a guardian would not call Hwareet that way. Hwareet thought it weird, but still kept his politeness.

[Follow.]

The neerm from the guardian who was covering his face with his hood was overly simple. It was a neerm that left out character and only conveyed meaning. Naga's neerm, unlike speech of the unbelievers, can be emitted without any character, like such. This is rarely done, however, since it could be confusing who neered and who did not.

Hwareet, even though feeling uncomfortable, responded politely.

[I apologize, but I am waiting for the extraction.]

[Neer simply. So you don't attract the attention of others. Before you arrived, Ryoan Fei ran away.]

Hwareet, though surprised, simplified his neerm.

[Ran away?]

[Yes. He locked himself inside the special library. It appears to be extraction anxiety. You need to come and calm him down.]

Because they simplified their neerms, no one paid attention to him and the guardian. Hwareet cautiously stepped off, realizing why the guardian was neerming such weird neerms. Unlike Ryoan who recklessly ran a moment ago, Hwareet moved slowly without drawing much attention and left the hall. As Hwareet entered the hallway, the guardian quickly walked to the eastern staircase. Hwareet asked following closely.

[By any chance, did he hurt anyone?]

[Not yet. We can't guarantee anything if we're late, however.]

Ryoan Fei, looking down at the corpse lying in front of him, felt like he was

going to lose his mind.

Generally, an extracted Naga does not die from accidents. They do not get sick and even when they lose a part of their body, they quickly regenerate. But Nagas are not complete immortals, as when their body is divided into many dozen pieces like the body in front of Ryoon, there is no way to avoid death even for a Naga.

But that body still retained the characteristics of a Naga. Ryoon, with great effort, bent his trembling knee in the middle of the body pieces.

[What did you say?]

From the body pieces came a neerm.

[Give... it back.]

Ryoon poked the head on the floor with his wildly shaking hand. The head swayed, but it did not flip upright. Ryoon clenched down on his teeth and picked the head up, turning it upright.

One eye was completely destroyed and the other was severely inflamed as well, but the decapitated head could look directly at Ryoon anyhow. Right before the uncontrollable fear made Ryoon faint, that head sent a weak neerm.

[Largand...?]

Ryoon flinched and looked directly at the head again. It was an atrocious scene, but Ryoon could remember a name that he once knew from the face with great difficulty.

[Yoovex? Yoovex the Librarian?]

Yoovex, the librarian of the special library, tried to nod his head. Of course, futile. If you are decapitated, you can't nod your head. Yoovex seemed perplexed at this fact, and barely neered.

[Anyhow... how did you come in here?]

[I, I came here because of the extraction...]

[How did you come in the special library? I, the librarian, didn't approve...]

Because of the decapitation, Yoovex seemed to be stupefied. Even during the

conversation, his neerms faded away. It would be too much to expect to hope for the neerm to continue in his state of neither life nor death. Getting frustrated, Ryoon almost grabbed the head and shook it, but pulled back his hands just before they touched the head in fright.

[Who did this to you?]

Yoovex stared blankly at Ryoon, until he suddenly realized something.

[I was... attacked? Largand, am I d... ead?]

[Who did this? Who did this to you?]

Yoovex's head did not answer, neither with neerms nor facial expressions. Ryoon thought that the librarian had finally died. But when Ryoon tried to get up, a thin neerm came from Yoovex's head.

[Makerow...]

Ryoon felt like he got smacked on the back of his head. Makerow? Ryoon tried his best, but he could not possibly think of a reason why Hwareet would butcher the librarian of the special library and hide him behind the book shelves. Ryoon kneeled down again and shot all of his mind straight into Yoovex's head.

A flow of mind was felt. Ryoon welcomed the flow of mind thinking it was Yoovex's, but soon realized that the direction was different.

Someone was running to the special library.

The fear reawakened.

