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# 소설 속 에스트라

지감승 류정 평택지 정민소영

# **The Novel's Extra**

**- 소설 속 엑스트라 -**

**- Part 2 -**

**-Author-**

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**[ FudgeNouget (Wuxiaworld) ]**

# Chapter 33

## Exam Period (1)

10:55 P.M. I safely arrived at Gangwondo's Portal Station with Chae Nayun. Thankfully, there weren't many people around. I put Chae Nayun down on a nearby bench. She glanced at her smartwatch and murmured.

"It's almost curfew."

Immediately, I became speechless. Going to Cube in her current state was ridiculous.

"Contact your father."

"Why?"

"You know why. Go get treated at a hospital."

I turned to the Portal, leaving Chae Nayun alone on the bench.

"I'm going."

"What? Where?"

"To Cube. You can give my coat back later."

"Take me too! Hey! Aak!"

Chae Nayun tried to get up and fell forward. Looking at her pitiful state, I couldn't help but sigh.

"...You should really go to a hospital."

Chae Nayun clenched her teeth and glared at me. Her lips trembled. It seemed she really didn't want to call her father.

It was understandable. Chae Nayun's father was the head of a chaebol group. He was

a busy and important man. Even though he would run over the moment he heard his daughter was hurt, Chae Nayun didn't want that.

"You have a butler or an attendant, right?"

"...Yeah, you can go."

Chae Nayun retorted curtly.

"Alright."

I walked towards the Portal employee, then stopped.

I suddenly remembered something. Today, Chae Nayun subconsciously unleashed her Gift. The magic power sword that cut down a Djinn in a single slash, that was the Gift Chae Nayun needed to develop.

"Hey, are you still going to use a bow?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

"You felt it today, didn't you?"

Chae Nayun's Gift was specialized for close ranged combat. More specifically, it was specialized for war.

As long as she had a conductor of magic power, she could amplify it tremendously. For example, her Gift could transform a 2-meter sword into a monstrous 20-meter sword. Furthermore, because magic power was weightless, the transformed sword wouldn't be any heavier.

In a way, it was similar to Sun Wukong's Jingu Bang<sup>[1]</sup>. The only difference was that Chae Nayun didn't need a legendary grade weapon to display a similar strength. Slaughtering hundreds of monsters with a single blow, an imperial might capable of making Djinns shudder in fear, 'Emperor of the Battlefield' would be the epithet given to her.

"You should be using a sword, not a bow."

Just like in the original story, large weapons like zweihander or claymore suited her best. She even had the financial power to purchase the most expensive weapons.

“Oh yeah? What do you know about me?”

But Chae Nayun didn't know her future. She refused to even accept the idea. The current Chae Nayun had yet to overcome her fear of close ranged combat.

“...Nevermind then.”

I stepped into the Portal.

I could feel a resentful gaze piercing into my back.

She might be thinking, 'is he really going to leave me here?' But yes, I was planning to do exactly that.



The next day.

Just like the saying, 'nothing travels faster than words', last night's matter was already widespread.

Chae Nayun was attacked by a Djinn, and the Djinn was a cadet named Sven. Chae Nayun came out victorious, but she was seriously injured...

But even in the midst of such rumor, Friday's class resumed normally. My meeting with Kim Suho wasn't delayed either. He asked me to come to room 303 before 5 P.M.

“It's an important matter, so don't forget! If it goes well, it can improve your grade too.”

After class, he reminded me once more. He should have heard about what happened to Chae Nayun, so he was probably planning on visiting her after the meeting.

“Yeah.”

I nodded. Kim Suho tapped on my shoulder and busily walked away. I yawned while looking at his back.

Since it was 3:30, I still had some time before the meeting. I wanted to go back to the dorm and take a nap.

But while I was talking down the hallway...

“...What?”

It felt like someone was following me. But when I turned around, no one was there. The presence was too calm to be a Djinn. Then was it an assassin? Why would an assassin be following me?

“Hm.”

Was I mistaken? I took out my laptop and continued walking.

[383,013,160 points have been deposited. These points can be used in Violet Banquet or traded for cash. (at least 10,000,000 P required)]

Because of Violet Banquet’s enormous fee, what was close to 600 million won had shrunk to 400 million. But there was no reason to think it was unfair. First trade with Violet Banquet was always like this.

[Purchaser ‘Youngfly’ has requested to talk to you. (Seller’s nickname will show up as anonymous.)]

[If you have any more ginsengs, I’d like to buy them.]

I didn’t accept his request. I didn’t have any ginsengs to sell either.

...Now.

I turned around quickly.

*Shashashak—*

In a flash, someone hid behind the wall. However, my eyes could see through walls.

...It was a rather unexpected person.

Rachel.

With her back stuck to the wall, she was holding her beating heart.

“Hm, was I mistaken?”

To understand why she was following me, I turned back around. Then, I turned off the laptop. Using its black screen as a mirror, I looked behind me.

When I started walking, Rachel peeked her head out. Her gaze was fixed on my bag. But why my bag? The only thing in it was a notebook. Ah, thinking about it now, this was the way to the library. The dorm was right next to it.

“...Is she trying to steal my notebook?”

No, a princess wouldn't do something like that. Besides, there wasn't anything worthwhile in it.

I continued to walk and Rachel tenaciously chased after me. She didn't stop until I entered my dorm.

“She really followed me all the way here?”

When I looked out from the dorm window, she was glaring at the dorm with a regretful face.

Interesting.

I walked into my room with a grin.



After taking a light nap, I left the dorm and arrived at room 303 Kim Suho told me about.

There was already quite a crew gathered here – Shin Jonghak, Yoo Yeonha, Kim Horak, and Yi Yeonghan.

It almost looked like a scene from my novel, Kim Suho and his friend versus Shin Jonghak and his lackeys. Even Kim Horak, who was the weakest one here, had a fairly important role until the middle of the story. I felt completely out of place.

They didn't say anything when they saw me, so I opened my mouth first.

“Why did you call me?”

I asked, pretending not to know. But just that innocent question was enough to make Shin Jonghak frown. Thankfully, Kim Suho explained before Shin Jonghak expressed his dissatisfaction.

“I haven't told Hajin why we're meeting yet.”

“So, what is it?”

Kim Suho stood up at my question.

He should've just stayed sitting. His height made me slightly uncomfortable. I set his height as 185 cm. Now, I was slightly regretting it.

“Hajin, you’ve heard about cadets going missing, right?”

“...Yeah.”

“It’s about that. Cube entrusted us to investigating the cause. Of course, they’re going to do their own investigation, but since it’s likely that the culprit is a student, they think it’ll be easier for students to investigate.”

I was about to nod nonchalantly, but after realizing that this was supposed to be my first time hearing about this, I dropped my jaws pretending to be surprised.

“...But why me?”

“You have good eyes. I heard you can see over a thousand miles away.”

“Well, yeah... I do have good eyes.”

So it really was for that single reason? I feigned a smile and sat down on a nearby chair. As a result, Kim Suho naturally came to sit at the table’s head. Kim Suho looked into my eyes and asked.

“Will you help us?”

“I don’t know if I can, but...”

I didn't want to give up on potential SP.

“Thanks.”

Kim Suho smiled happily. He then cleared his throat and brought up yesterday’s incident.

“First, I don’t think the Djinn who attacked Nayun is this incident’s culprit. But...”

Shin Jonghak interrupted him.

“Nayun?”

He was picking at the fact that he didn’t address Chae Nayun with her last name.

“...But I think there is a high chance that Chae Nayun is the real culprit’s next target. Djinn’s follow their contracted devil’s orders, so if Sven’s contracted devil ordered him to attack Chae Nayun, it makes sense that another Djinn would go after her.”

It was a good theory, but incorrect. Sven’s contracted devil and the culprit’s contracted devil weren’t the same. In the first place, Asmodeus and Lilith had completely different dispositions.

“So I’m wondering, can you think of anyone suspicious? Someone you know who recently has been acting strangely...”

Before the real investigation began, Kim Suho asked for everyone’s opinions. But no one stepped forward, and Yoo Yeonha was staring at me fixedly. Soon, Shin Jonghak and Kim Horak also turned their gaze towards me.

I knew the real culprit.

But I was hesitant to reveal his name without any proof.

The culprit should be leaving behind traces of his act, but he was going too quickly. In the original story, six people went missing in the span of two months, but in this storyline, three people had gone missing in just two weeks.

I felt guilty letting more people die just so I could wait for the story to catch up. At this rate, there could even be more victims than in the original story.

Perhaps, it was better to throw down his name, so the investigation team had an idea where to start.

“Yeah, I have someone in mind.”

Five pairs of eyes became focused on me.

“Who?”

Kim Suho asked.

I slowly opened my mouth and spoke the real culprit’s name.

“Yun Hyun.”

...Immediately, a deep silence descended in the room.

No one seemed to react to my comment.

“Pft.”

Soon, Yoo Yeonha’s mocking laughter broke the silence, and Kim Suho gently rebutted.

“That person has an alibi. We already looked into him because he was close to the first victim.”

It was obvious that Yun Hyun had an alibi.

“But what if the victim went to Yun Hyun on her own?”

“A mental magic that could lure a cadet? Yeah, that makes sense.”

Shin Jonghak rebutted sarcastically. The contempt and disdain he had in his eyes were as if he was staring at an insect.

Just like Shin Jonghak said, it wasn’t easy to lure a cadet with a mental magic. Even if it was possible, it couldn’t have escaped people’s suspicion. After all, people who were under the effect of mental magic moved like puppets or scarecrows.

However...

“If it’s mental magic, yeah. But...”

It was different if it was ‘love’. That was the biggest difference between enchantment and mental magic. Someone who was in love didn’t know oneself was bewitched.

“Screw the useless talk.”

Shin Jonghak cut me off before I could finish my sentence. He then kicked an empty chair, which rolled towards my leg.

“As for me...”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha made a dangerous smile. She slowly raised her hand and pointed at me.

“I’m more suspicious of you.”

“...What?”

My head drew a blank. Because it was so sudden, I was lost for words and froze.

“Yoo Yeonha, that’s not right either. Hajin also has an alibi.”

Kim Suho quickly refuted the idea, but Yoo Yeonha easily rebutted him.

“His alibi is a record of him using the Portal. If he is a Djinn, tampering with something like that should be easy. Compared to senior Yun Hyun who was with others, that person is much more...”

“Why don’t we beat him up first?”

Kim Horak hastily got up. With the way he cracked his knuckles and displayed his muscles, he practically looked like a miniature ogre.

“I’m sure he’ll sing or transform if he’s beaten. Hey, get up.”

Yoo Yeonha and Kim Horak. Shin Jonghak and Yi Yeonghan.

Everyone other than Kim Suho looked at me with suspicious eyes.

As the person in the middle of it all, I was furious. This had never happened to me before even in a mafia game. So this was what it felt like to be falsely accused.

Should I not have brought up Yun Hyun’s name?

No, even if I didn’t, this would have happened anyways. Yoo Yeonha must have planned to do so from the beginning.

“Jonghak, I can break an arm or two, right?”

The ogre asked for Shin Jonghak’s consent. Before Shin Jonghak could give his answer, I jumped out of my chair.

“Yeah come at me, you fat son of a bitch. I’ll drill a hole in your head.”

“...What did you say? Look at this crazy motherfucker.”

Kim Horak raised his voice. I took out my gun from my back pocket, but Kim Horak only snorted disdainfully.

“Retard, you think that can make me flinch?”

Kim Horak positioned himself to charge forward. I also lowered my center of gravity. I had Aether. I could cook up some stupid pig whenever I wanted.

“Stop.”

But at that moment, Kim Suho stepped in between us. He even had his training sword out.

“Now’s not the time for this. Hajin, you calm down too.”

I snapped back to reality, looking at the chilling flash on his sword blade. Though I shouted in a grand manner, Kim Horak was too strong of an opponent for my current self.

'Don't get angry. If you get angry, it's your loss.'

After telling myself that, I took in a deep breath and pointed at Yoo Yeonha.

“You, if you're doubtful, ask Chae Nayun.”

“...What does Nayun have to do with this?”

I was talking to Yoo Yeonha, but it was Shin Jonghak who reacted sensitively.

“When she was attacked by a Djinn, I was there too. We killed him together. She didn't tell you yet?”

“...”

I said so as I glared at Yoo Yeonha. She received my gaze in a perfectly calm manner without a single word.

“Anyways, I made myself clear. The culprit is that piece of shit Yun Hyun.”

After leaving those words to Yoo Yeonha, the 'final victim', I turned around.

“Uk.”

In the middle of walking out, I tripped accidentally. My body slipped to the side. But in the path I was walking, a fat boar suddenly flew in and smashed against the

wall.

The charge was too quick for a boar and too destructive for an attack on a fellow cadet, as a crack appeared on Cube's reinforced wall.

"Oh? You dodged that?"

Shin Jonghak's lips twisted up in interest. That just now was Kim Horak's tackle. If it hit, I didn't think it would have ended with just a couple broken bones.

"You... son of a bitch."

Kim Horak stood up. For someone who attacked first, he sure was angry. I didn't have any other choice. I pointed my gun at him.

"I think I need to teach you a lesson."

But Kim Suho stopped us once again. This time, he did it with action rather than words. Magic power rose up from his sword and separated me from Kim Horak.

"If you're that suspicious, just ask Nayun! Yoo Yeonha!"

He shouted at Yoo Yeonha. Kim Suho's furious look even made the proud Yoo Yeonha shrink.

"...Wait one minute."

Tsk.

Yoo Yeonha clicked her tongue and turned on her smartwatch.

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1. Jingu Bang is the magical staff used by Sun Wukong, which can elongate endlessly.

# Chapter 34

## Exam Period (2)

Yoo Yeonha called Chae Nayun and asked if what Kim Hajin said was true. Chae Nayun carefully explained what happened the day before, and it was exactly as Kim Hajin said. In fact, Chae Nayun went so far as to make a definitive claim.

“There’s no way Kim Hajin is a Djinn”, she said.

The meeting was disbanded afterwards. Kim Hajin stomped out of the room, while Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan chased after him.

Once the short yet fierce disturbance passed by, room 303 became silent. The three remaining people didn’t speak. In the midst of the silence, Yoo Yeonha saw Kim Horak massaging his right shoulder.

“...Does it hurt?”

“N-No, I’m fine.”

“That was your Gift, right?”

Many cadets already knew about Kim Horak’s Gift. That was how straightforward it was.

A simple and brute Gift that instantly amplified his body’s explosive and destructive power. This easy-to-understand Gift was one of the strongest Gifts for martial arts. But Kim Hajin had dodged his attack easily. His movement wasn’t flashy or nimble in any way. Almost as though he simply tripped, he had used a concise movement to dodge Kim Horak, whose Gift was specialized for martial arts.

“...”

Kim Horak dodged Yoo Yeonha’s gaze. He wasn’t feeling sorry about wrongfully accusing Kim Hajin. He was only embarrassed that his attack had been so easily dodged.

“Ehew.”

Yoo Yeonha sighed and glanced at Shin Jonghak. For a while, he was only staring at his smartwatch. Was he messaging Chae Nayun? That’s what Yoo Yeonha worried about.

“Jonghak, what are you up to?”

Yoo Yeonha approached him with an affectionate smile. Shin Jonghak answered without bothering to give Yoo Yeonha a glance.

“I’m looking to see if there’s more of an item I bought.”

“Item?”

“Yeah, I bought something.”

“What did you buy~?”

Yoo Yeonha pulled on Shin Jonghak’s arm and acted cute in her own way.

“You don’t need to know.”

But Shin Jonghak pushed her away. Yoo Yeonha’s face froze at his cold action.

“...Tsk. If we’re done, I’m leaving.”

Shin Jonghak clicked his tongue and got up. In his mind, his action was justified. The website he was looking at was the famous Violet Banquet. However, Cube’s cadets were prohibited from being a member of that website. It wasn’t just Violet Banquet. Owning any black market ID was enough to get a cadet expelled. Even so, his indifferent attitude hurt Yoo Yeonha’s feelings.

“Kim Horak, aren’t you coming?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah.”

Kim Horak, who was peeking at Yoo Yeonha’s face, followed Shin Jonghak like a puppy. Just like that, Yoo Yeonha became alone. She looked around the empty room. Suddenly,

anger surged up from her heart. This wasn't the first time something like this had happened. Now, she was beginning to get upset.

'Shin Jonghak you bastard, just which part of Chae Nayun is better than me? Ehew. But what can I do, I just have to try harder.'

When Yoo Yeonha was about to chase after Shin Jonghak, her smartwatch vibrated. It was a message from Yun Hyun.

—There's going to be a preparatory exam next Monday. You're coming, right?

Club activities stopped during exam periods, but the academics club offered peer tutoring during this time.

Yoo Yeonha started typing, but she suddenly remembered what Kim Hajin said. That the culprit of this incident was Yun Hyun...

"Stupid."

Yoo Yeonha dismissed the idea once again and sent her reply.



9 P.M... I was sitting on a bench. I already chased away Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan, who followed me to comfort me.

In an empty park, I stared up at the night sky all alone. I released the bitterness in my heart.

"...Haa."

I reflected on what happened. Not only was I thrown into my own novel, I even got into an argument with characters I created with love. All sorts of feelings I had kept pent up in my heart exploded today.

I wanted to stop. I wanted to go back to my old, one-room house. I wanted to see my parents. I avoided them, saying I was too busy, but now I was full of regrets.

How was the time flowing in my old world? If it was the same as this place, I should be a missing person by now. I might even be considered dead by the time I go back. After all, I would have to spend close to 10 years in this world.

At this point, I was glad I raised my perseverance stat. In this world, I had nothing. The memories I built up, the relationships, the feelings, none of them were here. My old self wouldn't have been able to endure it. Even if I didn't have the courage to commit suicide, I would have given up on the hope of returning home. I might have given up being part of the main storyline and gone on to live a normal life.

"Ah, I want to see you, Mom."

It didn't feel right saying this as a 26-year-old man, but my voice trembled from the deep sincerity in my heart.

I hoped she was healthy. I hoped she was getting along with Dad.

If time was flowing normally in the other world, I hoped they would find out about me going missing as lately as possible. I didn't want to even imagine them being sad because of me.

Once I began to think along this line, it just didn't seem to end.

I remembered my friends. I cursed them from time to time for calling me when I was busy, but I missed them, especially today. Even the seniors from my college and the army, who liked to mess with me, popped up in my head.

Both good and bad connections I've made in my life lit up in my heart like stars.

But the outside world was still dark, and not even a faint starlight existed in its sky. Dreaming of stars in a starless world only filled me with anguish.

"...Huu."

I wiped my reddened eyes and stood up. The handgun in my hand was still cold and heavy. The sensation was like a familiar scent.



My high perseverance stat indeed gave me an amazing recuperative power. A day was enough to mend my broken mentality, and after working out, hunting, and buying stocks, as usual, the weekend flew by in the blink of an eye.

"Exams are next week, starting with the written exams. The combat exams will be on the following week. But remember what I've always said, written exams are just as important as combat exams."

Today was Monday. The professor purposely spoke in a grave tone. Just like he said, the midterm exams would begin in just a week.

I was also a bit apprehensive.

Of course, I had nothing to worry about in written exams, but the problem was with combat exams.

In duels, cadets fought each other in a one on one battle. In monster wars, cadets fought illusionary monsters summoned by magicians rather than mana puppets.

Cadets didn't show mercy in duels to maximize the points they gained, and summoned monsters in monster wars were on a completely different league than mana puppets.

In a way, they were no different than 'real' monsters.

So I had to prepare myself for the pain of getting my flesh cut or my bones broken.

“...”

But setting the exam-worry aside, I couldn't focus on today's class because of someone sitting next to me.

Rachel.

She always sat by herself in the back of the class, but ever since the results came out for the Phenomenon Realm Analysis exam, she has been getting close to me seat by seat, and now she was sitting next to me.

To be exact, she was still a seat away since there was still an empty seat between us. In any case, Rachel kept sneaking a glance at my notebook. She wasn't just stealing a look, but she also seemed to be writing something down.

Just to be sure, I wrote down a random string of words.

[Yoo Kim Ok Jun Ja Hyuk]

Yoo Okja. Kim Junhyuk. It was my mother's and father's name. I rolled my eyes to the side and observed Rachel.

As expected, she snuck a glance before quickly jotting something down on her notebook. With my eyes, I could clearly see the words "Yoo Kim Ok Jun Ha Hyuk????"

Next, I scribbled down a string of numbers next to my parents' names.

[19680529.19660912]

It was my father's and mother's birthday. Rachel also jotted down the numbers.

Next, I scribbled down the name of the dog I used to have, then 'iputsmid' which was an anagram of "I'm stupid"...

The class then ended while I was still messing around with Rachel.

“Good luck on your exams next week. The results will be posted for everyone to see, so don’t embarrass yourselves.”

The professor left after reminding the cadets. Immediately afterwards, Chae Nayun’s seat became noisy.

Chae Nayun had returned from the hospital today. It seemed she still had trouble moving, as she had all sorts of supporting equipment with her. Just like in the original story, Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak ran up to her.

“What’s wrong with you guys. I can move just fine by myself.”

They backed off slightly at Chae Nayun’s complaint but still remained hovering around her.

“Kim Suho, you should leave.”

“...Why?”

“Can’t you see Nayun is uncomfortable having you around?”

Shin Jonghak was provoking Kim Suho as usual, and one girl watched them from the side with somewhat lonely eyes. She smiled, acting as though she was fine, but I knew she was feeling alienated. Obviously, it was Yoo Yeonha.

Yoo Yeonha approached Chae Nayun and the others and spoke.

“Jonghak, Nayun, I’m going first.”

“Yeah.”

“Hm? Oh, bye Yeonha. Good luck studying.”

Shin Jonghak and Chae Nayun’s greeting was just for courtesy. Yoo Yeonha left the classroom biting her lips. I stuffed my laptop and writing utensils in my bag and walked out the back door.

Immediately, I ran into Yoo Yeonha. She should have gone left to go to the dorm, but for some reason, she chose the opposite direction.

“...”

We looked at each other awkwardly.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“...To the dorm.”

Like I said before, this wasn't the way to the dorm.  
But I didn't want to continue talking to her.

“I see.”

Yoo Yeonha didn't say anything more either.  
She simply made a small bow and walked past me.



Yoo Yeonha opened the clubroom door. The clubroom looked no different than usual, but the empty room gave off a slight chill. The only person inside was Yun Hyun, who was reading on the teaching platform.

Yoo Yeonha tilted her head. Where was everyone else?

At that moment, Yun Hyun noticed Yoo Yeonha and walked over.

“You're here?”

“...Yes.”

“Come take a seat.”

Yoo Yeonha sat down for now. Not having anyone else around made her feel a bit uneasy, but she soon calmed down. It was likely thanks to Yun Hyun. For some reason, the scent Yun Hyun gave off was calming and cozy, so Yoo Yeonha could always relax in front of him.

“Where did everyone go?”

“They're coming soon. Oh right, Yeonha, I heard you joined the team.”

“Team?”

“You know, the Djinn investigation team. I’m in it too as the second year representative.”

Yun Hyun’s voice was clear and firm. At least, that’s how Yoo Yeonha felt.

“Oh really?”

As expected, Kim Hajin’s suspicion was a complete nonsense.

“But we haven’t made any progress. Do you guys have any lead? Any suspects?”

“No, not yet.”

“Really? So you guys haven’t made any progress either?”

Yun Hyun asked softly. Yoo Yeonha pondered for a moment at his courteous manner of speech. Progress. There wasn’t any. The meeting was disbanded before anything happened.

“Mm... One person did say something, but it was stupid.”

“Stupid? I’m curious what it was now.”

Yun Hyun leaned against the desk Yoo Yeonha was sitting on and placed down a scented candle.

“What’s this?”

“A scented candle. It’ll help when we’re studying later. Anyways, what did this person say?”

Yun Hyun asked with a kind smile on his face. Yoo Yeonha smelled the scented candle. It was aromatic and gentle. Her body relaxed, and the day’s exhaustion seemed to wear away.

“Tell me.”

“It’s nothing, really.”

Yoo Yeonha smirked.

“Some guy was saying you were a Djinn. That you could use some sort of mental magic. Absurd, isn’t it?”

After answering, Yoo Yeonha sniffed the scented candle once more. The wonderful fragrance was almost addicting. Because she was focused on the scented candle, she didn’t see Yun Hyun’s face.

“...Does he have proof?”

“No...?”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha suddenly snapped out of her daze. Tension welled up in her body once more. She turned her head towards Yun Hyun and glared at him.

When being suspected, most innocent people wouldn’t ask if there was evidence. At least, not as the first question.

After all, there couldn’t possibly be any evidence against someone who didn’t commit a crime.

“Oh, oops, I misspoke. What a funny kid. On what ground is he calling me a Djinn?”

Yun Hyun realized his mistake and quickly corrected himself. But it was too late. Yoo Yeonha backed off, taking out her whip from her back pocket and pointing it at Yun Hyun.

“Who are you?”

“...What’s wrong, Yeonha?”

Yun Hyun smiled.

The gentle arc his eyes and lips quickly twisted viciously.

“It’s not your turn yet.”

# Chapter 35

## Exam Period (3)

With exams starting next week, the Fitness Center was filled with cadets. Haaap—! Yaaaap—! The spirited shouts coming from the sparring rooms pierced through the walls, while clashing of magic power created sharp sonic booms. In the physical training room, cadets could be seen lifting 120kg dumbbells effortlessly.

I was also working out among such monsters. What I could do was pitiful compared to other cadets, but I was pouring out sweat and effort in my own way.

*Wiiing—*

“Uuk.”

Using my smartwatch’s vibration as an excuse, I put down the bar I was lifting. Dizziness immediately came over me. It seemed 130kg bench press was still too much. I wiped my sweat off with a towel hanging around my neck and checked my smartwatch.

[The documents are ready... But are you really going to invest so much money in us?]

It was a message from Park Soohyuk.

Of the 500 million I earned from selling the ginseng, I bought stocks with 250 million and invested the rest into SH Agency. I knew SH Agency would become just as successful as Packhorse Master.

[Of course. I’ll see you tomorrow.]

[Um... Why us?]

It seemed Park Soohyuk was quite confused, but I couldn’t blame him. The current SH Agency was a tiny nameless company that had yet to accomplish anything.

[It's fun, growing bigger together. Don't you think it'll be nice to see each other grow?]

I wasn't investing in a company, but a person. That was how exceptional Park Soohyuk was. He was a future tycoon, jumping into this business without any connection and managing to achieve the world's most brilliant enterprise.

[Ah... Yes... Then I'll see you tomorrow with all the documents and contracts. Thank you once again.]

[No problem. See you then.]

After ending my conversation with Park Soohyuk, I lied down on the bench press once again. But immediately after I put my hands on the bar, my wrist vibrated once again. Who was it now? When I looked at my smartwatch, I couldn't help but furrow my brows.

It was Yoo Yeonha.

[9]

I couldn't understand why she would suddenly message me, but the content of the message was even more mysterious. It was a single number. Did she press the wrong button?

“What's up with her?”

Since she didn't say anything else, I ignored it and put my hands back on the bar. Putting strength into my entire body, I lifted it up with regular breathing.

One, two, three, four... nine.

Nine. 9.

Suddenly, I thought of something.

“...Don't tell me, is this a rescue signal?”

◇ ◇ ◇

Yoo Yeonha was currently detained in the penthouse room of Cube's second year dorm.

No matter how much of an elite Yoo Yeonha was, she couldn't do anything against a Djinn who was loved by Lilith. Yun Hyun easily subdued Yoo Yeonha before storing her

in an extradimensional pocket and moving her here.

He couldn't show the meticulousness he usually did in hiding his tracks and Yoo Yeonha's struggle was surely caught on CCTV, but since he planned to leave Cube once this matter was finished, he didn't care.

"Oh, this is him? The quick-witted one who said I was a Djinn?"

Yun Hyun looked at Yoo Yeonha's smartwatch he just snatched and grinned. The message Yoo Yeonha sent Kim Hajin was displayed on the smartwatch screen.

"Looks like I'll need to kill him later... Anyways, what's this? 9? That's all you sent to ask for help? Who would understand something so cryptic?"

Yun Hyun dropped the smartwatch and stomped on it. Cube's proud smartwatch was shattered easily.

"Of course, even if he understood what you meant, he wouldn't be able to come in here. There's a barrier around this place, you see."

Yoo Yeonha fiercely glared at Yun Hyun while clenching her teeth. Seeing Yoo Yeonha's glare, Yun Hyun trembled in ecstasy.

"Ah, amazing. Those eyes are amazing. It's okay, Yeonha. Soon, you'll come to like me too."

*Tap, tap.*

Yun Hyun slowly approached Yoo Yeonha, who was tied to a chair. She struggled fiercely, but the restraint spell prevented her from moving.

"You have beautiful skin."

Yun Hyun put his hands on Yoo Yeonha's thigh. A faint handprint was left behind on her white skin. At the disgusting sensation akin to a snake licking her, Yoo Yeonha teared up.

"Once is enough. You won't be able to escape afterward. Lilith-nim allowed it for today too. That's right, Lilith-nim wants you too."

Yun Hyun spoke leisurely. The Devil of Enchantment bewitched people on a

fundamental level. Once Yun Hyun had his way, Yoo Yeonha would become a completely different person.

“Yeonha, weren’t you lonely? I know that feeling too.”

Speaking persuasively, Yun Hyun placed his hand on Yoo Yeonha’s neck. A mind-muddling magic power was imbued in his breath. Yoo Yeonha trembled. No matter how powerful her mental power was, ecstasy forced by magic power wasn’t something she could resist. If she could, she would not have hesitated to bite her own tongue to end her own life.

“It’s easier if you give up.”

Yun Hyun caressed Yoo Yeonha’s face and whispered softly. A magic power of passion flowed into Yoo Yeonha from his hand. The magic power stimulated many parts of her body and urged her to submit. An intense pleasure akin to euphoria overwhelmed her. In the end, she let out a small aroused moan.

*CLANG!*

But at that moment, a flash of light erupted from the window and a translucent beam of light pierced Yun Hyun.

“...What?”

Yun Hyun was dazed by the unexpected attack as he fell on his knee. While he was struggling to comprehend what just happened, an unidentifiable voice rang out from the room.

—Serves you right for not listening to me and suspecting me.

“...!”

Yoo Yeonha’s eyes shot open at the familiar voice. Yun Hyun used this chance to imbue magic power into his injured leg, but the special regenerative power of Djinn’s didn’t activate and only the pain increased.

—Don’t think about recovering from that wound. I refined that bullet to be a bit more efficient. Unless you undergo a surgery to take it out...

“Shut it!”

Yun Hyun shot up with a roar. Red magic power erupted from his body. His eyes, which had turned bloodshot, glanced around the empty room in vain.

“Where are you! Show yourself!”

Yun Hyun swung his magic power around desperately. The storm of magic power swept through his surroundings, but there was nothing out of the ordinary.

—You can try all you want, but you won’t be able to reach me. I’m far, far away, you see.

“You little rat—!”

As if to respond to Yun Hyun’s curse, a single bullet shot through the window and pierced Yun Hyun’s shoulder. Yun Hyun felt rage before pain.

“You, You—!”

Yun Hyun swung his arms frantically.

“Show yourself—! Show yourself, you son of a bitch—!”

His frenzied cry muddled his speech, and it became harder and harder to tell whether a human was talking or an animal was crying.

Then, a few more bullets flew in through the window. Yun Hyun erupted in a furious rage. Now, he was no different than a beast.

Yoo Yeonha watched this overwhelming scene in a daze. Setting aside where the bullets were coming from, just how could mere bullets injure a Djinn to this degree? She grew deeply curious at this unprecedented power.

—So this is why people enjoy sniping.

With a mocking taunt, another bullet flew in. This time, the bullet hit Yun Hyun’s chest. He collapsed from the shock, then began to crawl pitifully using his hands. Immediately, bullets pierced his knees and shoulders. It was a critical blow preventing him from further movement.

“This...”

The bullets had all come from the window. Yun Hyun thought that he just had to hide from sight.

But the cold-hearted sharpshooter didn't allow any mercy. Another white shooting star flew in through the window and pierced his back. Yun Hyun's hands trembled, while his bloodshot eyes widened.

—So durable... Oy, Yoo Yeonha, I'm about to use up all of the bullets you gave me. If you have a conscience, provide me with better ones.

Yoo Yeonha couldn't laugh at the man's joking words.

Yun Hyun was in a pitiful state, while a man was protecting her from a faraway place. Realizing that she would survive, she relaxed. When the tension in her body disappeared, drowsiness overwhelmed her.

—If you're tired, just sleep. Kim Suho should be arriving soon.

Before she fell asleep like the man said, Yoo Yeonha asked the one question she had.

“By the way... Where are you talking from?”

—Above you. The ceiling's speaker, I hacked into it.

“...Oh.”

I see...

Yoo Yeonha chuckled and closed her eyes.



At first, I thoughtlessly asked the Book of Truth whether Yun Hyun had kidnapped Yoo Yeonha.

The Book of Truth answered 'yes', and I shot up in surprise. Not only was the schedule moved up, I was also notified of a settings change.

Because my novel was for an audience of all ages, I made Yun Hyun impotent, but an absurd setting had been added to his genitals...

I immediately alerted Kim Suho, but since every second was vital, I set out myself.

I ran to a mountaintop that had a clear view of the second year cadets' dorm. I only needed five minutes to climb the mountain thanks to my increased vitality and stamina. As a result, I could save Yoo Yeonha before it was too late.

“Thank god I chose to come.”

Just now, Kim Suho barged into Yun Hyun’s penthouse after breaking the barrier. Yun Hyun resisted with what little strength he had left, but Kim Suho cut him down with a single slash.

“...But this, it’s better than I expected.”

I stared at the giant anti-material sniper rifle in my hand in admiration. With a length of 1.5 meters, it flaunted a domineering and beautiful appearance. The gun barrel, designed to amplify the gun’s firepower, looked extremely vicious, but its platinum color and the golden patterns surrounding it gave it a noble elegance. This sniper rifle was the result of Aether and Desert Eagle’s fusion. I had created it just now using SP.

[Sniper rifle mode – transforms into a high-powered sniper rifle when fused with Aether.]

Even after adding the restriction that Aether had to be used, the modification cost 250 SP.

Using this anti-material sniper rifle, I sniped down a target 1.5km away. I saw the enemy from a distance I couldn’t be seen, and sniped an enemy from a distance I couldn’t be attacked.

It was quite exhilarating.

“I’m sure Kim Suho will take care of the rest.”

I canceled the fusion between Aether and Desert Eagle. The 1.5m long sniper rifle returned to its normal handgun form.

[You obtained 457 SP!]

[An incredible luck applies. You obtained an additional 11% as a bonus!]

[You succeeded in a long range snipe. Proficiency of Master Sharpshooter increases to

grade 7.]

I gained a lot of SP in a single day. It was to be expected since I completed a major arc.

I sat down on the ground and watched what was happening far away. Kim Suho was putting Yoo Yeonha on his back, while Cube's Heroes were rushing into the dorm.

With this, the number of victims had decreased. Though faint, a point of contact was also created between Yoo Yeonha and Kim Suho. Since Kim Suho was a kind main character, I was sure he would treat Yoo Yeonha well.

Though things had become a bit messy, overall, I was satisfied with the outcome.

# Chapter 36

## Exam Period (4)

Yoo Yeonha opened her eyes. A patternless white ceiling filled her sight, and the sound of something being cut tickled her ears. She turned towards the direction of the sound. Kim Suho was cutting an apple with a fruit knife.

“...What are you doing here?”

Yoo Yeonha asked dumbfoundedly. Kim Suho glanced at Yoo Yeonha before smiling bashfully.

“You’re awake? It doesn’t hurt anywhere, right?”

“...I’m fine.”

“The doctor said there’s nothing wrong with your body.”

Yoo Yeonha raised her upper body. She felt slightly stiff and sore, but it wasn’t to the point she couldn’t move.

“What I want to know is why you’re here.”

“We’re taking turns nursing you. Me, Nayun, Shin Jonghak, and Kim Horak.”

“Why?”

Yoo Yeonha asked genuinely curious.

“Well, it’s kind of our fault...”

“...Huh?”

Yoo Yeonha fell in thought because of Kim Suho’s incomprehensible words. How was it their fault?

But even after contemplating about what happened, she couldn't come up with an answer.

'Did they do something I didn't know?' Yoo Yeonha glared at Kim Suho, demanding an explanation.

"As members of the same team, we should have been more careful. We were too absorbed in caring for Nayun that we were too negligent..."

Yoo Yeonha became lost for words. Her brain seemed to freeze at the sheer stupidity of Kim Suho's statement.

It wasn't like they could have known she would get attacked. Not to mention, the investigation team had only met twice, and there was even a huge argument in the second meeting.

"...Sorry."

"Pfft."

Yoo Yeonha chuckled at Kim Suho's bashful apology. If anything, she realized just how stupidly kind this man was.

"You don't need to be sorry. I got what I deserved."

Kim Suho scratched his neck and gave Yoo Yeonha a plate of sliced apples, which were shaped like rabbits. Yoo Yeonha smiled subconsciously. Being a girl, Yoo Yeonha liked cute things.

"They look nice."

"Thanks."

Kim Suho laughed innocently. His handsome face seemed to shine. Yoo Yeonha stared at his face in a daze before suddenly remembering something and asking.

"...Oh right, um, did that person come?"

"That person?"

Kim Hajin.

Yoo Yeonha couldn't say his name out loud. She had a conscience. She didn't expect him to visit her after what she had done.

"No, nevermind."

She looked outside the window. There wasn't a single cluster of clouds on the East Sea's clear and blue sky. The world seemed particularly bright under the beaming sunlight.

Seeing this dazzling scenery, Yoo Yeonha fell in thought.

She learned many things today.

Of course, her 17-year-old personality wouldn't entirely change with just this one incident. Tomorrow's Yoo Yeonha might not be too different than today's.

But there were certainly many things she felt from the bottom of her heart. She wasn't sure whether it was self-reflection, introspection, or plain gratefulness.

Before she wrote everything down on her diary and pondered over it, she first picked up her smartwatch.

There was still something she needed to do.



I received a message.

[Thank you. I'll repay today's debts for sure.]

The sender was Yoo Yeonha. Seeing her name, the corners of my mouth curled up to a smile.

I wanted to say something cool, but the person sitting in front of me asked for another affirmation.

"Um... So I can just take this money? Really?"

I stared back at the man. Park Soohyuk has been like this for a while. I lost count how many times he asked if this was real.

Haa. I couldn't help but sigh.

It was my money I was investing, so why was he so hesitant? Just buy an HUV (hunter utility vehicle) and a proper magic pouch already!

"Yes, yes, yes. Please take it! Please!"

I stood up and bowed down at a 90-degree angle.

“Please take it!”

“Ah, um, I—”

“What, do I need to kowtow? I’ll do it!”

“No, no! I’ll take it! Thank you so much for investing in SH Agency!”

He finally put the signed documents in his suitcase.

How did such an easygoing person end up becoming the agent world’s greatest giant?

I was the owner who created this setting, but I just couldn’t understand it.

After staring at him for a moment, I asked casually.

“By the way, how old are you?”

“I’m 29.”

“Ah, you’re more than a decade older than me. You don’t have to talk so formally.”

Talking casually would be better for our relationship.

“How can I do such a thing to an investor...”

“Don’t think of me as an investor, think of me as a business partner. You know, like we’re building SH Agency together.”

“But still...”

“Don’t worry, I’m fine with it.”

“But...”

A back and forth argument went around on the topic of talking formally or casually. Eventually, I defeated Park Soohyuk and he submitted.

“Okay... I won’t talk so formally then.”

“Good.”

I got up.

“Then let’s go hunt. We’ll stop at just two for today.”

“Alright, then this hyung<sup>[1]</sup> will support you from the back.”

Park Soohyuk laughed bashfully.

We left the coffee shop. Right when we were about to head to the Field, I saw a convenience store.

“Um, Soohyuk hyung?”

I was the one who suggested talking casually, but I felt shy now that I needed to do it.

“Hm? What’s up?”

“We should buy a lottery ticket.”

I pointed at the poster that said [lottery ticket on sale]. In truth, this was the first method I thought up to make money since I had an absurd level of luck. But because of my status as a ‘minor without a guardian’, I haven’t been able to do it until now.

“Come on, lottery tickets are a waste of money. You might be too young to understand these things, but the lottery is a scam.”

“It’s not a scam. I have good luck, so I’ll probably win something. I’ll invest what I get on SH Agency, so give it a try.”

“No, I’m telling you it’s a scam...”

“Just follow me.”

I dragged Park Soohyuk to the convenience store. I grabbed ten instant lottery tickets on the counter, and with Park Soohyuk’s clearly aged face, the clerk didn’t even ask for his identification. After buying the ten tickets, I brought them over to a nearby table.

“I need something to scratch them with.”

“Oh, here’s a coin.”

Even though he just said lottery tickets were a scam, he gave me a coin with anticipating eyes.

“I’ll start then.”

Shashak. I started scratching on the silver foils on the ticket. The first one was a fail. I immediately moved on to the second. Another fail. I scratched the third ticket. Another fail.

“Haam.”

Park Soohyuk had already lost interest and yawned. Unperturbed, I continued scratching. Fourth, fifth, sixth...

While Park Soohyuk walked around the cup ramen aisle, I scratched the tenth lottery ticket.

“Oh, finally.”

“You won? How much?”

Park Soohyuk asked casually after picking up a cup ramen.

“20 million won.”

“Oh, nice.”

Park Soohyuk then started walking towards the counter before suddenly stopping and tilting his head. ‘Did I hear that wrong...?’ murmuring so, he turned towards me.

“...Can you repeat that?”

“20 million won. Looks like getting the first place jackpot is asking for too much.”

First place was 100 million won.

I showed Park Soohyuk the lottery ticket. His jaws instantly dropped.

“W-What, is, is this real?”

“It’s real, so take it.”

I handed him the ticket.

“W-Why are you giving this to me?”

“Oh, didn’t I tell you? I’m still a minor, so I can’t claim the money. You can take it. It’s an additional investment, so send me a modified contract.”

Park Soohyuk stared at me in a daze. His gaping mouth didn’t think to close. The cup ramen he was holding could probably fit in his mouth. It sure was big.

“Take it.”

“Oh, yeah.”

Park Soohyuk quickly put the lottery ticket in his pocket. Next, he quickly looked around himself and began to sweat as though he had just committed a crime.

“You can put down your guard. No one is going to steal it. “

“No, you don’t understand how scary the world can be...”



Moonlight shone through a broken window, but it only lit up dusty ruins and absolute silence. Vines and moss were the only living things in this desolate place abandoned by humans.

A factory in Suwon abandoned after Outcall, this was Chameleon Troupe’s temporary hiding place.

—Boss.

A voice rang out in the empty space. The call awoke an existence sleeping in the darkness.

—You're awake?

The existence slowly opened its eyes. The revealed pupils glistened like jewels yet carried a threatening aura.

—Those bastards started moving. The Packhorse Master. They just listed themselves on the stock market.

The ownerless voice notified the existence of this information.

The existence replied briefly. Not even a hint of emotion could be felt in the dull voice.

“Understood.”

—What should we do next?

The existence put off answering the question and slowly raised its body. Meanwhile, a full moon revealed itself from behind the clouds. A brighter moonlight infiltrated the window and lit up the existence's body. The enshrouding darkness instantly melted down.

—That aside, Boss is beautiful as always.

Long black hair seemingly weaved out of shadows, full pink lips, and a smooth white skin adorning a graceful figure... A woman, who seemed to be the manifestation of modern beauty, spoke without the slightest change in her expression.

“Do you have a death wish?”

A dark blue magic power crackled from her hands.

—I'm kidding, but it's not like I can say Boss is ugly. Forgive me.

The threatening magic power akin to an erupting lava calmed down.

—Anyways, what are we going to do? The Packhorse Master is making its move.

“We will only steal. We won't care about anything else.”

It was an apathetic answer, but her command was clear.

—Oh, by the way, there's someone buying Packhorse Master's stocks en masse.

“Stocks?”

—Yep. At first, I thought it was just a small investor, investing 3 million won first and 10 million won second. But suddenly, he threw in 250 million won on top of that. A small investor randomly investing wouldn't do something like that.

“Coincidence?”

—Mm... 95%, I'd say. But Boss, the other 5% is what I'm concerned with. There's no reason to buy this stock. Packhorse Master doesn't even have a guild page yet.

The guild stock market was riskier than the normal stock market. Thus, without a proper source of information, few small investors invested in new guilds. And there was no way that there was a source of information on Packhorse Master.

“Don't mind it. We only have one job.”

—Mmm... If you say so. I'll tell the troupe members that.

“Un.”

With that, the voice disappeared. Then, it quickly came back.

—Oh right, a few interesting pages appeared on Violet Banquet.

The woman tilted her head.

—Artifact Search Corp, Jonggak's Dog Meat Soup, and Truth Agency.

“Are they of any use?”

—The first two are slowly building their reputation, but I don't know about Truth Agency. I just included it because of how confident it introduced itself. Since it's boasting in Violet Banquet, I'm sure it has some skill.

“Take it out.”

—Come on~ You know how things are. It wasn’t just once or twice that seemingly ordinary pages were the jackpot. I’ll give you the page number later, so take a look. It says it’ll answer any question. Who knows? Maybe it can help us find that son of a bitch.

However, the woman remained uninterested.

“That doesn’t happen often.”

—Still. Alright, I’m going. See you later, Boss~

That seemed to be the end of the conversation.  
But the voice came back once again.

—Oh, one more thing, Boss.

“..”

Veins popped up on the woman's white forehead.

“What now?”

—Cube’s exams start next week. You’ll go watch, right?

Huu.

The woman sighed before replying.

“Yeah, I will.”

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1. Term used for male to refer to older males, usually in a friendly family-like manner.

# Chapter 37

## Intruders (1)

Thursday. The sound of scribbling pencils rang out in the classroom. Almost all cadets were hard at work to prepare for the exam four days later.

“Argh... I want to go play soccer or something.”

Of course, there was bound to be at least one cadet who hated studying. Chae Nayun expressed her boredom with her entire body.

“My body’s healed but I can’t move my body...”

This week’s incident was reported across the entire world, and combat training was canceled due to Cube’s executives all being under investigation. As a result, there were only review and theory classes until the exams. To Chae Nayun, it must be like hell.

“Exams are next week. Study hard, or you’re going to have regrets when the results come out.”

Next to her, Kim Suho spoke with a laugh. Being a diligent protagonist, Kim Suho was also good at written exams. But since he wasn’t good enough to contend for top ranks, he asked Yoo Yeonha who sat in front of him if he ever had any questions. Just like he was doing now.

“Um, Yeonha, can you tell me how to solve this?”

Yoo Yeonha glanced at the problem Kim Suho showed her.

“...Can you not forget my last name?”

“Oh, yeah, sorry.”

I yawned as I watched them interact.

At that moment, someone poked my shoulder. It was Rachel. When I tilted my head, she handed me a piece of paper.

Just like yesterday, it was another high difficulty problem.

Rachel has started to ask me for help on problems like these. In reality, I haven't even heard her voice.

[Suppose the boss monster of a Dungeon is a high-intermediate rank grade 3 demi-devil. The Dungeon is a Stage Dungeon, and each stage consists of a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 30 low rank to intermediate rank monsters. Assuming the size of this Dungeon is medium small, find the minimum and maximum mana density, and approximate the number of people needed to conquer the Dungeon.]

I had no clue where to start. Was this really going to be on the exam? I glanced at Rachel. She was tapping on the desk while staring at me.

I should probably answer the question.

I activated my Gift. With several abilities I added to Observation and Reading, it should be able to solve this problem as long as it followed the world design I created.

[A high-intermediate rank grade 3 demi-devil has a minimum magic power capacity of... medium small Stages have four to six floors... 878ppm~1133ppm. Nine people can use and recharge magic power without being overburdened.]

I wrote down the sentences that popped up in front of me on a piece of paper and gave it to Rachel. Immediately, her eyes widened. She buried her face on the paper and began to carefully scrutinize every step of the calculation.

*Ding dong—*

At that moment, the bell rang signaling the end of the class. The class was technically a review class, but in reality, it was just a self-study class. In any case, few cadets got up from their seats. They were all studying hard.

I, of course, planned on going back to the dorm. That's just what smart students did. When I began to stuff my writing utensils in my bag along with my laptop, a shadow was cast over my desk. I raised my head with a quizzical look. It was Chae Nayun.

"Hey, help me study."

She spoke with a sweet smile.

I got up from my seat.

“...I don’t want to.”

“What? Why?”

“It’s too troublesome.”

Written exams began next Monday. That was less than four days. Even if she started studying now, her grades wouldn’t change much. Not to mention, I had no way of helping her study.

“H-Hey! Um, please! How about a study guide on Phenomenon Realm Analysis?”