Ryoon's eyes faced the body of the librarian but Ryoon's eyes saw was the terrible end of Yosby. Almost unconsciously, Ryoon hid himself behind the book shelf that Yoovex's body was concealed. The place was covert enough. As soon as he hid behind the book shelf, the library door opened.

And Ryoon heard such a familiar neerm.

[Ryoon! Ryoon Fei!]

It was Hwareet's neerm. Ryoon almost stood up as he heard the desperate neerm of his friend. But right before he neered the name of his friend. Ryoon could remember the fact that he was an exile and the last neerm of Yoovex.

Ryoon crouched again, and pushed out a book from the book shelf. A crack happened between the books and he could peek at the door.

When he saw Hwareet standing by the door, Ryoon again felt the urge to rise. But as he saw a guardian behind Hwareet, Ryoon's body froze again. It was hard to know who the guardian was because his face was covered with his hood, but his guardian costume was enough to stimulate his fear. Apprehended by fear, Ryoon locked down his mind to the extent of autism.

Then, Ryoon saw something strange.

The guardian that followed Hwareet approached the book shelf near the door. His hand fumbled on top of the shelf and soon enough a bloody Syker was on his hand. When Ryoon was frozen in fear and confusion, the guardian slowly approached behind Hwareet.

And the guardian slashed his Syker at the vulnerable back of Hwareet.

Ryoon screamed. But his scream only echoed inside him. Ryoon did not realize, but his mind was still locked down. Because of the astounding sharpness of the Syker, Hwareet, for a moment, did not grasp what had happened to him. But moments later, Hwareet collapsed to the ground, moaning powerlessly. At the same time, blood violently poured out of his back. Because Hwareet still had his heart, blood left his body like a torrent. The guardian slightly moved sideways to avoid the blood.

[Why...?]

Hwareet emitted a neerm while lying facing down. The guardian smiled and kicked Hwareet so he was facing up. To his face, the guardian slowly lifted his hood.

Hwareet and Ryoon, who was hiding, both screamed the name.

[Viias Makerow!]

Viias smiled cruelly.

[Yes, foolish brother.]

[I thought you'd use poison... Instead this simple method...]

[Simple is always best. Make that your life philosophy. Of course, you won't be

able to keep that for long.] Delighting over the torrential outpour of blood from Hwareet's body, Viias added on as if she was reminded of something. [I don't think I need to slash you multiple times like I did to the other one.]

Hwareet twitched.

[Ryoon? Don't tell me, Ryoon too?]

[No, I'm neerming about that upright librarian, Yoovex. I told him I needed to look for some medicinology books and he was so happy to guide me.]

[Then Ryoon?]

[It is true that Ryoon Fei ran away. I was waiting for you in the hall and saw him run away. He's probably wandering somewhere in the tower by now. ]

Viias almost kindly responded to Hwareet and fumbled for something on the top of the shelf again. Taking out a big bunch of parchment from atop the shelf, Viias laid it on the table flat and rolled the Syker on the parchment. Then Viias took off the guardian's robe and turned it inside out. Then, the guardian's robe turned into something that any Naga scholar would wear in an outing.

After putting back on her clothes and picking up the bunch of parchment on the table, Viias now looked like a renowned medicinologist. Ryoon, who was still hiding, felt like he was witnessing magic, and Hwareet, still laying on the floor, felt the same way too. Viias smiled satisfied to her brother fallen on the floor.

[Your blood is so beautiful, Hwareet. I don't think I'll ever forget it.]

[You... are not normal, Viias.]

[I don't know, you're the one spewing blood on the floor. Who's the not-normal one?]

Answering heartlessly, Viias suddenly bent down. From Ryoon's mouth came a moan, but Viias kissed Hwareet's lips without hearing it. Hwareet screamed in refusal.

[Get away from me!]

But Viias left Hwareet's lips after a while. Getting upright, Viias licked her lips then smiled almost gracefully, neerming.

[Farewell, brother.]

Then Viias opened the door and left.

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Translator : Imblygon

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