She sounded more desperate than I imagined, but I still went on my way cold-heartedly.



The written exams went by like a breeze. From the first exam on Monday to the final exam on Friday, time seemed to pass in the blink of an eye.

I felt like I got everything correct. At first, I thought about aiming for an average score, but because I might end up scoring near the bottom on the combat exams, I did my best on the written exams so that I wouldn’t be held back.

Today was Saturday.

Combat exams would begin on Monday. During combat exam periods, Cube was open to cadets’ family members, various Hero associates, and all institutions that hired Heroes. Naturally, Cube was bustling with people.

“Oh~ Cube’s rank 117, Kim Junha! I saw you on YouTube. My son is your fan. Can we take a photo?”

Because cadets’ families were present, the combat exam period was somewhat of a festival. It was a bit odd that teenagers fighting each other was considered a festival, but this was Cube’s tradition.

“We are in Cube, the world’s best Hero Academy...”

Reporters were also allowed in from approved broadcasting companies. Since

becoming a Hero was akin to becoming a celebrity, the goal was to let cadets become used to being on camera.

“There sure is a lot of people.”

I was currently sitting in Hero Park, located in the center of Cube. Unlike how it was normally, the place was booming with people as though it was Disneyland.

“Ah! Hajin-ssi!”

At that moment, someone called my name.

*Tap tap.* I turned towards the direction of the footsteps.

It was Hazuki.

“Hajin-ssi, what are you doing here?”

“Oh... Just taking a break. Who are the two behind you?”

“My parents. This is my mom and this is my dad. Mom, Dad, this is my teammate.”

“H-Hello.”

I shook hands with Hazuki’s parents. They smiled and said something in Japanese. Since I couldn’t understand them, I just feigned a smile.

“Hajin. His name is Kim Hajin.”

Hazuki introduced me to her parents. It seemed they were asking for my name. After Hazuki told them my name, they grabbed my hands, saying “Hajin-san, Hajin-san”. I didn’t know what they were saying so I just replied with “hai, hai”.

In any case, after the greeting ended, Hazuki left with her parents.

Alone once again, I sat down on the bench. I couldn’t help but feel jealous of Hazuki, whose parents had come to see him.

‘Huu. If only Mom and Dad were in this world too... ’

Just when I was having wishful thoughts... a certain person caught my eyes.

A woman was slowly walking through the crowded park. Her long hair was black like shadows, her eyes looked like obsidian, and she seemed a bit drowsy. She held a certain melancholic charm that seemed to turn her surroundings dark.

I felt like I knew her.

She was exactly as I described her in my novel.

One of the few wanted criminals on Hero Association's blacklist, the leader of the criminal group Chameleon Troupe, and the person who inherited the title of Yasha of the Eight Legions.

As she disguised herself with countless number of identities, I was the only one who knew her real name.

At that moment, she suddenly came to a stop. She slowly turned her head, meeting my eyes. I had to look away, but my body immediately froze.

Her deep eyes seemed to strangle me. Just by looking into her eyes, I became stifled for breath and broke out in a cold sweat.

“...”

When my mind was about to turn blank, she turned back. *Clack, clack.* The sound of her high-heels rang out as she walked away.

“Haa... Haa...”

I collected my breath. It felt like I was under an immense pressure.

But at that moment, I felt a gaze on me. I slowly raised my head.

She had her back towards me, but I could feel a gaze from her back.

I was certain.

That woman was observing me.

My instincts were roaring. I had to say something, something that could explain why I was staring at her...

With a gulp, I muttered.

“Wow, she's so hot.”

Instantly, she slightly twisted her head towards me.

But soon, she continued walking.

“Whew.”

I let out a sigh of relief. I beat my stifled chest and put my hands over my heated face.

I almost forgot.

The Chameleon Troupe would sneak into Cube for combat exams. Their goal was to scout. They wanted to see if anyone was worthy of filling in an empty position in their group.

In the original story, Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak were the main candidates. Kim Suho would be disqualified because of the differences in their beliefs, and they would return peacefully with Shin Jonghak in their mind. In other words, they weren't here to cause any trouble.

However...

“I'm looking around constantly, but everything's normal.”

Cube was currently filled with Heroes dispatched by the Association.

One particularly notable character was the world rank 1737, high rank grade 6 Hero, Oh Junhyuk.

“There's no one out of the ordinary. Let's just go grab lunch.”

“Just focus.”

There was also rank 2000, high-rank grade 7 Hero, Seo Youngji.

Several Heroes were on the lookout in disguise.

Because the incident with Yun Hyun happened before the combat exams, the Hero Association had dispatched numerous Heroes to investigate.

“Let's eat pizza.”

“Shut it. Just keep your eyes out for anyone suspicious or with a strange aura.”

If the Chameleon Troupe were to clash with them... it wouldn't end with just one or two dead people.



*Clack, clack.*

A woman stopped in an artificial forest. After confirming that no one was watching her, she quietly murmured.

“Someone saw me.”

The forest was empty without even a shadow of a person. However, a strange voice rang out from the ground.

—Really? Maybe you were mistaken.

“No, he said I was hot.”

—... Pfft. Well, did you like it, Boss?

“Do you want to die?”

—Check again. Maybe the necklace isn’t working.

A full body mirror shot up from the ground. The woman looked at herself in the mirror. Around her neck was Siren’s Necklace, an item with the ability to prevent people from recognizing her.

“The necklace is working fine.”

—Really? So someone saw through the necklace? He must have good perception. I’ll keep an eye out. Do you remember his name and face?

“...Stop joking around. You saw him too.”

—Huhu, I know, I know. I’m already looking into it. Wait just a bit.

*Tadak, tak.* The sound of a keyboard rang out.

The woman closed her eyes and waited for the report.

# Chapter 38

## Intruders (2)

—There's nothing special about him.

The voice answered after ten minutes of waiting. The woman smacked her lips. It was her habit that came out when she was dissatisfied.

—Really. He's an orphan without parents or relatives. The orphanage he was in held an examination for potential Heroes and he was admitted to the Agent Military Academy at the age of 6. He never stood out, maintaining a below-average rank before entering Cube. He has a 300 million won debt. That's it.

“...”

'Then how did he notice me?'

To her, that was the question. Siren's Necklace was a mythical grade accessory. Siren, of course, being the half-human half-bird creature in Greek mythology.

'Perception distortion' was one of the many abilities the necklace had. Without exceptional perception and eyesight, it was impossible to see through it.

—Do you still have doubts? I can put his name down on the notebook if you want.

“...No.”

The woman dropped her head.

“We still have many chances. We can write his name down after we find out more about him.”

“Oh, Boss, you were here.”

At that moment, an imposing voice resounded. The woman turned around. There, a large-bodied man was smiling viciously.

“It’s been a while, Boss.”

It was a bit funny seeing a man call a woman, whose height couldn’t reach his shoulders, Boss. However, the man clearly treated the woman with great respect.

“This place is filled with powerful Heroes.”

*Click, click.* The man clenched and unclenched his gauntlet-covered fist.

“Take it off. We didn’t come here to cause trouble.”

“Ah, right. I almost forgot.”

At the woman’s command, the man’s black gauntlet scattered into dust. He then scratched his neck in silence, while the woman glared at him coldly.

“W-What?”

Startled, the man asked. What the woman wanted to ask was said by the mysterious voice.

—The report.

“Oh, right. There’s nothing to report. I can pop everyone’s heads with a flick of a finger.”

—Idiot... That’s obvious. I’m talking about their future potential.

The man rubbed his chin and pondered.

“Hm... I’m not sure. I went to watch the second year’s rank 1 cadet, but he wasn’t anything special.”

—First years are who you should be watching. This year’s freshman are said to be exceptional, so go look again. Oh, Boss, I have something to do now, so I’ll talk to you later.

“Yeah, screw off.”

—... You shut up.

The voice disappeared, and the man smiled as he stared at the woman.

“Boss, I don’t think there are any good saplings. What do we do? Since we’re here, can’t we fight these self-proclaimed Heroes?”

The man didn’t hide his willingness to fight. He flaunted his battle spirit by releasing his magic power, which fluttered in the air through the wind. Though it was a careless move that could draw a keen Hero's attention, the woman watched his action without a change in her expression.

“...Gyeong.”

“Mm?”

“Let’s test something.”

She imbued magic power into her necklace. Immediately, the necklace changed color from gold to blue.

“How is it? Can you see me?”

“Oho, is that the treasure you got before? I can see a faint silhouette, but not your face. Ah, I have to focus. Even though you’re not moving, I keep losing sight of you if I’m not focused. Ah, you just fused with the tree, Boss!”

“...”

As expected, the necklace was working fine. Although the man was a muscle-brained brute who only trained his body, he still had a deep perception that matched his skill. But even he couldn’t see through her, so how did a mere cadet manage to do so?

“Oh, dang. I can’t tell where you are now, Boss. Let me borrow that too. I’m way too noticeable because of my large body. If there’s someone I wanted to kill...”

“We’re done here. Go.”

The woman cut off the man’s chatter.

“Make sure you complete your mission.”

“Yes, Boss.”

The man turned around without a fuss.

The woman watched him walk away imposingly. His bulky back, mountainous shoulders, and flawlessly refined physique showed that he was anything but simple. In reality, he was an Irregular who had inherited the old Martial God’s spirit and vigor.

—... Cheok Jungyeong wasn’t always that stupid, right Boss?

Korean Peninsula’s strongest swordsman and a storm of an era that had commanded the country’s fate.

His name, Cheok Jungyeong<sup>[1]</sup>.

That was the ‘past life’ he awakened through ‘enlightenment’ and ‘inheritance’.



The weekend passed by in the blink of an eye, and the combat exams began.

Monday’s exam was a duel.

The exam was carried out in a simple way. Cadets could nominate cadets they wanted to fight. Each cadet had 3 nominations, and a nominated cadet couldn’t refuse the duel.

Though it might seem like a way for the strong to bully the weak, Cube wasn’t so stupid. The exam was designed to be fair, giving bonus points depending on the difference in the cadets’ rankings.

For example, if Kim Suho who was rank 1 fought with a bottom-ranked cadet, he would receive negative points even if he won, while the bottom-ranked cadet would gain points even if he lost.

Furthermore, an ungraded element called ‘fame’ encouraged cadets to challenge stronger opponents.

There were thousands of cadets, numerous duel arenas, and limited time. Naturally, scouts from various countries’ guilds spectated high ranking cadets. So if low ranking cadets challenged high ranking cadets, they would be able to appeal to these scouts even if they lost.

“...I knew this would happen.”

But even with this mechanism encouraging fairness and challenge...  
I was nominated by the rank 18 cadet.

[Duel 1]

[Rank 18 Kim Horak vs Rank 934 Kim Hajin]

Even if Kim Horak won, he wouldn't gain more than three points. A fight between rank 934 and rank 18, it was obvious who would win.

...This muscle-brained buffoon.

"Well, what can I do."

It seemed he really wanted to beat me up.

I put my laptop back in my cross bag and left the dorm.

The scenery outside was completely different than usual.

If I were to put it, it was touching and heartwarming. I could practically smell a flowery scent blowing in the wind.

"Yunseok, say cheese~"

"Wow, isn't that Kim Suho? O-Oppa, are you friends with him!? I want to take a picture with him!"

Many cadets walked around with their family. Since last Friday, cadets were staying with their families in the same dorm room.

I walked solitarily, watching other cadets laughing and joking with their family.

"Where are you going?"

At that moment, someone scurried next to me like a cat. I paused and turned my head.

"To the duel arena, obviously."

"Oh right, Horak nominated you~"

Yoo Yeonha feigned ignorance.

"...Is there something you want to say?"

"I tried to stop him but he insisted on fighting you. I had no choice."

“Oh, I see.”

I continued walking. Yoo Yeonha followed after me, then suddenly backed off. There was a camera up ahead. It seemed she didn't want to be near me in front of a camera. Once the camera disappeared, Yoo Yeonha returned to my side.

“Oh, also...”

*Tak.* She snapped her fingers. Immediately, a tall man walked up and handed her a suitcase.

“Here are 100 pinnacle grade bullets. But if you need any more, just tell me. You can also ask for any defensive equipment.”

“Oh?”

Just when I was about to take it, Yoo Yeonha suddenly pulled the suitcase back.

“But don't misunderstand. This isn't a payment for you saving my life.”

“Huh?”

Yoo Yeonha stuttered somewhat bashfully.

“T-This is... just a present.”

“Yeah, I get it, so give it here.”

Uninterested, I snatched the suitcase from her hands.

“Also, they're asking for my testimony.”

“Hm?”

“For the Djinn incident.”

“Oh yeah, what about it?”

“They want me to testify, but I’ve been delaying it since it looked like you wanted to hide your power.”

So she purposely didn’t report that I sniped the Djinn.

“...Then keep doing that.”

Yun Hyun was contracted to an especially dangerous devil, Lilith. Lilith’s Djinn were ill-natured and heinous, so if they found out that I killed Yun Hyun, things could get difficult since I didn’t have any backing.

“Understood. Ah, by the way, will Horak win?”

I paused. Her question had a strange connotation.

‘Will Horak win?’

It sounded like she was asking if I would lose on purpose. In reality, I couldn’t win even if I wanted to.

“Then I’m off.”

Before I could reply, Yoo Yeonha left.

Was there another camera?

Just when I was thinking as such, I saw a group of reporters, who noticed Yoo Yeonha and was running towards her.



I arrived at the second duel arena. It was only eight in the morning but the place was bustling with people. There were also numerous reporters equipped with cameras and microphones.

Coincidentally, a nearby reporter was talking about why.

“Today, Kim Suho, Chae Nayun, and Kim Horak are scheduled to duel from 9 A.M. to 11 A.M.”

I plowed through the crowd of people and walked towards the duel arena. Suddenly, I was stopped by a man in an official Cube uniform. I asked, somewhat disgruntled.

“I’m wearing a cadet uniform, can’t you see?”

“Haha, it’s not that. Cadets need to go that way.”

The man pointed at a pathway next to the main entrance.

“Oh, thank you.”

I walked through the pathway and arrived at my assigned waiting room.

[Waiting Room 5]

This room was likely full of extras like me. People like Kim Suho and Chae Nayun were in waiting room 1, which was closest to the reporters.

I opened the door. 30~40 cadets, who were talking among themselves, immediately fell silent. Their eyes landed on me. One, two, three... After three seconds, they retracted their gaze in disinterest and continued talking.

I walked in and sat down on a random seat.

“I heard you were fighting Kim Horak.”

When I was resting by myself, someone I didn’t know struck up a conversation. His face looked somewhat familiar, so he was likely in my class.

I nodded without replying.

“Damn, Kim Horak must have you marked. You shouldn’t have shown off so much.”

“...”

I wanted to say something but gave up. Instead, I murmured inwardly.

‘Unlike you guys, I get stronger by showing off.’

“Oh right, why do you keep leaving Cube? Are you really throwing money in cabaret clubs and brothels?”

It seemed these rumors were still going around. I shook my head silently.

“No way, you really do?”

But he interpreted my gesture as he wanted. Without a choice, I opened my mouth.

“No. Even if I want to, I don’t have the money.”

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1. A historical figure.

# Chapter 39

## Intruders (3)

The duel arena was a miniature version of the Roman Colosseum. The central arena was slightly bigger than a standard soccer field, while the seats circling the arena could seat about 5000 people.

The design was a great success.

Ten minutes before the start of a duel, the guest seats were packed full of people.

“How did you get such a nice seat?”

The high rank Hero, Oh Junhyuk, asked in surprise as he handed Seo Youngji a hotdog. The seats she grabbed were the frontmost seats, which had the best view of the arena.

“You tell me to focus on the mission, but you come here first thing in the morning to grab the best seat...”

“Shut up and sit down.”

Oh Junhyuk snickered and sat down next to her.

“...Wow, it sure brings back memories, doesn't it?”

“You must mean bad memories. I remember you saying you were beaten so hard that you couldn't even watch mixed martial arts afterwards.”

“...I've gotten better because it's always on TV. My son loves it too.”

Mixed Martial Arts was one of the most popular sports worldwide. It was especially popular among kids and teenagers.

The sport featured one-on-one or team battles between superhumans. Naturally, the fights were extremely flashy, with magic power blowing like storms and strikes cutting the earth in half. The might they displayed served as the perfect motivation for young children to pursue strength.

“Really? That’s nice to hear.”

“Nice to hear? Please, the world must be coming to an end. Djinns are more active than ever but nowadays, becoming a sports star is ranked third for cadets choice of career path. They’re saying they’d rather go into sports than joining a small to medium sized guild.”

“I don’t see what’s wrong with it.”

“You don’t see what’s wrong with it? Because of people like you, the Association is in this pitiful state...”

In the middle of his sentence, Oh Junhyuk felt an extremely battle thirsty gaze.

“...Who’s that guy?”

He stared at the seat on the opposite side of the arena.

A man was giving a menacing look and smiling with his teeth out. His fearless and unrestrained smile was clearly aimed at Oh Junhyuk and Seo Youngji.

“He’s been doing that for a while. He must be a fan.”

“A fan? He can see through our disguise?”

“I guess so. Ah, it’s starting.”

The host announced the start of the day’s duels, and Seo Youngji immediately took out her laptop.

“Typical Associate executive... Alright, who should I be looking out for?”

“Kim Suho and Chae Nayun. They’re on the top of their class. And I guess Yi Yeonghan and Kim Horak too.”

“Oh! Two of the top 6 are here? Who are they fighting?”

Kim Suho and Chae Nayun were well-known even in the Association. Even Oh Junhyuk, who wasn’t into watching duels, couldn’t help but be interested in their match.

“Kim Suho is fighting Yi Yeonghan. Chae Nayun is fighting Joseph. Kim Horak is fighting Kim Hajin.”

“Other than Kim Horak, it looks like most of them chose appropriate opponents. So, who’s Kim Hajin?”

“Kim Hajin, rank 934”

“...Rank 934? Isn’t that too low? Is there anything special about him?”

Seo Youngji pushed up her glasses.

“There are bad rumors about him. My cousin in Cube told me that he’s quite distasteful.”

“Ah, so Kim Horak’s punishing a delinquent. I see, I see. Who would have thought Kim Horak had a sense of justice? He’s sacrificing his own grade to do this too...”

*Tak.* Seo Youngji closed her laptop.

“It’s starting.”

“...Tsk.”

Oh Junhyuk crossed his arms and leaned against the back of the seat.  
The first duel was between the two aforementioned cadets.

—The first duel is between rank 18, Kim Horak, and rank 934, Kim Hajin! How will Kim Hajin overcome the difference in their rank? Why did Kim Horak nominate such a low ranked cadet?

The unfortunate host tried his best to hype up the match which had an obvious result. A mana barrier went up around the arena. It was to prevent the two cadets’ attacks from leaking out.

“That must be him.”

“Yep.”

Oh Junhyuk looked at the man walking out from the right passageway. He looked... average. So average in fact that he wouldn't even remember his face the next day.



Cadets were prohibited from using their personal weapons during exams. It was because scouts wanted to observe cadets based on their ability rather than the power of their weapons. As such, I couldn't use the Desert Eagle. I also wanted to hide Aether if possible.

In other words, I only had a training handgun and a protective armor provided by Cube to rely on. With just these two, the chances of me beating Kim Horak was slim to none. But that didn't mean I planned on losing one-sidedly, especially against that bastard Kim Horak.

"Let's go."

"...Yes."

Led by the staff, I walked up to the stage.

First, I took a good look around the arena. A translucent mana barrier surrounded the arena with thousands of spectators looking down. Both an indescribable pressure and excitement overwhelmed me.

While I was shaking from this strange sensation, Kim Horak walked up from the other side.

"Oh~ Kim Horak."

I smiled and waved my hand.

"How did you do on your written exams?"

I provoked him, but Kim Horak equipped his gauntlet without talking. I also held up my handgun. Our physical stats should differ by at least 4 points. It was the difference between an ordinary human and an adult elephant. He would snap my body in half the moment he closed in on me.

"Let's take it easy, alright?"

—Counting down! Three!

The host must have thought we were ready, as he started counting down.

*Crack— Crack—* I could hear Kim Horak cracking his knuckles from all the way here.

—Two!

He ignited his magic power, drawing it above the surface of his body. Layering magic power around one's body was a technique called qi reinforcement. Kim Horak was still inexperienced in it, but my bullets were unable to penetrate his incomplete qi reinforcement.

—One!

His center of gravity leaned forward and he dug his feet into the ground. Currently, we were 150 meters away. It was a distance Kim Horak could close in just three seconds.

But I didn't come unprepared.

—Start!

Kim Horak immediately charged forward like a savage beast. My sense of time slowed down. I had activated Bullet Time.

I released Stigma's magic power which flowed into my handgun and adhered to a single bullet. Fusing with Stigma's magic power, the bullet then carried a special property as I set beforehand.

'Anti-magic'.

When it clashed with reinforced magic power, it would shatter it instantly.

"Ehew."

I had to use half of Stigma's magic power, but it was worth it.

I pulled the trigger at the wild boar charging towards me. He didn't even try to dodge my bullet. In his mind, it wasn't even a question whether my bullets could threaten him in any way.

*Clang—*

But when my bullet clashed with his qi reinforcement, a strange explosion occurred. The explosion shattered Kim Horak's qi reinforcement as though it was a glass window.

Now that he was bare-skinned, he was nothing but a target with a huge surface area. I pulled the trigger freely.

Kim Horak jumped to the side, clearly aiming to circle around me. I followed his movement and shot my bullets accordingly, and Kim Horak backed off helplessly. The barrage of gunshots didn't stop. I continuously pulled the trigger, bullets endlessly seeking after Kim Horak.

He held on, jumping up, rolling to the side, and lifting the arena's tile to use as a shield.

"...Hm."

After stopping for a moment, I rubbed my chin and stared at Kim Horak. A blue aura was rising from his body once again. His qi reinforcement had regenerated.

But qi reinforcement wasn't a technique one could use repeatedly. Even now, it was easy to see that his qi reinforcement was thinner than the one he initially created. It was likely that this was his final one.

"Huu."

He licked his dried lips and charged at me once again. This time, his movements were quite complex. Like a crab, he zigzagged as he steadily charged forward. His movements weren't as predictable, as it had no set pattern. Furthermore, I couldn't just shoot at him, as he moved faster than my bullet.

But I came prepared in case this happened.

I took out a dagger from my belt and tethered the blade with Stigma's magic power. Then, I lightly threw it.

Master Sharpshooter also applied to throwing. The dagger flew forward like a boomerang, but this dagger didn't have any special power. It likely couldn't even scratch his qi reinforcement.

"Fuck!"

But Kim Horak didn't know that.

He was likely worried, thinking there was something special about the dagger. Just like how my first bullet carried an unexpected power, he had to have suspicions about this dagger.

In the end, Kim Horak hopped to the side to dodge the dagger. I pulled on the string of magic power tethered to the dagger, changing its trajectory. The dagger turned in a ninety-degree angle and chased after Kim Horak. Judging by his widened eyes, he must be thinking this.

‘There’s definitely something about this dagger.’

However, Kim Horak didn’t try to dodge the dagger. A dagger wasn’t as fast or as small as a bullet. As such, Kim Horak tried to grab the dagger. And he succeeded. It was an incredible display of hand-eye coordination.

But in order to catch something, one had to stop moving.

A bullet I fired penetrated his qi reinforcement.

“Uk!”

The bullet cleanly shattered his qi reinforcement. While Kim Horak staggered, I also retrieved the dagger.

Now, Kim Horak was completely open. The question was what he would do next...

“...Damn it!”

As expected, he rushed in recklessly. He didn’t back off or move to the side. He simply charged forward while taking all my bullets.

Right arm, left arm, right thigh, left calf...

He held on even after being shot in multiple places.

“Huaaaap—!”

After finally closing in on me, he swung his fist. I immediately tumbled back to dodge his attack, and Kim Horak chased after me.

Eventually, I arrived at a dead end with the wall behind me. But before Kim Horak could feel any joy, I climbed up the wall.

With Parkour’s power, I could climb anything that was considered a wall. My hands and feet adhered to the wall like magnets, and I continued to fire from a distance Kim Horak could never reach.

“Hey! You fuck, this is cheating!”

Taking this exact situation into account, I had focused my bullets on his legs. Kim Horak didn't have the strength to jump this high.

Now, it was a completely one-sided attack.

Demoted to a mere target, Kim Horak constantly moved around hoping to dodge my bullets. However, even a single hit was enough to strike him with pain. Thigh, shoulder, foot... Injuries continued to pile up, and Kim Horak continued to slow down as a result. Eventually, he stopped completely.

I aimed for his stomach for a final attack. Every cadet had a device around their stomach that would automatically end the duel if one side received a critical injury.

*Click—*

“...?”

But no bullet went out. I rummaged through my pockets. I had no bullets.

“Ah.”

I had brought 240 bullets, but it seemed I had used them all.

With no other choice, I jumped down.

As I completely used up Stigma's magic power, I only had my dagger to work with.

All I had to do was to approach Kim Horak and stab his stomach... But it didn't look like Kim Horak would surrender.

“Huu... Huu...”

He was glaring at me with ferocious killing intent. If I got close, he would undoubtedly rip me to shreds. To make things worse, one of his arms was unhurt.

I looked around.

I remembered the crowd being excited at first, but now the arena was eerily quiet. It was as though I was in a library.

“Mm...”

This was a good enough payback.

Kim Horak was unable to hit me single time, but I had pummeled him continuously.

Not to mention, my score would go up even if I lost this duel.

I sneered at Kim Horak and raised my hands.

Then, I spoke quietly.

“I surrender.”

*Hweee—*

The referee immediately blew his whistle.

The mana barrier surrounding the arena disappeared.

I walked away, whistling leisurely.

# Chapter 40

## Intruders (4)

The duel was over. About eight minutes had passed.

It wasn't particularly fast or slow.

The result of the duel was as expected, but because the process was beyond anyone's imagination, the audience was dead silent.

"How scary. Those were real bullets, right?"

In this silence, Oh Junhyuk looked down at Kim Hajin, who was walking to his waiting room.

"Yep."

Seo Youngji nodded.

"But he doesn't look hurt at all, even though he looks like a beehive."

This time, he spoke while pointing at Kim Horak. Just like he said, Kim Horak's body was full of bullets. Though the vital points like the neck and heart were covered in protective armor, he didn't bleed much and didn't look to be in pain either.

"For martial art types, their bodies are their weapons. Recovery is their specialty."

"So, what did you think?"

"Kim Hajin did well and Kim Horak was too reckless. Kim Horak tried to show too much and suffered a loss. If he took it slow... Well, I guess the result would have been the same."

In truth, Kim Horak didn't need to use qi reinforcement. He could have simply imbued his gauntlet with magic power and slowly overwhelmed Kim Hajin.

"...I guess it was Kim Hajin's tactical victory. He still lost though."

Oh Junhyuk scratched the back of his neck.  
He wasn't sure how to put it, because Kim Hajin surrendered a won fight.

"It does leave a bad aftertaste."

Seo Youngji murmured with a frown. A picture of Kim Hajin was displayed on her laptop screen. She was writing a report.

"What, that he lost on purpose?"

"No, Kim Hajin put up a good fight, but I can understand his loss."

"...Really?"

Oh Junhyuk looked at Kim Horak, who was still standing in the arena. He was being treated with an expression that could be both indignation and relief. No, it couldn't be called treatment. Kim Horak simply drank a high-rank potion, and the bullets popped out of his muscles when he flexed.

"At first... no, from the start until the end, Kim Hajin overwhelmed him. His initial reaction speed and dynamic vision honestly surprised me. His firing speed was unbelievable too."

"I agree. His firing speed was something else."

"But after a certain point, he slowed down as much as Kim Horak slowed down, even though he only attacked without being hit. I think Kim Hajin can't maintain that movement for long."

*Tak tak tak.* Seo Youngji spoke as she continuously tapped on the laptop's keyboard like a shorthand typist.

"And before Kim Hajin surrendered, he tried to finish off Kim Horak. I saw him pull the trigger but nothing came out. Kim Hajin's face stiffened at that point, and he rummaged through his pockets without taking anything out."

"So he used up his bullets."

“Yep. But he didn’t try to fight Kim Horak, even though Kim Horak only had his left hand to work with. Why?”

“Because he wasn’t confident in winning?”

Seo Youngji lightly nodded.

“Right. He used up his bullets but he hadn’t won. Kim Horak only had a single arm left, but he could still fight. At that point, it was Kim Hajin’s loss.”

Oh Junhyuk took a deep breath. Then, he tilted his head.

“Oh right, how did he break Kim Horak’s qi reinforcement? He only used a single bullet to do it too. Twice, at that.”

“Right, that’s the problem. That’s why I said it left a bad aftertaste.”

Seo Youngji took off her glasses. As it looked like she was getting ready to explain things in depth, Oh Junhyuk swallowed his saliva.

“Most people, including you, probably missed it, but I saw the movement of magic power. It was stuck to his bullet.”

“...Is that possible? He’s only a cadet too!”

Mana was an extremely difficult power to control. Making it thin enough to coat a bullet and compressing it dense enough to destroy a qi reinforcement, that was something even Oh Junhyuk wasn’t confident in doing.

“I’m looking it up on the market to see if it’s a trick that uses an item or if it’s related to his Gift. If he used an item, it’s cheating. But if it’s his Gift... I don’t know what Gift it is, but it might be the first of its kind.”

Seeing Seo Youngji explaining seriously, Oh Junhyuk sighed.

“Huu... Anyways, I don’t like it. I thought Kim Horak was carrying out justice, but he was crushed.”

Kim Horak won, but it was a Pyrrhic victory.

In a one-on-one fight, warriors directly countered sharpshooters. Kim Horak should have been able to easily overwhelm Kim Hajin, but in reality, he was toyed by him. Not only would this incident become a trauma for him, guild scouts' evaluation of him could also plummet. On the other hand, this cadet named Kim Hajin made his name known to the entire crowd. That, of course, included the many guild associates present.

—Yes, Kim Hajin. Never heard of him? Me neither, but he just fought with Kim Horak and he...

—He uses a gun. Yes, his limit should be clear, but he broke a qi reinforcement. Yes, it was an incomplete qi reinforcement, but just the fact that he broke it...

—I don't know how he destroyed a qi reinforcement either. That's why I'm calling you...

Guild associates were already making calls.

"Justice doesn't always win. Plus, we don't really know which side is on the side of justice."

"...Yeah, yeah. Just keep writing your report. New talent discovered. That's a nice title."

At that moment, the host announced the next battle.  
Seo Youngji glanced at the watch on her wrist.

"Kim Hajin, I'll have to remember him. Let's leave after we see Kim Suho's match. It's coming up in three fights."

"Yeah, I planned on doing the same... What is he complaining about?"

Oh Junhyuk gestured at the arena. The man, who was grinning at them just a moment ago, was now staring at the right passageway with killing intent. It was where Kim Hajin was.

Seo Youngji replied uninterested.

"...He must not have liked how the duel turned out. Everyone has their own taste."



After the first duel, I used two of my own nominations. I picked two male cadets around the 300~400 rank. The duels started around 5 and ended around 8.

The fights were... strange comebacks.

Of course, I wasn't at my best. Stigma's magic power was slow to recover because I depleted it during my fight with Kim Horak, and I also couldn't use Bullet Time, which was limited to once a day.

In addition, 'swordsmen' were just hard for me to deal with.

My first opponent, Kim Horak, had a bigger firing surface area because he used a gauntlet (though it was more like a fingerless glove).

And even with Kim Horak, if he didn't try to cover his body with qi reinforcement, saved his magic power by covering only parts of his body, and slowly choked me out without trying to end the fight immediately...

I would have been completely helpless.

His carelessness was his downfall. He wanted to show the scouts too much. He also might have been aiming for the 'quickest victory' record.

But unlike Kim Horak, the other two opponents slowly closed in on me. They blocked my bullets with their long-reach swords and dragged the fight out without charging towards me. It was a real hassle since I couldn't approach them.

But in the end, I managed to claim victory in both duels. It was all thanks to luck.

The first opponent lost to a lucky ricochet.

The bullet I accidentally fired on the ground bounced off and struck his armpit. The opponent dropped his sword from the unexpected pain and instantly surrendered.

The second opponent lost to his own mistake.

This battle was a drawn-out battle lasting 30 minutes. During this time, the opponent sweated too much from continuously blocking my bullets, and the sweat pooled up to a puddle. Right before the referee announced a draw, he charged towards me while I was reloading my gun. Then, he slipped on his own sweat.

Hoiik—!

I still remembered his scream.

“God, that guy was just too funny.”

I giggled and lied down on my bed.

The final result was 2 wins 1 loss.

As sharpshooters gained bonus points for fighting close ranged warriors, I no longer had to worry about being held back.

“Auuu~”

I stretched and looked out the window.

It was deep into the night. The darkness concealed the world like a thick curtain, and the moon, which was the only source of light, was faint and pale. The eerie outside scenery brought an unfounded anxiety.

“...I hope everything will be okay.”

I suddenly thought of the Chameleon Troupe. I saw them at the arena. Not only was the boss of the Chameleon Troupe here, ‘that guy’ was also here as I expected.

The monster with the instincts of a savage beast, completely obsessed with the pursuit of strength.

If things went according to the original story, he should have felt Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak’s potential and returned peacefully after promising to fight them in the future.

But that wasn’t the case now.

Cube was currently filled with people he wanted to fight ‘immediately’.

“Well, it’s not like I can do anything about it.”

All he needed to do was breath heavily for my head to explode.

“Hm...”

My wandering gaze landed on the corner of my bed.

The gift Park Soohyuk gave me was there. He sent a rather expensive gift as gratitude for his first investor.

“A drone...”

It was a fist-sized drone with a camera.



A chilling wind brushed against leaves, creating a bleak melody.

In one of Cube's artificial forests, a man was sitting on a tree trunk. He was in the middle of pitch-black darkness, but his bulky body could be seen easily. The formal suit he was wearing made him especially eye-catching.

"He wasn't much by my standard."

The man murmured in a low voice.

—By your standard?

"Yep, he's a mouse by my standard. I don't like him, a tiny guy only shooting from a faraway distance."

—You mean you don't like his battle style... Whew, you were supposed to find out why Boss is interested in him.

"How should I know?"

The man's voice turned hostile.

—What are you getting mad for?

"You would understand if you saw that little rat's fight. Rats like him... I need to pop off their heads..."

The man's eyes were already bloodshot.

The duels he saw between rookies made his blood boil. He wanted to jump in and show them what a real fight was. Though he barely held in this urge, his instincts were constantly contending with his reason.

—What about Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak?

"Mm... I think they were okay... Maybe not..."

—Make up your mind.

“They were fine. Happy? I want to wait until they grow up to fight.”

At that moment...

“Who are you?”

A voice rang out from behind him. The man turned around. It was a police officer who was deployed for the combat exams. The man didn't notice him because he was a weakling who hasn't even learned magic power.

—Don't forget why Boss brought you.

At these words, the man nodded.

“Yeah... I know. I'm a master when it comes to recognizing the strong.”

—Right, that's the only reason.

“Excuse me, what are you doing here? The forest is off-limits to outsiders. Please come out.”

The police officer approached the man with a flashlight. The man stared at him with scorn. The killing intent in his eyes radiated a clear warning. But the officer couldn't see the man's expression in the dark, walking closer towards him.

“Oh right, how did you get in here in the first place? Sir? Come out!”

The man laughed.

“...Hey.”

—What.

“I'll go after I crack open a nut.”

“Sir, stop talking to yourself and come out!”

Immediately afterward, the man's fist cut through the air. To be exact, he punched the

air, causing a shockwave that ravaged the officer. Crushed by the pressure, the officer's body no longer resembled a human body.

—Did you do it?

“Yep.”

—... Boss is going to kill you.

“Keep it a secret.”

—I will until she finds out. For now, go do your job.

Thanks to the weakling, the man felt like his mind cleared up slightly. He stood up and began to walk. The dorms were only a few minutes away...

After a while, his keen hearing picked up on faint voices.

—Hey, what is this?

—Ueek. Fuck, this is a corpse! Contact the headquarters!

He turned around. Far off in the distance, he could see two officers vomiting. A grin emerged on his face.

*Wiing— Wiing—*

“Mm?”

Hearing the sound of a mosquito buzzing, he turned back to his front.

—What?

“...Nothing, just a mosquito.”

—How lame. Hurry up before I tell Boss that you killed someone.

“Yeah, yeah, I'm going.”

The man quickened his pace.

A tiny drone hovering above him silently watched the man leave before disappearing.

# Chapter 41

## Sudden Encounter (1)

—*Tak.*

I closed my laptop.

“...Well that's terrifying.”

Cheok Jungyeong killed someone without hesitation, purely for his own enjoyment.

This was the world I created.

On the surface, the society seemed functional with science and magic vastly improving quality of life, but on the inside, demi-humans who didn't care for the law or morals lurked within.

Demi-humans didn't just refer to Djinnns.

Humans who rejected the existence of Heroes, but had supernatural powers just like them. They were officially known as ‘wanted criminals’, but the public called them ‘Villains’.

“What killed him?”

The drone was unable to capture exactly what happened.

Only after slowing it down ten times was I able to catch a glimpse. Cheok Jungyeong threw out a jab, and a violent pressure erupted, instantly killing the police officer.

“He killed someone without even making contact... Also, this thing...”

I stared at the drone on my bed. It was more useful than I expected. If I bought a more expensive drone and added a bunch of settings to it, I might be able to put it to good use.

*Wiing—*

At that moment, my smartwatch suddenly rang.

[Yo, can I nominate you?]

It was Chae Nayun. She seemed to be talking about tomorrow's duels.

[Why?]

[What do you mean why? You already provoked me several times.]

I still had one nomination left. Cadets had to duel at least three times and could duel at most six times. In other words, I didn't need to fight anyone else unless someone nominated me.

[No, I'm exhausted from today.]

There was no chance of me winning in a one-on-one fight against Chae Nayun. Not only were arrows stronger than bullets, I also didn't have the physical ability to dodge her rapid fire shots.

[You can think about that tomorrow morning. Also, how did you destroy qi reinforcement with a bullet? It didn't look like you used your personal weapon. That's all people are talking about. That was your Gift, right?]

So this was her real goal.

I ignored her message. Thinking about it now, I doubt she had any nominations left. Even if she did, she probably wouldn't use it to maintain her peak condition. After all, she was scheduled to duel Rachel tomorrow.

"Whoa, it's already 12?"

I took off my smartwatch and looked at the time. It was already midnight. When I turned off the light and lied down on the bed, I received another message.

[You put on quite a show.]

This time, it was Yoo Yeonha.  
I gave a short reply.

[I didn't want to get hit.]

[Because you destroyed a qi reinforcement with your bullet, many guilds are showing interest in you.]

[I know.]

I had gained quite a bit of SP, 185 since noon. Once I collected a bit more, I would be able to create a new Art or Physique.

[They're already calling your Gift 'superpower bullet' or 'bullet reinforcement'... Speaking of which, what do you think about guilds?]

[Those names suck.]

[No, I mean, what do you think about Essence of the Strait?]

"Hmm."

Yoo Yeonha had a tendency to judge people based on their usefulness. This would only get worse as she got older, and she would eventually become someone who didn't care about someone's background as long as they were useful.

[Contacting cadets beforehand is illegal. That's a 500 million won penalty.]

I sent a thoughtless message, trying to end the conversation.

[First, I'm still a cadet. Cadets can try to recruit other cadets without being in trouble with the law. Second, I can afford to pay that much.]

She returned a very serious reply.

I felt a bit awkward.

[That's not your money, it's your parents'.]

[Oh right, your acting was pretty superb on your second and third match.]

"...This girl."

Why was she talking like I was hiding my power? If anything, Kim Suho was the one

hiding his power.

[Were you watching?]

[I had time. But to be honest, I think your growth speed is too quick. You were rank 934 during the initial exams, but if you corner a rank 18 after switching to a sharpshooter role, it's too eye-catching no matter how much aptitude you have for it...]

“What is she on about now?”

I also ignored Yoo Yeonha's message. In truth, my eyelids were closing. I fought three times today, so it wasn't surprising.

“...Oh right.”

I suddenly remembered something else to do.

I turned on my smartwatch and sent Park Soohyuk a message.

[Hyung, thanks for the drone. I'll take good care of it.]



Chameleon Troupe's hiding place. In a pitch-black abandoned factory without a single stream of light, Chameleon Troupe's boss was sitting cross-legged on the ground. A series of battles from earlier in the day was being played in her head.

Kim Suho's swordsmanship was just like what she had heard. His sword strikes were light like a feather, but carried a heavy destructive power and connected fluidly with his next move. Each of his movements was natural like flowing water. His swordsmanship was so well polished and sharpened that it seemed more suitable to call it a sword art than swordsmanship

Next was Shin Jonghak. His spearmanship was truly domineering and vicious. He stabbed directly at his opponent's heart and brutalized anyone who was constantly on the defensive. Using the spear's long reach, he constantly cut, smacked, and stabbed his opponent. Rather than a duel, it was more like a one-sided beating.

—Next is the man you were talking about, Boss. The one who called you hot.

She nodded silently. The video being reflected in her eyes changed. This time, it was a battle between a gun and a fist. A sharpshooter and a warrior. It was clear who should be the winner.

However...

She abruptly opened her eyes. She only watched the video for a short time, but during this time, the sharpshooter's bullet had destroyed the warrior's magic power. She examined the nature of the magic power around the bullet. If her eyes weren't seeing things, it could only be one thing. The power of 'anti-magic'. It was the power she was looking for, the silver bullet that could kill 'that man'.

—Interesting, isn't it? I was surprised too when I first saw it.

“Kim Hajin. Write his name down on the notebook.”

She spoke without hesitation.

—... Really?

“Yes.”

—But Jungyeong said he didn't like him.

“Gyeong hates sharpshooters.”

Cheok Jungyeong was a warrior in and out. Staring at each other's eyes and trying to strike down death upon the enemy with deadly killing intent; he believed that was what a battle was.

Even in the Chameleon Troupe, there were members he didn't like just because they fought from a long range.

—I guess so. He did say Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak were okay.

“Then put their names down too.”

—Then we'll only have 5 slots left. Is that okay?

People who had their names written down on the 'notebook' could have their live locations tracked. In a way, the notebook was like a GPS. In addition, the owner of the

notebook could teleport to the location of a written target.

—Who do we prioritize?

In exchange for its wide-ranged power, the condition, [target cannot know that his name is on the notebook], had to be met. But as long as the target wasn't told about the notebook, there was no reason he should notice.

“Mm.”

The boss closed her eyes. She remembered what happened a long time ago. The death of the previous leader of Chameleon Troupe 11 years ago, “that” man's betrayal, and the day she cried for the first time. In front of a grave, she felt the new burden on her shoulders as the Chameleon Troupe changed its colors once more.

“For now...”

The Chameleon Troupe survived even with the death of its leader. A new leader was chosen, and the group managed to take a huge step forward using resentment and vengeance as nourishment.

But now, they couldn't find where the traitor was hiding. No, even if they knew, they couldn't do anything about it.

So, she kept searching this entire time.

The power of anti-magic, which could destroy the Magic Power Physique...

“Put Kim Hajin on top priority.”



Tuesday. I remained in my room until noon. Although duels continued until today, no one had nominated me.

“I should have just stayed in the dorm.”

Currently, it was 1 P.M., and I was outside. To be honest, I was bored. I also wanted to watch Chae Nayun (rank 4) duel Rachel (rank 3), and Kim Suho (rank 1) duel Yohei (rank 8).

“The seats are full.”

However, the arena was completely packed full of people. The first arena had 5000 seats, but there wasn't an empty seat no matter how hard I looked.

‘Should I go back? Or should I just stand and watch?’

When I was having such thoughts at the back of the arena, two people, who seemed to be a couple, suddenly stood up and left.

“K-Kuhum.”

I sat down on the seat, feeling like I was walking on eggshells as I hoped they wouldn't come back.

—Thank you for waiting!

Thankfully, the couple didn't come back, and the host announced the start of the duel along with the excited cheering of the crowd.

*Sssss.*

Someone sat down next to me. I glanced to the side with a bag of popcorn in my hand, then looked back ahead.

“...?”

Suddenly, the image of the person flashed in my head. She... looked familiar. I swallowed the popcorn in my mouth and glanced sideways once again.

At the same time, my heart stopped beating and my breathing froze.

“She” was sitting next to me.

The boss of the Chameleon Troupe. As someone who lived her life without a name, she was only known by her title, Yasha.

I stuffed my shaking hands into the popcorn and fixed my eyes on the dueling arena. My heart, which temporarily stopped, finally began to thump crazily.

Why was she here? Did I do something wrong? Or was it a coincidence?

Right, it had to be a coincidence. She was here to watch Kim Suho and just happened

to sit next to me...

In the middle of my panicked thinking...

“Huak!”

Someone who was walking down the stairs suddenly tripped. This nameless person was holding onto a large-sized soda. The soda promptly spun in the air before landing on someone’s head like a hat. For the record, the soda was filled to the brim.

I didn’t know whether luck played a part in it, but not a single drop landed on me. However...

I turned to the side, feeling a tinge of dizziness.

Under the soda cup standing like a party hat, Boss' black pupils were trembling uncontrollably.

# Chapter 42

## Sudden Encounter (2)

“Oh no, I’m so sorry.”

The nameless person apologized in shock. The Chameleon Troupe’s boss seemed just as shocked as she remained completely still. First, I took the soda cup off of her head. The ice cubes sitting on her head immediately drizzled down, and Boss shut her eyes close.

“Please wait just one minute. I’ll go get a towel...”

But at that moment, the nameless person suddenly froze. His eyes turned lifeless and he began to walk out in a strange zombie-like manner.

I glanced at Boss’ neck on which a faint light was glimmering. It seemed what just happened was her necklace’s ability. That necklace... I felt like I knew it, but I couldn’t quite remember it. I wasn’t too keen on item settings.

“Haa.”

She suddenly let out a deep sigh. Then, she turned towards me.

I scratched my neck.

I had a tiny pack of tissues in my pocket, but it was nowhere near enough to take care of the mess on her head and clothes.

“...”

But because her eyes were fixed on me, I took out the tissues.

“Um, you can use this...”

She looked back and forth between me and the pack of tissues. She then grabbed the tissues and wiped her face, legs, and arms.

“Thank you.”

Then, she gave a light bow and thanked me. I fell into a daze momentarily. What just happened?

At that moment, the host's loud voice resounded.

—We are now starting!

The crowd cheered loudly. A countless number of reporters aimed their cameras at the arena. Although they weren't allowed to film the duels, they were allowed to take pictures. The reporters from England were especially excited.

—Duel between rank 3 Rachel and rank 4 Chae Nayun!

A battle between a rapier and a bow.

This was something that happened in the original story. In other words, I already knew who would win - Rachel.

I stared at Rachel and Chae Nayun standing on the arena. Though they were far away, I could see them as though they were only a couple feet away. Chae Nayun's mouth moved. I could hear what she was saying.

—Princess, our rank will be changing today.

Rachel didn't react to Chae Nayun's provocation.

—Beginning countdown! Three! Two!

Chae Nayun aimed her bow at Rachel, and Rachel held up her rapier.

Facing each other, neither side had even the tiniest imbalance in their postures. Waiting for the start signal, they concealed their openings while searching for their opponent's openings.

—Start!

Chae Nayun fired her arrow immediately. Her magic arrow flew out at lightning speed. However, Rachel skirted past the arrow by a hair's breadth with refined, efficient movements.

Chae Nayun continued with a barrage of arrows. When the arrows raining down from

the sky hit the ground, they split into several offshoots and took on unpredictable paths. It seemed this was the plan Chae Nayun made for this fight. Since Rachel would just dodge her arrows if she shot at her directly, Chae Nayun was trying to box her in.

However, Rachel dodged the terrifying barrage of arrows elegantly. Not only that, but she didn't hesitate to stab with her rapier when given the chance. The magic power from her attacks shot towards Chae Nayun like beams of light. Even so, Chae Nayun didn't dodge them. Instead, she emitted magic power in the form of a shield to block them.

Immediately, the crowd erupted into cheers and applause. Chae Nayun's magic power control had already surpassed the level of a cadet.

However, the outcome of this fierce battle was predetermined. Chae Nayun couldn't win against Rachel.

Rachel was a swordsman specialized in receiving long ranged attacks. Her slender and flexible body could dodge arrows with the slightest movement, and her attacks of delicate magic power continuously disrupted an archer's posture. Chae Nayun created a shield to prevent her posture from becoming unstable, but this method was too costly in magic power.

The moment Chae Nayun's magic power ran out, it would be Rachel's victory.

"I saw your duel against Kim Horak."

At that moment, a voice suddenly rang out from next to me.

Startled, I jolted slightly.

Because I was too focused on Chae Nayun and Rachel's duel, I had forgotten who was sitting next to me. It was incredibly foolish, considering she was currently far more important than Rachel or Chae Nayun.

"Um, thank you."

I replied as calmly as possible.

She asked while staring at me.

"Was that your Gift?"

“...I’m sorry, but that’s not something that I can reveal so easily.”

“ ... ”

She took out a business card from her pocket.

“This is who I am.”

She gave me the business card.

[Li Xiaopeng]

[Desolate Moon’s grade 3 Hero]

[Contact address: 0103-3243-9203-93]

This was likely one of her many fake identities. Even so, my heart trembled as very few people had way of contacting her. In order to not make it obvious, I simply smiled and muttered.

“It’s illegal to scout cadets in advance.”

“ ... ”

She tried to put away her business card.

“Ah, but...”

I grabbed her wrist. As I thought, she didn’t know about playing hard to get.

“I’ll hold onto yours.”

“ ... ”

She nodded and gave me her business card.

“I’ll leave now. Contact us whenever you want.”

With that, she got up. As she walked out, I stared at her back in a daze.

“...What did she come here for?”

I couldn't understand. No matter how much I thought about it, there shouldn't have been any reason for her to visit me at this point.



All duels ended by 5 P.M.

Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, Rachel, and a cadet named Joo Youngho were the only ones to win all their duels. Because cadets could fight up to three times a day, many unexpected outcomes had occurred due to one side being tired.

—Wow, that was amazing. Did you see Kim Suho? How stylish can he get?

—Chae Nayun lost to Rachel... I'm a bit bitter. This is the first time I've seen Korea's rising star losing to a foreigner.

By the time I left the arena, the sky had already turned dark. Many spectators brushed past me as they reflected on today's battles.

Before I returned to the dorm, I first went into an alleyway in the back of the arena. After sitting down in a random spot, I took out the drone I placed in my cross bag. This drone was quite different than the original, as I added several settings like battery life boost, stealth mode, and target lock-on. These changes would last for four days, which was when the Chameleon Troupe would leave. Consequently, the modification was relatively cheap in SP.

"Fly."

I threw the drone into the air. The drone flew into the forest, and I got up to head back to the dorm.

—... kuk, huk... kuk

"...Huh?"

But a sudden crying sound made me stop. It sounded a bit like an animal crying, but it was also pitiful enough to make me turn to its direction. My eyes broke through several walls in the path, and in a nearby forest close to the back of the arena, I saw someone hiding between trees and crying.

It was Chae Nayun. Her body was shaking and her face was buried between her knees.

“Ah.”

This event, I remembered it.

It was the when Chae Nayun would completely fall for Kim Suho. Soon, he would come to console Chae Nayun on her defeat, and with everything else that should have happened between them, Chae Nayun would come to see Kim Suho as not just a friend. Although things had changed slightly from the original story, it seemed the big picture remained the same.

I turned back without much thought.

“...Tsk.”

But I hesitated to leave.

Kim Suho would console Chae Nayun, but his kindness would only comfort her.

“You can do better next time,” “Work hard with me,” “I will help you get stronger”...Such words wouldn’t really help Chae Nayun.

In life, it was sometimes better to give up rather than continuing to work hard. But there was no such thing as giving up in Kim Suho’s dictionary. He never gave up on anything and never suggested others to give up.

Because of Kim Suho, Chae Nayun wouldn’t give up on using a bow for a long time.

“...Huu.”

In the end, I turned on my smartwatch.

The message Chae Nayun sent me last night was there.

[Hey, don’t ignore me. If you don’t reply, I’ll nominate you for real.]

I gave her an 18-hour late reply.

[What are you doing?]

Through the walls, I could see Chae Nayun’s smartwatch ring. But because she was crying, she didn’t check her smartwatch. I sent her another message.

[I saw your duel today.]

Chae Nayun then glanced at her smartwatch.

—... What does this bastard want now?

It seemed she was planning on ignoring my messages. I didn't have any other choice. I sent her a message she couldn't ignore.

[See, I told you. You're more suited to a sword than a bow. It's not too late to change your weapon. I did too.]

—This son of a...

It was incredibly effective. Fuming, Chae Nayun tapped on her smartwatch.

[Screw off before I kill you.]

The reply I sent back immediately was enough to drive her over the edge.

[Come on, you defeated a Djinn with a sword, so why do you insist on using a bow? I just can't understand. It's almost... pitiful. If you fought Rachel like how you fought that Djinn, do you think you would have lost?]

[What? You wanna die?]

[Think a little. You beat her when you were in Agent Military Academy, so why do you think you're losing now? It's because you don't have the aptitude for bows.]

[What you piece of shit where are you do I look like a pushover you bastard don't be so arrogant just because you beat Kim Horak]

Her emotional message was hardly readable because of punctuation errors. I didn't even read it all. I didn't reply to her either. I wanted to mess with her a bit more because her reaction was funny, but unfortunately, it was time.

—Huh? Chae Nayun?

Kim Suho peeked his head behind the tree, where Chae Nayun was hiding.

—... Eh?

—What are you doing here?

—W... What!

Chae Nayun quickly wiped off her tears. She then tried to run, but Kim Suho caught her.

—Let me go!

Chae Nayun tried to shake him off, but Kim Suho wasn't the type of person who would leave a crying girl be. He had a typical main character personality. Consoling a crying girl was almost in his instincts.

“...It's time to go.”

I didn't stay behind to watch what would happen between them.

Making sure that Chae Nayun didn't forget about her real Gift, that was the extent of my role.



Wednesday.

The next combat exam began. As cadets had to fight monsters in this exam, ordinary people were prohibited from spectating. Furthermore, because magicians' summoned monsters were of varying types and power, the exam was graded on an absolute scale rather than a relative scale.

“Be especially careful in today's exam. If you refuse to give up, you might really end up dying.”

Kim Soohyuk gave a solemn warning. Just like he said, summoned monsters were dangerous. Even though they were summoned by magicians, they were unable to comprehend complex orders.

“Annihilate enemies and protect allies,” that was the extent of the order they could understand. An order like “test that cadet's skill” was out of the question.

Not to mention, summoned monsters didn't just disappear into thin air when magicians reverse summoned them, so cadets had to be on their toes even after surrendering.

“If you think your life is in danger, give up immediately. You can yell ‘I surrender’ or simply tap on the ground twice.”

“...”

I stood still and calmly listened to Kim Soohyuk’s explanation. Chae Nayun was glaring at me from the side, but I ignored her.

“Magicians in charge of the exam will give the rest of the explanation. Give them a warm welcome.”

The door opened and robed magicians walked in.

Summoner magicians weren't given any special treatment. The Magician’s Tower had a strict hierarchy among magicians depending on their specialty, and summoner magicians were nothing more and nothing less than average. And because summoner magicians often worked outside of the Magician’s Tower, they didn’t have twisted personalities like most magicians.

“Nice to meet you all. I am the Chief Magician, Jin Joohwa.”

The leader of the magicians bowed to the cadets.

“Today, you will fight monsters we will summon. But be careful, summoned monsters are no different from real monsters. Even if we reverse summon them, they won’t disappear immediately like in games. So if things look dangerous, surrender immediately.”

The cadets nodded at the magician’s kind explanation.

“Good. Then we will tell you how the exam will proceed.”

Jin Joohwa smiled brightly.

“Four cadets will go in at a time, and each cadet will be given 15 minutes. You will not be graded based on victory or loss, and your fighting role will obviously be taken into account.”

Jin Joohwa stuck up his index finger.

“First is how long you last. Next is how calm you responded. In other words, you don’t have to try to kill the summoned monster.”

*Wiing—*

A smartwatch’s faint vibration cut him off mid-sentence.  
The magician looked around the room.

“Please turn off all smartwatches.”

He spoke nonchalantly.  
We also nonchalantly turned off our smartwatches.

# Chapter 43

## Sudden Encounter (3)

Chief Magician Jin Joohwa's explanation dragged on for a long time. How the exam will be carried out, how groups will be formed, the types of monsters that will be summoned... I understood that he was a cautious person, but I just wished he would get on with the exam already.

"Now, we will begin the exam. Group 1 members should stand up."

Finally, he spoke the words I was waiting for.

Group 1 was Hazuki, Kim Junho, Yoo Jungjin, and Spenner. Hazuki was the only one I knew.

"I'll do my best!"

Hazuki got up as she received encouraging words from her friends. The four group members followed a staff to the examination ground.

"Everyone else, please stand to the side."

The 96 remaining cadets of Veritas class stood against the wall while wondering why. Suddenly, Jin Joohwa clapped, and ten circular tables with ten chairs each rose up from the floor.

"Take a seat, everyone. You will be writing a report for this exam as well."

Immediately, cadets broke out into groans.

"Sit wherever you want."

Since I already knew this would happen, I wasn't fazed by it in the slightest. I took a seat randomly, while other cadets sat close to their friends.

“...?”

Just when I was thoughtlessly waiting for Jin Jooхва’s next word, a sweet fragrance tickled my nose. It was a unique and aromatic smell of rose. I glanced sideways.

It was Rachel. She was staring at her fingernails. It seemed one of her nails was too sharp as she took a nail clipper to one of her fingers. At that moment, her eyes met mine.

Rachel hastily put away the nail clipper into her pocket.

“Battle analysis will be part of this exam.”

Jin Jooхва’s explanation began once again.

“It’s simple. You will carefully analyze cadets who are battling monsters and write a report.”

In an instant, a monitor shot up from the tables. There was one for each seat, a total of a hundred.

The monitor’s screen was split into four, and each screen showed a cadet from the group taking the exam.

“How they were able to defeat their monster, or why they lost; even if they won, in what areas they were lacking; if they lost, what methods they could have used to get a better result. This is what we are looking for in your reports.”

*Chak, chak.*

Jin Jooхва clapped, and the other magicians began to hand out report papers.

“You have to write three reports in total, but only the best report will be reflected on your grade. Of course, that doesn’t mean you can only write one report. If you do, you will be penalized.”

I picked up the paper in front of me. Looking at the peer assessment paper, I suddenly remembered my college days. I had to write my name on the “evaluating cadet” line and the name of the cadet I’m evaluating on “evaluatee cadet.”

[Check the ‘anonymous’ checkbox if you wish to remain anonymous.]

Thankfully, we had the option of being anonymous.

“For the record, this report is only 5% of your grade. But, the reports you write will be given to the cadets you evaluate.”

At these words, cadets began to exchange meaningful looks.

“Giving your peers healthy advice and recommendations, and encouraging honest self-development, I think these are duties of a Hero. So if you abuse the ability to be anonymous to be malicious, you will be penalized accordingly.”

The chief magician’s mouth curled up to a smile.

“It seems we are ready. Group 1’s exam will now begin.”

I stared at the monitor fixedly. I then clicked on the box Hazuki was in. The other three boxes disappeared, and only Hazuki’s filled the screen.

Hazuki was facing a ghoul, a low-intermediate rank grade 1 monster. It should be a difficult fight for Hazuki.

—*Clang, clang*

The ghoul’s claws clashed with Hazuki’s axe.

Hazuki responded to its attacks rather calmly, but a ghoul’s claws were harder than average high grade weapons. After exchanging a few blows, Hazuki must have concluded that she was at a disadvantage in close ranged combat as she began to circle around the room. Using the ghoul’s slow speed to her advantage, she began to look for an opening in the ghoul’s defense.

But 15 minutes went by with no change.

The ghoul disappeared after being reverse summoned.

“Draw, Hazuki and Yoo Jungjin. Victory, Spenner. Defeat, Kim Junho. Next is group 2. Chae Nayun, Hojun, Jutryn, Carlos.”

Next up was Chae Nayun’s group.

Chae Nayun walked up in an imposing manner. The weight of her bow seemed lighter than usual. Just what could Kim Suho have said to her to make her feel so energetic? I looked at Chae Nayun through the monitor.

“A Thousand-Mile Horse?”

Chae Nayun's opponent was the Thousand-Mile Horse, an intermediate rank grade 9 monster. It was one of the trickiest monsters for an archer to face. But in the screen, Chae Nayun stood tall with confidence in front of the Thousand-Mile Horse.

Not long afterward, the battle began.

Chae Nayun drew her bow, and the Thousand-Mile Horse charged towards her.

I examined their fight closely. My Gift, Master Sharpshooter, seemed to affect my eyes of discernment, as I could clearly see Chae Nayun's faults.

[Chae Nayun]

Chae Nayun dodged the charging Thousand-Mile Horse by rolling to the side. Doing so, she had missed an opportunity to attack. She should have stabbed an arrow in its flank, or if she fired after rolling, she would have hit the horse's butt.

[Chae Nayun only wants to shoot her bow in upright positions. In other words, she lacks adaptability and situational awareness as an archer.]

Chae Nayun was too fixated on textbook stances. As a result, the Thousand-Mile Horse easily dodged her arrows.

[In a one-on-one fight, sharpshooters require detailed analysis and background knowledge of their target. However, Chae Nayun lacks knowledge about monsters.]

Defeating a Thousand-Mile Horse was easy if one started with disabling its legs. However, Chae Nayun was attacking places with a large surface area like its neck and body.

'She doesn't like memorizing theory.'

It was Chae Nayun's flaw I created myself.

[Her ability to predict her opponent's movements is superb, but she lacks the ability to take her arrows' speed into account.]

This was a matter of talent. Chae Nayun's talent in bows was ranked second or third. In contrast, her talent in longswords was ranked first. The spear and bow only came afterwards.

In other words, Chae Nayun couldn't predict what I could predict.

That was the difference between our talents, our Gifts.

[Despite all this, Chae Nayun was able to win against the Thousand-Mile Horse because of her overwhelming magic power control, capacity, and adaptability.]

Eventually, the Thousand-Mile Horse got tired. It couldn't withstand the endless barrage of arrows that came from Chae Nayun's terrifying magic power capacity.

[Overall, I recommend that Chae Nayun find a weapon that is more suited to utilizing her immense magic power.]

The exam ended with her victory.

However, my report was filled with criticisms. Still, they were reasonable. If the person grading this report had sharp eyes, he would know that I was right.

"Victory, Chae Nayun. Defeat, Hojun, and Jutryn. Draw, Carlos."

After the exam, Chae Nayun returned in the same imposing manner as when she had left. I didn't even give her a glance. Feeling somewhat guilty, I flipped over my report.

"Next is group 3..."

The exam thus continued.



Meanwhile, Oh Junhyuk was patrolling the west forest. The faint vibration he felt a while ago was bothering him.

Normally, he would have thought of it as a natural phenomenon and ignored it, but a police officer had been killed the day before. As a result, Oh Junhyuk was currently more sensitive to his surroundings.

*Oong—*

A vibration even clearer than the one he felt before rang out.

"Youngji, did you feel that?"

Seo Youngji's reply came within a second from the micro-transceiver he had.

—Yep, another vibration. I think it's coming from the ocean. Can you tell me exactly when you felt the vibration?

“How should I know?”

—Then just send me your smartwatch data.

“...”

Oh Junhyuk did as she said.

—I'm in the east forest. The vibration was 0.03 seconds faster on your side. The source of the vibration must be in the west sea.

“Can I use the smartwatch to calculate the same thing?”

— You should be able to. It's the Association's specially crafted smartwatch. It has a lot of useful functions. Anyways, I'm heading over there now. Wait for me.

“Got it.”

Oh Junhyuk began to walk towards the west sea through a field of weed. Since the vibration came from the west sea, he planned to observe it from a distance.

But at that moment...

He felt a condensing and scattering of magic power.

Oh Junhyuk quickly turned to that direction.

A shadowy figure was walking out from the dense forest.

“...”

Oh Junhyuk stared at the figure while holding his breath.

*Tap, tap.* With heavy steps, a man walked out... a man that he had seen before. Because of the unique aura he gave off, Oh Junhyuk remembered him.

A large build and a sinister face. It was the man who was glaring at him in the arena.

Oh Junhyuk's eyes met the man's. The man returned a big smile.

Looking at the man, Oh Junhyuk spoke in a businesslike manner.

“This area is off-limits to outsiders.”

“Is it?”

A fierce light shone from the man’s eyes.

“Then why are you here?”

His voice was fittingly husky and full. However, Oh Junhyuk retorted without being fazed in the slightest.

“Because I’m not an outsider.”

“Mm, what a surprise.”

The giant man gave a dry reply as he rubbed his chin. Oh Junhyuk forced himself to smile.

“If you understand, please go back.”

“I refuse.”

With a grin, the giant man suddenly began to crack his joints. He was clearly asking for a fight. Oh Junhyuk let out a deep sigh.

“The one who murdered that police officer, that was you, wasn’t it?”

“Huh? I don’t know. Rather than that, don’t just stand there.”

At that moment, a chilling wind blew from the sea. Oh Junhyuk’s smartwatch loudly rang at the same time.

“Move if you don’t want to be beaten up.”

The moment the giant man’s voice fell low...

*Chwaa—*

From the depths of the sea, a giant creature shot up with a burst of water. Oh Junhyuk quickly turned around.

The creature looked like a generic snake, but its overwhelming size and vicious mouth showed that it was on a league of its own.

Serpent Dragon.

A mythical monster had appeared on the west sea.

# Chapter 44

## Sudden Encounter (4)

“Wow~ I wonder if I got some sort of an insight. Who knew I could win against a Thousand-Mile Horse so easily?”

Tired of waiting, I was looking at my laptop when Chae Nayun’s bragging sound entered my ears.

“Really, what happened, Nayun?”

Yoo Yeonha also chimed in from next to her. Although Yoo Yeonha usually lowered her head in front of Chae Nayun, her genuinely surprised expression told me that it wasn’t just flattery this time.

It was understandable. Yoo Yeonha didn’t know anything about bows, so Chae Nayun’s battle might have seemed unproblematic. At first glance, it was indeed an amazing fight. But just like the saying, one shouldn’t judge a book by its cover.

“I learned from failure, something like that, hahaha.”

Chae Nayun made a hearty laugh. She must be feeling great, seeing as how she even brought up her loss from yesterday. Meanwhile, Kim Suho was smiling sweetly as he watched Chae Nayun.

As for me, I felt a chill run down my back when I imagined Chae Nayun reading my report. Should I submit it anonymously?

“Group 10. Rachel, Kim Hajin, Skid, Lee Wei.”

At that moment, Jin Joohwa announced the 10th group. I glanced at Rachel, who was sitting next to me. She seemed to have me on her mind as well, as her eyes met mine. She got up from her seat, and I followed.

“Come this way.”

Rachel and I followed a staff with the rest of group 10’s members.

We arrived at a waiting room, and the staff opened a giant door on its right side.

“Go in.”

Behind the giant door was a long hallway.

We walked in. Soon, the hallway came to an end, and two doors stood on each side of the wall.

“Stand in front of the door.”

The staff guided us to a door each. I was on the same side of the wall as Rachel.

“Good luck on your exam!”

I gave Rachel an energetic cheer, and she returned a nod.

“You have one minute to confirm your monster and terrain.”

Beyond the window on the door, I could see the monster and terrain I would face. The terrain was flatland. The monster was a Chrome Wolf.

Chrome wolves were monsters that ranged from low-intermediate rank grade 4 to grade 2. It was comparatively weaker than what some of the other cadets had to face. However, it was difficult to fight it with a gun. Not just difficult, but very difficult. Anyone could see at first glance that bullets would just bounce off its skin.

[Peculiarity – its skin has the ability to reflect metallic objects.]

[Weakness – inside the mouth]

[Strength – powerful epidermis]

Chrome Wolves were monsters I created.

“30 seconds left.”

They had the metal and earth dual-attribute, and its vital point was inside its mouth. While the combination of metal and earth attribute made it difficult to deal with, its weakness was unexpectedly clear. An extreme heat that could melt metal and earth, that was what I needed.

I grasped the knife in my pocket. When things came down to it, I could use Stigma’s

magic power to heat up the knife.

“A minute has passed. Please enter.”

The members of group 10 walked into the examination ground.

It was a small room of about 130 square meters. Dirt and rocks filled the ground, while a wolf was crunching on something on the other side.

I barely had any time to think. Chrome Wolves were capable of long ranged attacks. I quickly held up my gun. *Ptui*. The wolf spat something out. What seemed to be a metallic fragment hurled towards me. I aimed at the flying object and fired. The metallic fragment clashed with my bullet, destroying each other.

It charged towards me immediately afterward. I activated Bullet Time. I could clearly see the wolf's slowed movements, but I didn't move. I simply waited for it to open its mouth. Because it was so slow, I wasn't even scared.

As though it was moving in slow motion, the Chrome Wolf opened its jaws as it shot towards my neck.

I jabbed my gun into its mouth and fired consecutively. By the time the Chrome Wolf shut its mouth, I had already jumped back by several meters.

My sense of time returned to normal, and the Chrome Wolf convulsed in pain. Unfortunately, it wasn't dead yet. After retching a few times, it spat out ten crushed bullets. Then, he growled while glaring at me.

“Tough, aren't you?”

I had struck its vital point, but the Chrome Wolf's bulletproof property put me at a disadvantage. Without a choice, I took out my knife. With a gun in one hand and a knife in the other, I lowered my body slightly and glared back at the wolf. My lips were dry and sweat drenched my body. Close ranged combat was always frightening. Right when the fight was about to break out...

*KWANG—!*

A huge explosion erupted and the lights in the room went off. I was now in total darkness, but I couldn't let my guard down. There was a savage beast in here with me.

—A problem has occurred. All monsters will be reverse summoned. Cadets are to leave the examination ground immedi... Tzzzk.

The speaker cut off with a static noise.

I stared at the wolf. Rather than being reverse summoned, it was growing even more ferocious.

“Um, is that thing going to be reverse summoned?”

No one answered my question.

One or more of the dispatched magicians had to be a Djinn.

Jin Joo-hwa wasn't a Djinn. I had already checked on my laptop. No change in setting had happened to him. In fact, the laptop didn't detect any setting change.

This could only mean one thing.

The Djinn deployed here was a Djinn I didn't know.

It was entirely plausible. There were uncountably many Djinn in this world. It wasn't strange for an extra to appear.

“Haa... I knew this would happen eventually.”

An event that I didn't know about was happening.

My heart rate went up at the uncertainty of the situation, but I forced myself to calm down. After a deep breath, I looked through the wall at the room next door. Rachel seemed to be in a similar situation, as she was glaring at her opponent calmly and silently. But her opponent was... a person.

—Kuwalwal!

At that moment, the Chrome Wolf charged towards me with a howl. I took out my personal weapon from Stigma. Desert Eagle materialized in my hand, and Aether fused with it promptly.

The grip fits snugly in my hand.

First, I fired a bullet at the charging Chrome Wolf. It fell down with a whimper.

“Know your place.”

The Desert Eagle I had taken out for the first time in a while was much more powerful than before, but I didn't have the time to stand around and admire its strength. I didn't even have time to look at my laptop.

Rachel was the urgent problem at hand.

There were arcs where Rachel was targeted. One of the antagonists of the story was someone who wanted to conquer England itself.

But now shouldn't be the time. They should only attack after they grew their forces more...

—Krrrr...

I furrowed my brows at the growling noise. When I turned my sight back front, the single Chrome Wolf had unknowingly multiplied to three.

But I wasn't worried in the slightest.

"Hm."

I transformed Desert Eagle into the shotgun mode.

At the same time, the three Chrome Wolves flew towards me.

My job was simple.

I just had to point my shotgun calmly and fire without shaking.

*KWANG—!*

Immediately, thunderous gunshots rang out.



In a dark room filled with chilling air and breathless killing intent, a lone man's murmuring rose up coldly.

"I knew this day would come one day."

What should have been a familiar language approached Rachel unfamiliarly. She glared at the man who appeared from the darkness. Although the man was wearing a cape and covering his face, Rachel felt like she knew who he was.

Rachel calmly recited his name.

"...Sir Lancaster."

The previous Captain of the Royal Guard and Rachel's previous master, Alex Lancaster.

The man who disappeared a few years ago after his family was murdered in the infamous London Incident had appeared once again with breathtaking killing intent.

“I’m honored you remember me.”

A thin smile emerged on his face. Rachel felt a great malice from his sinister smile. From it, she could easily see the path he had walked.

“...You sold your soul.”

Lancaster shook his head. He was denying Rachel’s claim.

“I lived my life for my country, but my country killed my everything. I didn’t sell my soul. Only, my master took in my wandering soul after I was abandoned by my country.”

For a moment, deep sadness emerged on Rachel’s face. What Lancaster was saying was a painful memory for her as well.

“...Is that why you came to me?”

“Princess, does it look like I came here?”

Rachel furrowed her brows. Then, she stabbed with her rapier, which simply passed through his body.

“I am somewhere, but not here.”

“...”

Rachel turned around. The door to the room was tightly shut. For whatever reason, no help seemed to be coming.

Lancaster spoke with a smile.

“There’s quite a chaos outside right now. Of course, if this place was England, Princess’ safety would have been the top priority. Tens, hundreds, and thousands of people’s lives wouldn’t compare to Princess’...”

Lancaster paused momentarily. His smiling face was twisted viciously.

“The entire country would not hesitate to throw away their lives to save Princess. After all, Princess is England’s only hope.”

After saying what he wanted to say, Lancaster’s mouth drew a satisfied smile.

“But that isn’t the case here. In this place, you are only one of many cadets.”

Rachel stared at him with sadness. The resentment and anger in his voice made Rachel feel guilty. However, Lancaster clenched his teeth at her response.

“So you still won’t remove your hypocritical mask of pretense...”

Anger and regret filled his drawn out words. Rachel took a small courageous step towards him.

“Sir Lancaster...”

“I would like to talk a bit longer, but there is no time.”

However, Lancaster rejected her before bowing respectfully.

“Fairwell Princess, please be well.”

With that, he turned into a black fog and disappeared.

“Wait...!”

Suddenly, an assassin jumped out of the fog, swinging a sword. Though it was abrupt, Rachel managed to swing her rapier and defend against the attack. At the same time, the attack sliced off a chunk of her sword qi. She was astonished at the weight behind the magic power.

But the assassin’s magic power wasn’t the only astonishing thing.

The assassin’s movements were nimble and sharp. Left flank and shoulder. His keen attacks dug through Rachel’s weak points. Two swords clashed against each other, and a sharp metallic sound resounded. Hot sparks were ignited, and fresh blood burst into the air.

Against the assassin's aggressive maneuvers, Rachel could only stay on the defensive. But as the fight continued, more scratches appeared on her body. Once the pain grew more intense, Rachel had to admit that she couldn't defeat the assassin with standard tactics.

She made a gamble.

“Uk!”

The assassin didn't miss the opening she purposely made. A deep stab appeared on her wrist, and Rachel dropped her rapier. Feeling his victory, the assassin dug in deeper.

At that moment, Rachel's rapier reacted. Her rapier had still been connected to her magic power.

The assassin moved to pierce Rachel's heart, while Rachel's rapier shot up towards his neck.

*KWANG—!*

However, this nail-biting situation was interrupted by a terrifying vibration and a fierce explosion.

Rachel lost balance along with the assassin. The assassin's sword couldn't reach Rachel's heart, while Rachel's rapier couldn't pierce the assassin's neck.

*KOONG!*

The room rumbled with another vibration. This time, the right side of the wall crumbled down. Rachel and the assassin both turned towards the wall.

*KOONG!*

Another shockwave seemed to tear through the wall. The assassin then held up his sword, and Rachel also grabbed her rapier with her left hand.

*KOONG!*

After the second shockwave, the assassin charged at Rachel, which she narrowly dodged by rolling to the side.

*KOONG!*

A third and final shockwave blew up the wall and the assassin was sent flying back by the explosion.

“Geez, so much dust. *Ptui.*”

A man walked out from a cloud of acrid smoke.  
It was a familiar face to Rachel.  
Kim Hajin. It was him.

“...!”

The assassin immediately ran towards him.

“Who the hell are you?”

Kim Hajin simply fired his gun.

“Kuak!”

A shotgun shell sent the assassin flying back from one end of the room to the other. It was a terrifying display of power.

Kim Hajin then walked up to the assassin, who was stuck against the wall.

*Click— Click—*

The sound of his gun reloading rang out frighteningly.

*Clack.* He finished reloading. Rachel stared at the white magic power flowing around his arm. However, she didn't have the chance to raise any questions.

Kim Hajin aimed at the assassin. He showed no hesitation as he pulled the trigger. In an instant, a radiant white light illuminated the dark room.

# Chapter 45

## After the Trouble (1)

'Destructive power amplification shotgun shell' – 50 SP each.

Although I used ordinary bullets against Chrome Wolves, I used five of these special bullets to break down the wall and kill the assassin. In other words, I had consumed 250 SP in less than a minute. It was a necessary expenditure to break down the examination room's wall, and since I managed to save Rachel, I didn't particularly regret it.

"Um..."

I reached out to Rachel, who was collapsed on the ground. She stared at my hand blankly before getting up by herself. I pulled my hand back and awkwardly scratched my cheek.

"..."

Rachel stared at the broken down wall to her right. The examination room's reinforced wall was in a sorry state because of my shotgun shells.

"Oh, the mana barrier disappeared when the electricity went out."

I made an excuse because her gaze pricked at my conscience.

Rachel's eyes rolled and landed on my shotgun. I hurriedly stuffed it in my bag, but it didn't fit because of its size. I quickly turned around and changed it to its handgun form before putting it away.

"R-Rather than that..."

I looked at Rachel's body. She was riddled with wounds, and she was bleeding to a worrying degree.

I should be concerned about her safety, but for some reason, I thought of Evandel's Seed first. Rachel's blood would be the perfect nourishment for it.

“You’re hurt.”

I took off the belt bag around my waist. To give a brief explanation about this belt bag, it was an all-purpose emergency kit created with the combination of all my fears and apprehension.

Antidotes, potions, painkillers, tranquilizers, bandages, gauzes... all sorts of medicine and medicinal supplies were in this bag. Of course, recovery potions, namely the ‘external wound recovery potion’, were also included in it.

Although recovery potions were a bit on the expensive side, they were cheap compared to what Rachel’s blood was worth.

“Here, it’s an external wound recovery potion.”

When I gave her a glass bottle containing a red liquid, Rachel’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Before I put it on, I’ll wipe off your blood first.”

Because I was nervous, I felt my lips going dry. I wet my lips with saliva before asking, “May I?”

“...”

Rachel nodded. She had given me permission.

First, I took out a gauze from my belt bag and wiped the blood flowing down from her wounded left arm. As I took out more gauzes, I kept the used ones stacked on top of each other without throwing them away. Once her arm was mostly clean of blood, I wet a gauze with the potion before applying it to her skin.

Immediately, Rachel clenched her teeth. Potions had a stinging sensation when applied over the skin, kind of like antiseptics.

I planned to heal her left arm first, but Rachel suddenly grabbed me.

She spoke for the first time since we met.

“...Here first.”

With that, she showed me her right wrist.

It was a serious wound. Her flesh and muscles were cut off entirely and her bones were showing. If the cut was just slightly deeper, her wrist would have been severed.

But surprisingly, there was no blood coming out of the wound. It seemed Rachel was blocking the wound with her magic power.

“Ah! You should have told me earlier!”

I was genuinely shocked. She seemed to have only suffered light cuts and scratches, so I was focused on her blood and missed that she had a wound that needed immediate treatment.

“Any later and you would have had to give up on using a rapier forever.”

Despite costing 7 million won, external wound recovery potions weren't omnipotent. Sensitive areas like a person's nerves had to be treated immediately. Otherwise, not even the Authority of Healing could do anything about it.

“It's going to sting. A lot.”

I poured the rest of the potion over her wound and wrapped a bandage over it.

“Aaak.”

The pain must have been intense, but Rachel endured it with only a short groan. I put three layers of bandages over her wound. With this, the treatment was complete. When I let go of her arm, Rachel crouched down on the ground and rolled her feet. It was easy to see that she was struggling to endure the pain.

I picked up the bloodied stack of gauzes and put them into my cross bag. While I waited for Rachel to recover, I turned on my laptop. A settings change alert was there as I expected.

[Lancaster Alex]

[Worsened attachment to his lost family. His rage has also been deepened. There is an increased chance of him attacking Rachel whenever he has the opportunity.]

[Potential changed from 7.5 to 8.5 to serve as a greater threat.]

“Hm...”

Lancaster Alex.

He was one of the characters I created in relation to England. As an antagonist who

appeared in the middle stage of the story, his goal was to topple England's government.

Such a dangerous antagonist had gotten stronger and appeared earlier than intended. Unfortunately, there wasn't anything I could do about it.

If I knew this would happen, I would have created more righteous characters.

Of course, there were plenty of other righteous characters. For Rachel, there was a secret service agent from MI6 named James Jone. As he was based on the 'agent' that everyone knew, his love and loyalty for his country was unshakable.

"...Hua."

A faint breathing sound rang out. I looked at Rachel. She was covered in sweat, but she must have overcome the pain, as she looked much better than before.

Rachel staggered up slowly and bowed at me.

"Thank you."

"Ah..."

Suddenly, electricity came back on and the darkness shrouding the room disappeared. Naturally, our conversation was put on hold.

Rachel and I walked to the door.

Holding the doorknob, we slowly pushed it open. Though it was tightly shut before, it opened without a problem this time.

After leaving the room, I stared at the examination rooms on the other side of the wall. It seemed the other two cadets were unable to escape in time, as their corpses were lying on the ground.

A mixed feeling came over me, but I knew I couldn't have done anything about it.

I led Rachel and began to walk back. With my eyes, I could see that the waiting room was in a pandemonium.

*Tap, tap.*

At that moment, I heard the sound of someone walking towards us. Rachel put up her guard. Seeing her, I simply smiled.

"Thankfully, we restored the electricity..."

It was Kim Soohyuk's voice. He was walking down the hallway while communicating with someone on a transceiver.

"You guys, what are you doing here? No, why did you come back here?"

"Come back?"

"Didn't you guys..."

Kim Soohyuk paused in the middle of his sentence as though he'd remembered something. From his reaction, I also had an idea as to what happened. Djinns who could create illusions with form surely existed.

"The other two are still inside."

"Ah, shoot! You two, wait here. No, run to the infirmary!"

With that, Kim Soohyuk ran down the hallway to the examination rooms. By the time his back disappeared from my normal view, I turned towards Rachel. Then, I whispered softly.

"Um, I may have to lie soon, so when the time comes, please match words with me. If they find out that I brought in my personal weapon, I'll be expelled."

Rachel nodded at my request.



...After the huge disturbance, in the silent shadow of the now empty waiting room, darkness suddenly sprung up, growing in size until it formed a human figure.

The figure was that of a short cute boy.

A deep smile emerged on the boy's face.

"Boss, Boss! I just saw something amazing!"

The boy, Droon, came to observe Kim Hajin as per his boss' orders. Currently, he couldn't hide his excitement over what he saw. He seemed to finally understand why Boss was so interested in him.

“Guns, it’s a Gift related to guns. It’s not just anti-magic...”

—For now, return. I’ll listen to you later.

However, Boss cut him off coldly.

“...Okay.”

‘Boss is no fun.’ Droon grumbled inwardly as he transformed into darkness once again. Next, he messaged another troupe member.

—Jungyeong, how was the Serpent Dragon? Did you kill it?



Facing a clear ocean breeze, Oh Junhyuk was sitting cross-legged on a rock. He was still trying to comprehend what he just witnessed. A Serpent Dragon had popped out of the sea, but...

“Oh Junhyuk!”

Seo Youngji arrived after everything was taken care of. Oh Junhyuk turned towards her.

“What’s going on? Didn’t you say a Serpent Dragon appeared?”

“You knew that and you’re this late?”

“I ran into a problem on my way here. Monsters suddenly escaped from the laboratory... I had to take care of it before coming here. So, where’s the Serpent Dragon?”

“It was chased away, deep into the ocean.”

“...Huh?”

Serpent Dragons were members of the dragon family, but that didn’t mean they were terrifyingly strong. In terms of the Association’s standard ranking system, Serpent Dragons ranged from high-intermediate rank grade 1 to high-rank grade 7. Compared

to some of the other monsters Heroes of their caliber had to face, Serpent Dragons weren't particularly frightening. In the first place, Serpent Dragons weren't aggressive. They didn't know how to fight, and because of their intelligence, they were afraid of pain.

Of course, it was a different story if a Serpent Dragon found a Cintamani<sup>[1]</sup>. Even so, what Oh Junhyuk witnessed was shockingly unrealistic.

"Someone provoked the Serpent Dragon."

"Provoked?"

"Yep. Its eyes were red. It was clearly enraged."

Hurling down from the sky with its gigantic mouth, the Serpent Dragon was undoubtedly oppressing.

"How did you chase away an enraged Serpent Dragon?"

"Well..."

Thinking back to what happened, Oh Junhyuk didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

"Apparently, you just have to beat it until it regains its sanity."

He recalled what he saw just ten minutes ago.

The giant man wearing a gauntlet stood in front of the Serpent Dragon and punched it. It was a simple straight punch, but the shockwave released from the attack was tremendous. The ground shook and trees were completely stripped of their leaves. The punch tore through the Serpent Dragon's tough scales, broke through its bones, and struck its muscles.

The enraged Serpent Dragon's bloodshot eyes instantly cleared up.

"...You want me to believe that?"

"If you don't want to, don't. Oh, by the way, I need you to put someone on the wanted list. I filmed him on my smartwatch. He's the suspect behind yesterday's police officer murder case."

Oh Junhyuk sent Seo Youngji a video. It showed the giant man's face and build. Seo

Youngji tilted her head as she checked the video.

“Tell them to contact me if he’s found.”

“...Why?”

“Nothing. It’s been a while, but I found someone I want to fight.”

Oh Junhyuk grinned.



The Cube Monster Incident became a hot topic across the world.

Djinns being involved in the incident was kept under wraps, but because a Serpent Dragon and several other monsters critically injured two cadets (I thought they were dead, but it seemed they were just unconscious), Cube received a huge global backlash.

As a result, the rest of the combat exams were put on hold.

The result of the duels would be kept, while another monster war would take place later. Finally, the group rescue mission, which was planned for Friday, was canceled entirely considering the circumstance.

In addition, classes were also canceled until Thursday two weeks later.

In other words, there were no classes for the next ten days.

With the sudden holiday, cadets seemed to be planning on returning home or going on vacation with the compensation Cube gave out.

Cube’s official community forum was filled with posts asking for good places to visit in Japan or America, while some people left snarky remarks on how they could go on vacation when cadets were injured from the incident.

In any case, none of these problems had any relevance to me.

Even now, I was sitting in my dorm room, protecting my abode.

“...Oh, did it just eat?”

Evandel’s Seed. The seed of a witch I obtained from Gari Mountain’s hidden stage was now sucking on Rachel’s blood. The bloodied gauze had returned to its white color.

Once three months passed, a kind witch would be born, who would become my trusted helper...

At that moment, a sudden pain overcame me.

The source of the pain was my upper arm. It was a pain I felt once before. I quickly pulled up my sleeve. Another streak of Stigma was being drawn on my arm.

‘Calm down and be patient, Kim Hajin. You’ve felt this pain before. You can do a lot more with another streak of Stigma. For example, you can put more magic power... into bullets...’

I couldn’t continue my encouraging train of thoughts as it felt like someone was stabbing my brain with a knife. My thoughts cut off, and I clenched my teeth, unable to scream.

In front of this tremendous pain, my consciousness slowly faded.



“Wow, it’s been so long.”

On the other hand, Chae Nayun returned home. Her family home was a traditional Korean house with tiled rooves and eaves. However, that was only on the outside. The interior of the house was large and elaborate and was no different than a European castle.

“Welcome back, young lady.”

With a warm smile, a butler greeted Chae Nayun.

“Long time no see, gramps.”

“I’ve been worried sick. I’m glad you’re safe.”

“Only two people were hurt. None of the ordinary visitors were injured either.”

Chae Nayun gave her bow to the butler who had been protecting her home for thirty years.

“Oh right, is the item I ordered here yet?”

“It arrived yesterday.”

“Yes!”

“Oh and Cube sent some documents.”

“Documents?”

The butler nodded.

“Yes, they’re apparently exam reports. There are 24 of them.”

“Oh that. Send it back to my dorm. I don’t want to think about school when I’m... No, wait.”

Chae Nayun recalled her might as she fought the Thousand-Mile Horse. Other cadets must have been extremely impressed to have sent so many reports. 24. That meant close to 25% of the class had written about her feat.

“Huhu, send it to my room. I want to read it.”

Wondering what kind of praises she would get, Chae Nayun spoke.

“Yes, understood.”

The butler bowed respectfully.

---

1. A wish-fulfilling jewel in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Wingless dragons would seek to obtain this object to gain wings and ascend to the Heaven.

# Chapter 46

## After the Trouble (2)

As expected of a rich young lady, Chae Nayun's room was huge with a queen-sized bed, a living room, a bathroom that was the size of a public bath, and a gaming room designed for the best virtual gaming experience. Lying comfortably on her bed, Chae Nayun opened the envelope containing her exam reports.

"Whoa, look how thick this is."

The stack of 24 papers had a sizable thickness.

First, she read the name of the topmost paper's grader.

Kianu Jin.

He was a spearman who was around rank 100.

[Chae Nayun's archery skill was extraordinary and her magic power drew out my deepest respect.

The Thousand-Mile Horse is a difficult opponent for most sharpshooters because of its agile speed and sturdy body, but Chae Nayun not only dodged its charges with incredibly nimble movements, but she also...]

"Haha."

Because he still had poor Korean, there were some grammar mistakes here and there, but it was still readable. She especially liked the words, "her arrows were like a drizzling rain."

After reading Kianu Jin's report, Chae Nayun worked her way down the stack.

Some cadets objectively analyzed her battle, while some noticeably filled their reports with praises. But seeing them all remark on her astounding might, the corner of Chae Nayun's mouth curled up more and more.

"Huu, no."

Chae Nayun collected her thoughts before they reached cloud nine.

‘Some of them are just flattering you. Be humble.’

After telling herself that, she calmly moved on to the next report.  
The report belonged to a familiar name.

[Evaluating cadet – Kim Suho]

“...”

His name shook her heart slightly, but Chae Nayun tried to act unconcerned and furrowed her brows chically. She quietly read the contents of the report.

[It was a victory of self-conviction.

Recently, Chae Nayun seemed to have doubts about herself. Losing to a rival and being criticized by someone wore down her confidence.

But as expected, Chae Nayun was a born archer who was overflowing with talent. Against the Thousand-Mile Horse, Chae Nayun showed a battle brimming with confidence. There were no hesitation or doubts in her movements, and her attacks were also on point.

I believe Chae Nayun has already reached a certain realm as an archer. She told me that someone said her talent was lacking, but what Chae Nayun lacked wasn't talent, but trust in her own abilities.

...

...

If she continues to trust in herself as she did today, if she believes in her talent and strides forward, I have the utmost belief that she will become the greatest Hero.]

“...Huua.”

With a thin breath, Chae Nayun softly caressed Kim Suho's report. She was moved by his heartfelt encouragement. A smile emerged on her face, and her worries and trembling heart settled down.

With her eyes closed, she reaffirmed her belief.

‘A bow suits me. No matter what anyone says, a bow suits me best.’

Chae Nayun carefully placed his report on her bed.

Now, there were two reports remaining. One was anonymous while the other was

from Shin Jonghak.  
She decided to finish what she started.  
First, the anonymous report.

“Hm.”

She picked up the report without much thought.

“..”

But not long afterward, she clenched her hands which were holding onto the report. Beyond the crumpled report, Chae Nayun’s distorted face emerged.

“Iiik, iii, iik...”

Unlike the others, the anonymous report was filled with criticisms. Its malicious words seemed to strike at her bones directly, and Chae Nayun trembled in anger.

“...Who is the fucker?”

The report was written in a respectful tone, but it was clear what it was trying to say.

‘You have no sense, talent, or brain. You won thanks to your magic power.’

It was anonymous, but Chae Nayun felt like she knew who the writer was.

“Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin...!”

She picked up her smartwatch as she fumed with rage.



On a fine afternoon, Rachel and I were being questioned by Cube’s investigators. I was still sore from the added streak of Stigma yesterday, but I still cooperated earnestly thanks to Rachel sitting next to me in an upright position.

“Thank you.”

Outside of the investigation room, on our way back to the Portal Station, I expressed

my gratitude at Rachel. As promised, she matched words with me. A royalty's words must have carried unquestionable trust and grace, as the investigators who were doubting me fully trusted Rachel's words.

"No, I should be the one to thank you."

Rachel said so without a change in her expression. Then, she showed her wrist to me. Thanks to treating her injury early, her wrist was fully healed without a scar.

"Is it fine?"

"Yes."

She spun her wrist nimbly.

"That's good. So, where are you going?"

"Back home."

"Ah, to England."

"Yes."

I see, so she was going back to England.

It made sense. England should be safer than Cube. The Queen's residence was a fortress that even a manifested devil couldn't easily enter.

"Ah, I'm also going hunting right now..."

Because we were going in the same direction, I told Rachel something she didn't even ask for when suddenly, my smartwatch rang.

It wasn't a text message, but a call.

From Chae Nayun.

I had a feeling I shouldn't pick it up, so I ignored it.

"I'm also taking Cube's Portal, so..."

My smartwatch rang once again. I immediately ended the call.

Then, a message arrived.

[Hey, you wrote that report, didn't you?]

[I just don't understand, just how are you in any position to say something like this?]

[I don't have the sense or talent of an archer? Have you ever used a bow before? I'm so freaking speechless.]

[And you said I'm stupid? What, you think you can mock me because you're good at studying?]

[You wanna fight? Wanna make a bet? Want me to teach you how hard it is to use a bow?]

“What is this bombshell...”

A barrage of five messages fell on me in just ten seconds.

However, the last message caught my attention.

Bet.

I recalled my Gift's proficiency level. If I remember correctly, it should be grade 7 and about 67% to the next grade.

Could I defeat Chae Nayun with a bow?

Of course, I purposely nitpicked her flaws during the exam, but Chae Nayun's archery skill was undoubtedly one of the best among cadets.

Although she was more talented with swords, that didn't mean she had no talent for bows. Not to mention, she trained in archery for ten years...

[Sure, let's fight and bet on it. I'll also use a bow.]

But it was about time to show her the difference between someone of talent and a true genius.

Even if grade 7 wasn't enough, I had incredible luck on my side. As long as the bet was done with normal arrows rather than magic power arrows, I couldn't see myself losing.

...But just in case, I should ask for a month to practice.

“...Why isn't she replying?”

For some reason, Chae Nayun stopped messaging me. Did she think it was meaningless to make a bet with someone who wasn't an archer?

Looking up, I saw that Rachel had gone ahead. I quickly ran and caught up to her.

Rachel glanced back at me.

“Haha, I’m also using the Portal. I’m going to Wonju.”

“...Ah, yes.”

We walked side by side to the Portal without talking.

We eventually arrived at the Cube Portal Station, which was fairly empty. Because Cube had asked the cadets to leave if possible for a more thorough investigation, most cadets had already left.

Rachel should now take the Seoul Portal to transit through to England, while I'd take the Portal to Wonju.

“Um, if it’s okay... can I ask you what weapon you used back then?”

But before we separated, Rachel asked me a question.

It seemed she found it hard to accept what happened. After all, an assassin who had been threatening her was killed with only two shotgun shots.

“...It’s an extremely expensive weapon, and cadets generally have one or more special abilities.”

That was all I could say.

Rachel stared at me fixedly before nodding.

“Thank you again. I’ll bring something back from England as thanks.”

With that, Rachel left towards the Seoul Portal.



I arrived in Gangwondo Wonju. Perhaps because it was midday on a weekday, the Portal Station was bustling with people to the point there was barely any space to breathe.

I plowed through the swarm of people and left the Portal Station.

“Hajin~ Here!”

When I came outside, a man in a well-tailored suit and sunglasses shouted my name.

It was Park Soohyuk. Next to him was an HUV, though it was an old model. He looked completely different. I approached him with a smile.

“Wow, I almost didn’t notice you. Looks like you had fun with my money. Maybe you should be investigated for embezzlement.”

“Haha, this is a proper business expense. Get in.”

Park Soohyuk opened the back door as though he had done it a thousand times before. I got in the car.

“Are we stopping at the 1km mark again?”

“Yeah, but we’re going to hunt a lot more today.”

“Great, then I’m going~”

Yoo Yeonha promised me an unlimited supply of bullets. Since I added a setting to the Desert Eagle to make it an evolving weapon, I had to hunt as many monsters as I could when I had time.

“So, how’s the business lately?”

“It’s much better thanks to you. Everything is easier with a car.”

A mode of transportation was an important core item in any business. For a monster hunting agency, an HUV was practically a necessity.

“It’s over there, but there are a lot of people already.”

Not long afterward, we arrived at the entrance of the Field.

“Let’s get off for now.”

“Yeah.”

To get a permit for our vehicle, Park Soohyuk and I got off.

“...Hm?”

But in the distance, I saw a familiar face.

In all honesty, she was eye-catching no matter where she went. Her long black hair fluttered in the air and shone under the sunlight. Her incredibly charming black dress made her stand out even in this sea of people.

Yoo Yeonha.

She was observing the Field, surrounded by people who I presumed to be her guild members. The serious expression she had as she spoke made her seem as though she was an adult.

“Oh right.”

I suddenly recalled that it was about time Yoo Yeonha came to the Wonju’s Field for business.

In the original story, she became the greatest investor for SH Agency. Kim Suho was obviously the reason. After finding out that Kim Suho had a contract with SH Agency, Yoo Yeonha invested an astronomical sum to SH Agency, which turned out to be incredibly successful. It was the point where Park Soohyuk and Yoo Yeonha began to walk the royal road.

“What, do you know her?”

“Mm... I do, but let’s just go.”

She seemed busy, so I pretended not to see her.  
But at that moment...

“Eh?”

Yoo Yeonha discovered me.

“Hello?”

Clack, clack. She approached me on her high heels, but the height of her heels was too threatening. She seemed taller than me.

“What are you doing here?”

Yoo Yeonha looked into my eyes and asked. We were at the same eye-level.

“I’m here to make money.”

“Mmm~ I see.”

Yoo Yeonha glanced at Park Soohyuk who was next to me.  
It felt like I needed to introduce them to each other, so I did.

“This is my agent.”

“Ah, nice to meet you. I’m SH Agency’s head manager, Park Soohyuk.”

“I’m Yoo Yeonha. I’m still a cadet.”

“Ah, yes.”

I stole a peek at the two of them.

Park Soohyuk and Yoo Yeonha.

Though it wasn’t my intention, their meeting was moved forward by three years. As for the consequences, I wasn’t sure. But it didn’t seem like a bad thing.

I also glanced at the four men standing behind Yoo Yeonha like guards. Their equipment were all high-class goods.

“Ah, they’re members of Essence of the Strait.”

Yoo Yeonha introduced them to us. The members stood around, not knowing how to react, but Yoo Yeonha’s stinging glare immediately caused them to bow.

“Essence of the Strait...?”

Disbelief emerged on Park Soohyuk’s face. Essence of the Strait was the rank 2 guild. Park Soohyuk must never have imagined being in contact with them.

*Wiing—*

At that moment, my smartwatch rang.

It was from Chae Nayun.

[Haa, what would I gain by betting with someone who doesn't know anything about bows? Just screw off.]

It seemed she was planning on ignoring me, but I couldn't let that happen. I kindled her rage.

[What, you're scared?]

[Ha. You wanna die? I was going easy on you, so don't you...]

[Just like you said, I've never even touched a bow before. But if it's you... one month. One month is enough for me to catch up to your level. Of course, that's strictly in archery.]

After sending the message, I crossed my arms. But suddenly, Yoo Yeonha asked.

"...Are you perhaps texting Nayun?"

Startled, I stared at her.

"W-What, how did you know?"

Wasn't I the only one capable of hacking into others' smartwatches? Yoo Yeonha grinned and put up a hologram of her smartwatch screen.

[Hey, look what this kid is saying to me. I'm speechless. S.P.E.E.C.H.L.E.S.S. Do I take on this bet?]

From the looks of it, Chae Nayun was telling her friends about what I said and asking them for advice.

"Aha."

I spoke shortly.

"Tell her to do it."

“Eh? Have you used a bow before?”

“Nope, not even once.”

I haven’t even touched one. In fact, before coming to this world, I haven’t even seen them outside of movies and the Olympics.

“But I only need a month to beat her.”

However, this was a contest of pure skill. My Master Sharpshooter Gift was specialized for the sharpshooter role, while Chae Nayun’s Gift didn’t directly support a role and was more relevant to swords.

Although grade 7 was a bit on the edge, my victory was certain if I reached grade 6.

“How can you be so confident? Isn’t your Gift related to guns?”

“..”

I stared at Yoo Yeonha silently. I was pondering on how to answer her question.

“Tsk, fine. I won’t ask. So sensitive...”

But Yoo Yeonha misunderstood my reaction and clicked her tongue before I had the chance to answer.

She then stared at Park Soohyuk and his HUV before asking.

“Ah, if you’re here to hunt, can I come with you?”

# Chapter 47

## After the Trouble (3)

*Koong. Koong. Koong.*

Every time the tires hit a rock, the HUV shook violently. Just how much of an old model was it to not even have a steady driving module? Yoo Yeonha was both confused and shocked.

“Ehew.”

‘Why did I ask to follow them?’ Five minutes were enough to make her regret her words.

“...So why are you here?”

While she was steadying herself from the constant bumps, Kim Hajin, who was sitting next to her, asked. Yoo Yeonha glanced at him and retorted.

“What use is going on vacations? You have to see things, hear things, and feel things to advance forward.”

“Oh.”

Kim Hajin quickly accepted Yoo Yeonha’s words and faced front again. Yoo Yeonha stared at him fixedly.

He was average-looking no matter how many times she saw him. If he had glasses, his face would be the average face of all salarymen.

“Hm...”

But, there weren’t just one or two things that were suspicious about him. Rather than suspicious, he was full of secrets. Unfathomable... was too grand of a word to describe him, but he was still mysterious.

When Yoo Yeonha was having such trifling thoughts, she felt her smartwatch vibrate. It was a message from Chae Nayun.

[Alright, I'll take on his bet. Looks like he needs to be put in place.]

She seemed quite angry. With a snicker, Yoo Yeonha initiated a conversation.

“Hey.”

“Hm?”

“Nayun says she'll do it. The bet.”

At that moment, Kim Hajin's smartwatch also vibrated. Yoo Yeonha was curious.

“Show me too.”

Kim Hajin displayed the message without complaints.

[Sure, let's fight. I'll give you a month. I'll bet my everything that I'll win. What are you going to bet?]

A duel between an archer and a gunman was thus established.

Yoo Yeonha found the situation quite ridiculous, but was also curious.

“...By the way, why are you doing this?”

Of all people, why was he so bent on provoking Chae Nayun?

Kim Hajin stared at Yoo Yeonha. He then spoke as though it was an obvious truth.

“Chae Nayun's real talent isn't in bows.”

Yoo Yeonha couldn't understand what he was saying.

“If she gives up on using a bow, she can advance much further.”

Kim Hajin added those words somewhat bitterly. At least, that's what Yoo Yeonha felt.

Yoo Yeonha then began to see what was going on.

Without interest, there was no criticism. One had to carefully scrutinize something to see its flaws. In a way, giving proper criticisms was harder than giving compliments.

In that sense...

Just how long has this man been watching Chae Nayun to be so sure of his thoughts? Three months? Half a year? A year? Or perhaps even longer?

‘...Come to think of it.’

During the third year of Agent Military Academy, Kim Hajin was in the same class as Chae Nayun. They were both only 11 years old. From then until now, six whole years had gone by.

Could it be that for six years, this man...

*Clunk!*

“Ak!”

Suddenly, the HUV shook violently and stopped. Yoo Yeonha hit her head against the headrest of the front seat.

“W-What’s going on!?”

Yoo Yeonha was inexperienced with such things, but both Park Soohyuk and Kim Hajin weren’t. Park Soohyuk turned off the engine and spoke.

“This is the monster point. We’re getting off.”

“Monster point?”

“Ah, yes, it’s a place where many monsters appear...”

“I know what it means, but how do you know that this is a monster point?”

“End of April is when monsters start to get more active. The weaker ones will be pushed out of their territories, and this is a natural escape route. There are a few more places like that, but those places are famous so they’re always bustling with people.”

Park Soohyuk replied without hesitation, causing Yoo Yeonha to stare at him in surprise.

But her gaze quickly fell back on her smartwatch. She had received a message.

“Hmm... Well, I’ll be going now.”

“Huh? Didn’t you want to hunt with us?”

“Something came up just now. Plus, I said I wanted to come with you, I didn’t say anything about hunting together.”

Yoo Yeonha got off the car.

From the distance, Essence of the Strait’s guild members came running.

“Then, I’ll be off.”

“Yeah, see you later.”

“Yes, see you back at Cube.”

After taking in Kim Hajin’s average appearance once again, Yoo Yeonha turned back.

“Ah, by the way...”

But almost as though she forgot something, she quickly turned around and reached her hand out to Park Soohyuk.

“Can I get your business card?”



For a week, I focused on hunting and training. I went to Wonju every day and hunted an average of 15 monsters per day.

The combination of Aether and Desert Eagle was undoubtedly overpowered for a weakling like me. Even if I didn’t aim at a vital point, I could one or two shot any monster under low-intermediate rank grade 6.

“Hm... It’s not going up by much.”

Now, it was Wednesday.

Classes would restart in two days. Cadets were returning, and the archery bet between Chae Nayun and me was already widespread.

===

▷ 「Master Sharpshooter」

[Low-intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [Evolving — Grade 7] [Proficiency EXP 75%]

===

Master Sharpshooter was only 25% away from grade 6. I've been shooting monsters for an entire week, but the proficiency didn't even increase by 10%. It was because the amount of EXP needed to rank up increased exponentially.

“Will I be able to hit grade 6 in a month?”

Now that the bet was happening, I had to win, but I felt a bit uneasy at just grade 7.

*Drrrr—*

At that moment, the room suddenly rumbled.

Was it an earthquake?

I quickly looked around. For some reason, it felt like I was at the epicenter of the earthquake.

“Eh?”

I found something strange. The seed I had placed on my desk was shaking fiercely. Looking at it closely, I noticed that the blood disappeared from the gauze I wrapped it with.

“...Is it hungry?”

When I asked, the shaking stopped. I was dumbstruck, but I still took out another gauze soaked with Rachel's blood. I pulled the seed out of the whitened gauze and placed it on top of the new gauze. Immediately, the seed trembled as though it was happy before burying itself into the gauze.

“Interesting.”

Was Rachel's blood that delicious?

“Oh right.”

Soon, an itinerary would be posted for the traveling club's next trip. I checked my smartwatch for an announcement.

[Traveling Club – There will be a trip this weekend.]

Yun Hyun, unfortunately, destroyed the academics club, and the hunting club was suspended because of Sven. The traveling club was the only club I had left. Everything was happening according to the original story.

During this trip, another incident would occur. The traveling club would soon be caught in an assassination incident.

The traveling club's leader was kind and gentle, but his indecisiveness and naivety made him the target of a French conman. The conman, disguising himself as a rich businessman, coaxed the club leader to bring the traveling club's cadets to his giant mansion, saying that he would pay for all expenses.

The club leader made his decision after visiting France and enjoying his time during the trip.

However, the rich businessman's real identity was an infamous conman who was constantly under the threat of assassination by people he had conned in the past. Although he didn't need to worry about them because most of them were powerless, he had accidentally provoked a group he shouldn't have.

Footsteps of Darkness.

—While the time changes from Saturday to Sunday, your life will be taken.

He had received an assassination notice from Footsteps of Darkness, a notorious assassination group known to target criminals.

When he received the notice, the conman despaired.

Because he was a wanted criminal, he couldn't report it to the Hero Association to receive help. He also didn't have enough time to liquidate his assets, so he didn't have enough money to hire mercenaries.

After pondering over the matter for a long time, he came up with the idea of inviting cadets to protect himself for the weekend.

But there was another secret behind the event...

“Hm.”

This should be the correct event since the assassination incident was supposed to happen a week after the combat exams.

*Ding dong—*

At that moment, a violet bordered alert popped up on the corner of my laptop screen. It was from Violet Banquet. I quickly clicked on the alert. Truth Agency had received its first customer.

—Here is a detailed information on someone I wish to find. He’s an evil man who conned my family and ran away. Can you tell me where he is?

“...What’s this?”

A beer belly, snake-like eyes, and chubby cheeks. It was the stereotypical face of a conman.

This man was the conman behind the assassination incident, Belbet.



In a dark, abandoned factory used as the Chameleon Troupe’s hideout, the presence of people was felt for the first time in some time.

Stuck to the surface of the concrete floor were ten shadows. All ten colors besides the currently empty seat of Black were gathered in this place. It was to discuss the seat which had been empty for three years.

The shadows were positioned around a round table, watching a video projected by Droon. Shown on the video was a person Droon personally witnessed.

It was part of Droon’s Gift, an ability which could project or materialize anything he experienced with his five senses.

The ten shadows watched the video, some with curiosity and some with disapproval.

[*KWANG—!*]

“Oh geez, that surprised me.”

The end of the video was marked by a thunderous gunshot and a brilliant white flash. When the video came to an end, the leader of the shadows signaled the start of the discussion.

“Raise your hand if you see potential.”

However, the voting didn't begin, as a high-pitched female voice quickly cut in.

“By the way, Boss...”

Boss stared at the source of the voice, a beautiful Caucasian woman.

“When did we become a group that needed to meet to analyze some greenhorn?”

Her complaint quickly clashed with a man's gentle voice.

“I think he has potential. Most importantly, I like that he doesn't have parents or a significant other.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“If you don't have people by your side, you start to indulge in other things. We might not be able to give honor, but we can give money.”

The Chameleon Troupe was one of the extremely few groups listed on the Hero Association's violet list. However, only the name of the group was known to the public and its members' identities remained completely hidden.

The Chameleon Troupe guaranteed the freedom of its members. They could live their lives however they wished. Only when there was work to do did the members gather or work in teams to complete missions.

“So what, you want to bring him in? A kid who can be sent flying by a little nudge?”

“We're strictly talking about his potential...”

“Quiet.”

Boss crushed the rising debate between the two members.

“From this man...”

In truth, the Chameleon Troupe was like a mercenary group. Of course, their goal was much grander than making money and living a lavish life. But that didn't mean their goal was unattainable.

To achieve their goal, the Chameleon Troupe did what they needed to do at the right moment. Currently, their goal was to kill the 'traitor'.

“I confirmed the power of anti-magic.”

Boss threw a glance at Droon.

Receiving her look, Droon projected another video.

The man in the video was using an ordinary gun to fight an opponent using qi reinforcement. When the bullet he fired shattered the qi reinforcement, the weight of the air was clearly heavier than before.

“...It's illogical to think that the same thing will work against that guy just because he managed to break a qi reinforcement of that level.”

“Like I said, Jain, Boss didn't say we were recruiting him right away. She asked if he had 'potential'. At least in my eyes, he seems to have it.”

At the man's snarky rebuttal, Jain sent him a glare.

“Fine, let's say we bring him in after he grows up. Black is the only color we have, so is he getting that seat?”

Black wasn't a color that suited a greenhorn.

Black was the color belonging to the man who betrayed the previous boss. At the same time, it was the color of the 'strongest member' of the Chameleon Troupe. This rule remained unchanged for over 20 years.

“...Then I'll take over that color.”

At that moment, a giant man spoke up. It was Cheok Jungyeong, who had stayed silent this entire time.

“Rejected. You're too stupid.”

“I also reject. I’m stronger.”

“Then what do you bastards want to do?”

“Aren’t there others? Are we just going to ignore Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak?”

“We’re going to vote on them next. This discussion is for who we’ll select as candidates.”

Troupe members who had remained silent began to speak up one by one. Voices overlapped on top of each other, causing a headache for Boss. She spoke in a suppressed voice.

“Show of hands.”

Everyone immediately quieted down.

“We’re voting.”

With no other choice, the troupe members began to vote.

8:2

Jain, who already voiced her objection, and Cheok Jungyeong, who didn’t like the man, were the only ones to vote against him.

The rest of the members voted in favor.

“Hmph.”

Jain snorted, clearly dissatisfied at the result.

“By the way, Jain, take this. It’s an invitation letter for the VVIP masquerade party in France.”

“Oh, stealing that ring, right? Don’t worry.”

But Jain’s sulking didn’t last for long as she took the invitation letter with a bright face.

# Chapter 48

## Tit for Tat (1)

“Huu.”

Standing in front of the classroom, I took in a deep breath.

Today was Friday. Cadets who had gone home or on vacations had all returned by now, and Cube was back to normal after all the chaos. Cube was continuing its normal routine.

I opened the classroom door, holding in my nervousness. Immediately, several meaningful gazes fell on me.

For now, I sat down on my usual seat. I could hear everyone whispering about my bet with Chae Nayun.

I tried my best to ignore them as I opened my textbook. I was at least happy that blatant bullying stopped after I beat up Kim Horak.

“Guys, grades are out for the written exams.”

At that moment, Yi Yeonghan appeared, carrying large scrolls in his arms. He put them up on the wall one by one. The results for each theory class were listed along with a ranking of the combined results.

Everyone stared at the scrolls while groaning.

Not long afterward, everyone turned towards me.

===

Rank 1. Kim Hajin

Rank 2. Rachel

...

...

===

My name was on top of every exam and the overall rankings.

Not just in Veritas class, but in the entire academy.

“Kuhum.”

Feeling awkward, I let out a dry cough as I stole a glance at Rachel. She was sitting behind me with her face buried on her desk. I could faintly hear her sigh and murmur in English, 'I should have worked harder.'

"Also, I hope everyone knows that we have new classes."

Yi Yeonghan added.

"Look at the first year announcements if you haven't. Starting from today, Fridays will have two classes."

For first-year cadets, classes changed after their first semester midterms. It was Cube's way of giving cadets a diverse selection of classes.

In addition, magicians would join in from the second semester and cadets would be able to choose the classes they wanted to take. In reality, they were taking classes that fit their roles.

I turned on my smartwatch.

The new class today was [Practical Magic and Intermediate Rank Magic Power Control]

*Drrrrrk—*

The door opened and the Phenomenon Realm Analysis professor walked in. The noisy classroom instantly fell silent.

"Take your seats."

The Phenomenon Realm Analysis professor peeked at the scrolls on the wall and grinned.

"I'm sure you've all seen the exam results."

The cadets groaned slightly.

"Now, now, your tests were easier than the ones I give to college students. Also, Kim Hajin cadet."

Suddenly, the professor pointed at me. Others also followed his finger and turned

towards me.

“An unconventional outlook and logical judgment, I could see true ‘wisdom’ from your answers. Frankly, I can’t believe you’re only 16. You’re good enough to be writing thesis papers for graduation.”

If the professor’s praise ended there, I would have simply been happy. After all, it was the first time I was being praised for doing well on an exam.

“Since today is the first class after exams, I will give a quick lecture using Kim Hajin cadet’s answer sheet and call it a day.”

But for some reason, he put up my answer sheet on the screen.  
I was caught completely off guard.

“Now, take a look at this answer. He wrote, if monsters had linguistic abilities...”

The class continued. I put my hands over my face, feeling it heat up and ready to explode.



It was now 3:30 in the afternoon and the time for Friday’s second class. 98 cadets of the Veritas class were gathered at the Magic Library.

The chief magician in charge of the class was waiting in an empty lecture room, which only had desks and chairs in case of a magic accident.

“Hello, I am the chief magician from Seoul Magic Tower, Kim Hyojun. Every Friday, from 3:30 to 6, I will be teaching you practical magic and magic power control. But of course, today’s class will only be 30 minutes.”

The chief magician introduced himself with a gentle smile. However, I couldn’t help but furrow my brows.

Kim Hyojun was a prick.

He led a successful life as the third generation child of a magic clan, but his talent wasn’t good enough to land him the chief magician seat. Although he ended up becoming one thanks to his clan’s lobbying, that was the limit of his career.

In the end, he acknowledged his limits and turned to education.

But his poor character – arrogance, jealousy, and perverseness – would cause

problems in the future. Eventually, he would even fearlessly touch Chae Nayun while pretending to teach her.

The only good thing about him was that he didn't form a contract with a devil.

[Kim Hyojun – Currently considering a contract with a devil.]

...But he might soon.

“You might be thinking, ‘why should I learn magic when I’m not a magician?’ That’s a valid question, but as I’m sure some of you know, qi reinforcement and sword qi are an extension of magic.”

Kim Hyojun released his magic power into the air as a demonstration. The soft and jellylike magic power he emitted instantly hardened when he concentrated.

“Now, if you simply use your ‘physical power’ to reinforce your magic power, that becomes qi reinforcement or sword qi. But if you refine your magic power with some calculations...”

Immediately, a pink flame rose up from his magic power.

Cadets instantly exclaimed in awe.

“It becomes magic.”

Kim Hyojun smiled.

“Even if you can’t wield magic of this level, you will learn to use more practical magic, or learn to wield things like qi reinforcement and sword qi more naturally. Since today is the first class, we will only go over what we will learn in the future.”

Suddenly, a blue sphere the size of a ping-pong ball shot up from his palm.

“This is a necessary magic to learn before entering a Dungeon. It’s called Light Sphere. It will be your light source in many dark areas. It may look simple at first glance, but to wield it skillfully...”

Kim Hyojun gave a complicated explanation.

To simplify things a bit, we had to compress magic power and air into a spherical shape that lights up.

“Now, before I teach you where to begin, try doing it yourself.”

Cadets began to emit their magic power.

I stared at my desk blankly before joining my hands and thinking, ‘Appear, sphere of light. Appear, sphere of light.’

Stigma’s magic power didn’t require intense focus or complex calculations. Soon, Stigma’s magic power flowed down into my hands and formed a white sphere of light. The cute sphere floated around on my palm.

*Wiing—*

At that moment, my smartwatch vibrated. Startled, I canceled the Light Sphere.

“Please turn off your smartwatches during class.”

Kim Hyojun’s disgruntled gaze fell on me.

“Sorry.”

I bowed slightly and checked my smartwatch.

It was a message from Yoo Yeonha.

[Um, we can’t do something like that yet. If you show people what you just did, they’re going to misunderstand~]

“What.”

I quickly scanned the room and found Yoo Yeonha sitting diagonally from me. When her eyes met mine, she smiled sweetly and mouthed silently.

‘Amazing. You did that after listening to his explanation once?’

After hearing her sarcastic remark, I glanced at the cadets around me. Less than half of the cadets were able to compress their magic power into a sphere, and even those who succeeded couldn’t maintain the form for long. No one was even close to being able to make the sphere shine.

“W-Whoa!”

At that moment, a nameless cadet suddenly shouted.

In the frontmost seat, blue light was shining from the Light Sphere in his hand.

Other cadets exclaimed in shock, while Kim Hyojun’s face stiffened. After staring at Kim Suho’s Light Sphere for a good minute, he suddenly snapped.

“Stop.”

Oh right, this was the reason Kim Hyojun came to be jealous of Kim Suho.

Kim Hyojun scowled for a moment but he quickly straightened his face before continuing in a kind tone.

“...If you make it like that, you’ll be overburdening your magic power. Now, pay attention everyone. I’ll give a more detailed explanation.”

Kim Hyojun then began to give Kim Suho a private lesson. It seemed he wanted to test Kim Suho’s limits.

While I was watching them quietly, Yoo Yeonha sent me another message.

[It must look like child’s play. You can easily make brilliant white light, while someone else is being praised for what’s really only a faint glow.]

“...What is she saying.”

I ignored Yoo Yeonha’s alien talk.



The next day, 12:30 P.M. on Saturday.

I arrived at the traveling club’s meeting place. Most of the others were already here. They seemed excited it was an overnight trip.

“Hajin-ssi is here too. Alright, let’s form our teams before setting off.”

The club leader, Oh Hanhyun, took out a box for drawing lots just like before. According to the original story, Kim Suho would be paired up with Yoo Yeonha. I didn’t care about the rest.

“First, Suho-ssi? Please step out. You’ll be drawing lots first.”

I was still a bit nervous. Hopefully, everything was the same as in the original story. Now, who will Kim Suho pick?



France, Paris.

I stepped foot in this European country for the first time ever. Thanks to Seoul-Paris Portal, we only needed ten seconds to arrive.

“So it really is a bit different.”

Paris’ scenery looked like what I saw in pictures, but it was also different than what I had seen in the old world. Around the Eiffel Tower were buildings built with state-of-the-art technology, and Paris Hero Academy’s cadets were around the streets with swords and spears.

For the record, France was the leader of the European Union in my story. It just showed how well-operated France’s Hero system was.

“Korean cadets, over here!”

When we were looking around Paris’ scenery, someone called us over. Turning to the direction of the voice, we saw a limousine. The club leader, Oh Hanhyun, walked up to the limousine with a hearty laugh.

“Nice to meet you. You must be Raymond.”

“Yes, nice to meet you.”

“Can we drop off our bags real quick before we take a look around the city?”

The man name Raymond nodded with a smile. We stuffed our bags into the limousine.

“Now, we’ll travel in the pairs we formed.”

I was paired up with Chae Nayun. I didn’t know why, it just happened that way. It was good that Kim Suho became paired with Yoo Yeonha like in the original story, but I wasn’t too comfortable being Chae Nayun’s pair.

“Alright, it’s 1 P.M. right now... so meet back here at 7.”

Then, Oh Hanhyun left with the girlfriend he brought on the trip using his authority as the club leader, as she wasn’t a member of the traveling club. They were likely going to the masquerade party happening later today.

“...”

Chae Nayun stared at Kim Suho with a wistful look before walking up to me.

“Hey, where do you want to go?”

She asked me.

“I’m getting lunch.”

Since I was in France, I had to try its gourmet food. I had already researched several places since I was excited for my first Europe visit. After looking through several pamphlets, I even used the Book of Truth to find the best place to eat.

“Lunch? I guess it is about that time. Where are you going?”

“...You’re coming with me?”

Chae Nayun didn’t seem to mind coming with me. It was surprising, considering there were rumors that she practiced archery with pictures of my face on the target.

“We drew lots and what’s done is done. What, do you want to split up?”

“...Oh right.”

Come to think of it, Chae Nayun had no sense of direction. She would get lost as easily as a five-year-old in a forest. She could find her way home from desolate places using her magic power and scent, but places she visited for the first time were like mazes to her.

“What’s right?”

“Nothing. Just follow me.”

Chae Nayun crossed her arms as though she doubted my manliness. She pouted and spoke curtly.

“And how do you know where anything is?”

“I know better than you.”

Book of Truth showed only two restaurants – a cheap and delicious restaurant and an expensive restaurant that was worth its cost. I was okay with either, but the latter should fit Chae Nayun’s taste more.

I turned on the GPS guide to the more expensive restaurant.

“Follow me.”

“Hm... Okay, but I’m letting you know, I’m a really picky eater.”

“I know.”

She acted like a tomboy but because she ate only the highest quality food from a young age, her palate was nobler than that of most nobles.

“...How do you know that?”

I ignored her question and walked to the restaurant. Chae Nayun followed after me like a cat.

After walking for about 15 minutes, we arrived at the restaurant.

[Goût Céleste]

I had no clue what it meant, but anyone could see at first glance just how fancy it was.

“Oh, this is the place?”

“Yep.”

“Ooh~”

Chae Nayun and I walked to the entrance. Immediately, a man in a suit stopped us.

“@!#[email protected]#[email protected]#\$”

He was speaking in French, so it only sounded like gibberish. Chae Nayun tilted her head and asked.

“What?”

The man cleared his voice and asked again in Korean.

“Do you have a reservation?”

“Oh, he speaks Korean. Hey, you didn’t make a reservation, right? Don’t you know you need to make reservations for high-end restaurants?”

I opened my laptop silently. I didn’t make a reservation, but I could hack into their reservation list.

Using the laptop’s internet function, I accessed the restaurants’ reservation list. Because I only needed to access a restaurant’s private server, I only had to pay a cheap price.

I found the reservation list and put my name down around a 1 P.M. slot.

“Hey!”

Chae Nayun shouted into my ear. I took my eyes off the laptop and saw Chae Nayun right in front of me. Even up close, I couldn’t see a single flaw in her smooth skin. I swallowed hard.

“Eh? W-What?”

“Reservation. Did you make one?”

Chae Nayun asked again, and I nodded.

“Yeah, I did.”

“...Really?”

“Tell him my name.”

Chae Nayun still looked doubtful but approached the man nonetheless.

“Kim Hajin. Is his name there?”

The man checked his smartwatch.

It seemed he found my name as he let us through with a smile.

“Yes, Kim Hajin and one companion. Welcome.”

“...Oh wow.”

Chae Nayun looked at me in surprise. Then, we walked in together.

“I like the atmosphere.”

I agreed with Chae Nayun. The inside of the restaurant was just as imposing as the outside. A calming classical piece flowed beautifully, while each and every decoration was delicate and elegant.

Customers inside were also wearing dresses and suits, despite it being lunchtime.

“Follow me.”

We followed the waiter and sat down next to a window.

“Welcome to Goût Céleste. Do you need help with the menu?”

“You handle it.”

I let Chae Nayun take over. She took the menu and skillfully finished ordering.

Once the waiter left, silence descended. We were staring at each other but didn't have much to say. Feeling a bit awkward, I turned to the side and looked out the window.

“...What?”

At that moment, I caught sight of an unexpected individual.

# Chapter 49

## Tit for Tat (2)

A familiar face flashed by the window. Although she was covering herself with a mask and sunglasses, I could see through her face.

Vice-leader of Korea's rank 1 guild, Yun Seung-Ah.

She was walking somewhere with a companion.

This was something that didn't happen in the original story. She was someone who shouldn't be here.

"Wait for me here."

"What? Hey, where are you going!?"

Leaving behind the shouting Chae Nayun, I ran out of the restaurant.

Thankfully, Yun Seung-Ah wasn't walking fast. I quickly ran up to her and grabbed her shoulder.

"Hey."

"Huak!"

Startled, she jumped up with an odd scream. Yun Seung-Ah turned around, her head creaking like a machine. When she saw my face, she flinched. She definitely recognized me.

"...W-Who are you?"

She feigned ignorance. Was she here on a mission?

I looked at the person standing next to her, a Caucasian man, but I couldn't recognize him from his outer appearance.

Naturally, I turned on my laptop.

There was an alert as I'd expected.

[Setting change – An ill relationship kindled between Jain and Yun Seung-Ah through

an anonymous informant.]

Jain and Yun Seung-Ah.

I knew their relationship better than anyone else.

It was a cat-and-dog relationship. Jain had the Chameleon Troupe's Yellow seat, and her Gift was specialized in stealing and disguising things.

Solely out of boredom, Jain disguised herself as an old classmate of Yun Seung-Ah and entered Creator's Sacred Grace. Through several events, the two of them would then get extremely close.

Eventually, Jain would become the only one Yun Seung-Ah could call her friend, but she would betray Yun Seung-Ah in a critical moment. While fighting a group of Djinnns over an artifact, she would critically injure Yun Seung-Ah to take the artifact for herself.

I knew that Jain would be infiltrating the VIP masquerade party happening this evening.

It was to steal a certain ring.

Although the ring wasn't worth much at the moment, that was only because its abilities weren't fully awakened. Once its potential exploded, its value would skyrocket immensely.

What made this even more complex was that this ring would eventually belong to Chae Nayun. When she eventually changes her position to a swordsman, her father would gift this item after buying it from the black market.

"Um, I don't know who you are, but we have to go."

Yun Seung-Ah still denied knowing me, and the man next to her separated me from her. He was taller than me by a head.

But...

The man was actually a 'she'.

My eyes saw through her diguise.

Jain Valerin.

She was currently disguised as Yun Seung-Ah's subordinate.

"...Ah."

Yun Seung-Ah was currently standing right next to her fated enemy, but she couldn't recognize her at all. I couldn't help but feel a bit sorry.

“I’m sorry. I must have mistaken you for someone else.”

I bowed in apology.

Since we would meet at the masquerade, I backed away for now.



“That crazy bastard...”

Kim Hajin ran out of the restaurant. Chae Nayun was wondering what illness of his relapsed this time, but since he was always acting strange, she didn’t think too much of it. In truth, the person she was more concerned about was elsewhere. Not to mention, with another girl.

After agonizing over what to do, Chae Nayun held up her smartwatch.

“...Hey, Yeonha, where are you?”

The receiver of her call was none other than Yoo Yeonha, who was paired with Kim Suho.

—Me? I’m shopping. Why?

Shopping. There were too many shops around. Where was she exactly?  
Chae Nayun feigned indifference and asked.

“What shop?”

—I’m buying some clothes.

“A-Alone?”

—No, with Kim Suho.

Yoo Yeonha’s immediate answer made Chae Nayun feel a bit uneasy.

“...What are you doing with him?”

—Hm? I’m just making him try on some clothes. He’s got the face of a model, but you

know how he dresses. So I'm buying him some clothes.

“What? Why are you buying him clothes!?”

Chae Nayun shouted inadvertently.

The gazes of the customers sitting nearby fell on her. Feeling awkward, Chae Nayun modestly dropped her head.

—Huh? What, I can't? It's for the masquerade party we're going to later.

“...No, not that you can't, but you know... it's expensive. You have to save money when you can. If you buy him things, he'll get used to it.”

—... Um, sure... So, Nayun, where are you?

“I'm at a restaurant.”

—With Kim Hajin?

“Yeah, he brought me here. But you know, there aren't many restaurants that fit my taste. I'll just have to endure it like I did with Agent Military Academy's lunch.”

Chae Nayun recalled painful memories of the past. At the Agent Military Academy, the academy's food was the only lunch option for cadets. She would be starving if she didn't eat anything, but she would feel queasy for the entire day if she did...

Chae Nayun let out a light sigh.

—Really? What's the restaurant called?

Chae Nayun looked around the restaurant. There was a sign engraved with the restaurant's name, but she didn't know how to read it.

“I don't know... Hold on.”

The waiter came with the appetizer at just the right time.

“Excuse me, how do you read that?”

“...Yes?”

“The restaurant’s name.”

“Ah, it’s Goût Céleste.”

“Can you say that again here?”

Chae Nayun held up her smartwatch to the waiter. The waiter was slightly dumbstruck but still pronounced the name clearly.

“Goût Céleste.”

“Thank you.”

“Um, have you perhaps not heard about our restaurant?”

“Hm? Ah, no.”

Chae Nayun shooed the waiter away and went back to her conversation with Yoo Yeonha.

“Hey, did you hear that?”

—... Did I hear that right? Goût Céleste? Flavor of Heaven?

Chae Nayun didn’t know whether Yoo Yeonha was talking about the same place, but she said the same thing the waiter did.

“Yeah, I think so. Why? Is this place famous?”

—... Kim Hajin brought you there? How?

“Hah?”

Because of Yoo Yeonha’s odd reaction, Chae Nayun tilted her head.

—I tried to make a reservation and failed. Even with a VIP membership, you need to make a reservation at least a week in advance.

“Really? Is this place that famous?”

—Ehew...

Chae Nayun’s innocent question caused Yoo Yeonha to let out a deep sigh. But Chae Nayun, who didn’t care about such things, truthfully had no way of knowing how famous this restaurant was.

—That’s De Jubon’s restaurant. You know, the cooking Hero.

“Ah?”

De Jubon. Chae Nayun had heard of the name before.

There were all sorts of Gifts in the world and all sorts of Heroes. De Jubon was special even among the countless number of Heroes. He was lauded as the Hero who could move people with just his food.

It was said that Djinn and Heroes were equal in front of De Jubon’s food.

—Paris’ Goût Céleste is his flagship restaurant, so it should be him cooking and not his apprentices.

“...”

“This place was that amazing?” Chae Nayun became lost for words.

—Oh right, Nayun, do you remember being in Kim Hajin’s class in the third year of Agent Military Academy?

“Eh? Was I?”

—You didn’t know?

“No, not at all. How am I supposed to know that?”

That was something she had no memory of. Not to mention, she was entirely focused on training at the time.

—... I see. Well, since you’re there, enjoy the food. Ah, don’t forget to take pictures of every dish before you eat. I want to see them later.

Yoo Yeonha's voice carried a clear envy.

“Uh, um, yeah.”

—Mkay, I'm hanging up.

‘Should I be happy? Or should I feel uncomfortable?’ The call ended before Chae Nayun could make up her mind.

Chae Nayun stared at the appetizer in front of her. It was a simple soup and salad, but for some reason, they seemed to glisten like jewels.

Picking up her spoon, she slowly scooped up a spoonful and took a sip.

The moment her tongue made contact with the soup, her eyes widened and her body trembled.

“...”

She was at a complete loss for words.

So this was the reason De Jubon came to be called the world's greatest cook, the so-called ‘flavor of mana’.

Just a single spoon was enough to shock her refined palate. At that moment, Kim Hajin came back.

“It's already here?”

He sat back down on his seat and picked up his spoon.

Chae Nayun carefully stared at him.

She had too many questions she wanted to ask.

First was how he managed to make a reservation.

Yoo Yeonha said even VIP members needed to make a reservation a week in advance, but Kim Hajin had done it.

It was strange. Even if he had a VIP membership, the announcement for the trip only came out four days ago.

It was unlikely that Oh Hanhyun told him about the club's trip beforehand...

Suddenly, a thought flashed in her head. She recalled her conversation with Kim Hajin twenty or so minutes ago.

—Hm... Okay, but I'm letting you know, I'm a really picky eater.

—I know.

Kim Hajin said he “knew” that I was a picky eater. In other words, he must have planned on taking me here from the start...

Even though pairs were chosen by drawing lots, it was something that could be easily manipulated if he talked to the club leader beforehand.

“Hmm...”

Chae Nayun gave Kim Hajin a meaningful glare.

“Hey, where did you go?”

“...Hm? Oh, I just thought I saw someone I knew, but it turns out I was mistaken.”

“There’s someone you know in Paris?”

“Something like that.”

Kim Hajin gave a short reply.

“How did you make a reservation for this place? I heard it’s really famous. Did this acquaintance of yours help you?”

At her words, Kim Hajin’s hands shook slightly, and it didn’t escape Chae Nayun’s eyes.

“Um, yeah. Anyways, aren’t you going to eat?”

Kim Hajin quickly changed the subject.

“...I will.”

The lunch continued. The two of them ate without further conversation.

Once the appetizer disappeared from their plates, the waiter came back with the main entrée.

Chae Nayun’s suspicion was quickly melted away by the transcendental flavor of De Jubon’s food.



“Whew, I’m stuffed.”

Chae Nayun and I came out of the restaurant. As expected of a course menu, food streamed in endlessly over an hour, and I was stuffed full as a result. Of course, I could have stopped eating in the middle, but the food was too good to pass up.

It was a good experience.

I had to thank this world for letting me try this heavenly flavor.

“...Hey.”

When I was rubbing my puffed up belly, Chae Nayun suddenly called my name. Just like me, she had a satisfied expression.

“What.”

“Thanks for the food.”

“...Don’t be. You paid for it.”

Chae Nayun insisted on paying for the food, saying that it was only natural since I made the reservation. The bill came up to 700 euros, but she paid for it nonetheless.

“The membership fee must be expensive, so it’s the least I can do.”

Chae Nayun said so as she glanced at me from head to toe.

I didn’t know what she meant by membership fee, but I just nodded understandingly.

“Right.”

“...So, where are you going now?”

At her words, I glanced at my watch. It was almost 3:00.

Since the masquerade started at 5:00, I needed to go now and look around the venue for a good place to observe the inside.

“Do you want to split up now?”

I had to keep my eyes out on the masquerade party. To do so, I had to get away from Chae Nayun.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. I’ll go ahead first.”

Chae Nayun nodded and started walking the opposite direction.

“Hello. Yeah, Yeonha, where are you? I’ll meet up with you guys.”

With my Gift, I could hear Chae Nayun’s voice even from a distance.

—What about Kim Hajin?

She was obviously talking to Yoo Yeonha.

“We just split up.”

—Huh? Why? We still have time left.

“It just felt awkward being alone with him. I don’t know what to say either. By the way, can I also go to that masquerade party you were talking about?”

Chae Nayun’s final words caught my attention.  
The masquerade party... wasn’t in that direction.



Yun Seung-Ah quickly ran away to a nearby café. After ordering two cups of coffee, she took a seat and breathed out a deep sigh.

“Whew, that surprised me. Why did he pop out of there...?”

Her heart was still pounding from an earlier encounter.

“Who was that?”

“A cadet. Someone I’ve seen before. His name is Kim Hajin.”

“...Is he any good?”

At her subordinate's question, Yun Seung-Ah gave a firm nod.

"He's all the talk recently. Last week I think it was? A video of his duel was released to the guild community. He shattered a qi reinforcement using a single bullet. I'm pretty annoyed by the whole thing. I was the one who noticed his talents first."

Yun Seung-Ah complained with glaring eyes.

"Haha... That aside, do you think that woman will really come to today's masquerade party?"

"Yeah, she will. I know it."

The subordinate furrowed his brows at Yun Seung-Ah's confident reply.

"...How can you be so sure? Was it the informant?"

"No, it has nothing to do with the informant. That woman just likes parties, especially if there are things to steal."

"I see..."

The subordinate answered somewhat bitterly. Yun Seung-Ah stared at him fixedly and asked.

"Why, do you want to know the informant's name?"

"...No."

"To be honest, I don't know either."

Yun Seung-Ah smiled as she leaned on her chair.

"It's not just one or two people who have animosity for that woman."

"That's good." The subordinate put on a thin smile and asked another question.

"...What will you do if you capture that woman?"

Yun Seung-Ah's answer was simple.

“What will I do? Nothing. I'll just hand her over to the Association... Ah, let's get going. It's 4. I have to buy a dress too.”

# Chapter 50

## Tit for Tat (3)

The masquerade party was happening at a castle in Paris constructed by a rich magnate. I positioned myself on a hill that overlooked the castle. In terms of distance, I was probably about a kilometer away.

In any case, my job today was simple. I just had to make sure the story progressed as it should. If possible, I hoped that everything would go according to the original storyline without me having to interfere.

5 P.M.

The sun had yet to set, but the masquerade had already begun. Luxurious cars arrived at the castle one by one, and people adorned in flamboyant dresses and masks went inside.

I checked Kim Suho and Yoo Yeonha's location by hacking into their smartwatches' GPS system. They were getting near.

5:30 P.M.

Two people got off of a limousine. It was Yun Seung-Ah and Jain. They were wearing masks resembling a fox and a tiger. They walked into the castle, led by a chauffeur.

Not long afterwards, Kim Suho and Yoo Yeonha arrived. Fully adorned in party clothes, their perfect figures shone brilliantly even with their faces covered.

"...Hm."

Looking at all the masks, I couldn't help but feel that my face was too empty. I had the feeling I should wear my own mask. After all, if I had to interfere in today's events, I had to conceal my identity to ensure my safety.

Although I didn't have a mask prepared, I could just use Aether to create one. Aether had the ability to transform into any equipment its user wished. Naturally, it was able to become a mask.

The question was its design.

I recalled a movie I saw on Earth. A mask from the movie Black Panther... though, it was really more of a helmet.

In any case, Aether transformed into the form I pictured in my head. I put on the Black Panther helmet, which then adjusted itself to fit snugly around my face.

6 P.M.

The air was becoming chilly as the sun began to set. The castle looked even more beautiful as it burned from the setting sun. I began to observe the castle's interior more carefully.

Almost as if I was inside, I could see everything clearly and hear every conversation. This came from the synergy between 「Thousand-Mile Eyes」 and 「Observation and Reading」 .

—I don't know how to dance.

—So what, you're going to just stand around after coming all the way here?

—... Well, I guess I'm a quick learner.

Kim Suho followed Yoo Yeonha's lead as they danced to a classical piece.

At the same time, I discovered a strange movement of magic power on the other side of the castle.

It was a Magic Portal.

“...I knew it wouldn't be so easy.”

Only Djinns could make such artificial portals. Even among Djinns, one had to be beloved by their contracted devil to have enough magic power to operate a Magic Portal.

An alert popped up on my laptop.

[Homer's Ring – Mythical grade artifact. It doesn't make sense that only a few people would aim for it just because it hasn't fully awakened its power.]

[Modified setting – The Djinn group, Evil Society, has identified its origin and will interfere in the story.]

The situation was becoming more complex.

I turned my gaze back to Jain.

She was infiltrating the underground vault of the party's host. The security guards surrounding the vault were already taken out.

—Let's see...

Iris scanners, fingerprint scanners, and password locks were all useless in front of Jain's Gift. She easily opened the door to the vault, and from the countless number of treasures, she put a blue diamond and a ring into her magic pouch. She then returned to the masquerade party.

Everything that happened so far was in the original story. The only difference was the arrival of Evil Society. If Jain could safely escape the masquerade party, I could go back, feeling relieved.

But...

—Yoren, where are you going?

Yun Seung-Ah appeared out of nowhere and grabbed Jain's arm. Jain, who was about to leave the party, flinched momentarily, but soon returned to pretending to be Yoren.

—I went to the bathroom.

—Oh, well, I have something to talk to you about. Follow me.

Yun Seung-Ah grabbed Jain's wrist. The exit was right in front of her, but for now, Jain followed Yun Seung-Ah obediently.



“...Um, vice-leader?”

Jain was led to an empty room on the second floor of the castle. Confused, she called Yun Seung-Ah's name. The only thing in the somewhat worn room was a single bed and some dimly lit lanterns. Clearly, the place was made for a secret love affair.

“W-Why here?”

“You know why.”

Acting coquettishly, Yun Seung-Ah pulled Yoren’s wrist and pushed him on the bed. While Yoren stared at her, she closed the door and pulled her hair up in a ponytail. If it was the real Yoren, he would have been thrilled.

“I, um...”

Yun Seung-Ah mounted Jain in a somewhat lewd position. Then, she slowly took off Jain’s mask and lowered her head to his revealed face.

“Yoren...”

Yun Seung-Ah’s breath caressed Jain’s face.  
But, Jain could feel the slight killing intent hidden behind Yun Seung-Ah’s mask.

“You won’t trick me a second time.”

Yun Seung-Ah shoved her hand under the bed sheet.

*Shiiing—*

A well-sharpened sword glistened in the dim light.  
Hearing the chilling sound, Jain quickly pushed Yun Seung-Ah off.

“Vice-leader, what are you—”

Before she could finish, Yun Seung-Ah’s sword struck down. Jain used an emergency dagger she carried around to stop the attack.

Sword and dagger.

The weight and size of the two weapons were different, but the density of magic power enveloping them was equal.

*BOOM!*

The surroundings shook from the fierce collision.

“You’re making a mistake, vice-leader... Uk!”

Yun Seung-Ah’s foot hooked towards Jain who was continuing to feign ignorance. Jain

was sent flying by the kick, and Yun Seung-Ah pounced after her like a ferocious beast. Although Jain bought time for herself by running around in all directions, Yun Seung-Ah was more tenacious and nimble than ever.

“Ak!”

Eventually, Yun Seung-Ah got on top of Jain and was about to strike down with her sword, when a whip suddenly flew in and restrained her sword.

“A lover’s quarrel shouldn’t be so noisy.”

Yun Seung-Ah and Jain both turned their gaze to the direction of the elegant voice. The door had opened before they noticed, and a girl wearing a cat mask was standing there.

It was Yoo Yeonha.

“I am a Hero cadet from Cube.”

She had walked upstairs to find a bathroom, hearing the sound of clashing metal during the process.

She would have normally ignored it, but she had gotten tired of Kim Suho’s clumsy dancing and was tempted by the chance to improve her image as a cadet who showed Korean cadet’s excellence in a foreign country.

“If you put your weapon down, I’ll make sure there is no bloodshed.”

Yoo Yeonha added strength to her whip as she spoke leisurely.

Her whip seemed to want to snatch Yun Seung-Ah’s sword, so Yun Seung-Ah ignited her magic power on her sword. Immediately, her magic power burned fiercely and scorched Yoo Yeonha’s whip to cinders.

The only thing left of Yoo Yeonha’s whip was black ash.

“...Oh.”

In a daze, Yoo Yeonha took a few steps back.

“Uh...”

‘I, I got too cocky just because I was in France. I should have known, Korea isn’t the

only country with powerful people.'

Yoo Yeonha felt her lips dry up. Hoping the woman's sinister sword qi wouldn't aim for her, Yoo Yeonha bowed in a ninety-degree angle.

"I will be on my way now. Please do continue what you were doing."

With that, Yoo Yeonha backed away stealthily before making a dash for it.

"DIE!"

The fight then continued.

Enraged, Yun Seung-Ah's sword struck down repeatedly. Each time her sword clashed with Jain's dagger, lightning crackled and flames ignited.

The roaring sound called people together, spectators and security guards quickly rushing to the room.

"Don't just watch and help! Uwaak!"

Jain tried her best to withstand Yun Seung-Ah's demon-like attacks, but it was difficult to combat a sword with her short dagger. As time passed, she was driven to a corner. Jain became desperate enough to ask the spectators for help.

However, security guards couldn't even dream of joining in such a fierce and ostentatious battle.

"Uk!"

In the end, Jain's dagger was unable to endure, breaking in half. Just when Yun Seung-Ah was about to make her final strike, someone stole the sword hanging by a security guard's waist.

Immediately afterward, a single streak of light shot through the air and cut in between Jain and Yun Seung-Ah. Kim Suho had used a security guard's sword to block Yun Seung-Ah's Flame Sword.

"Who are you? Back off before I cut you down."

Kim Suho didn't budge even at Yun Seung-Ah's solemn warning.

He wanted to become a Hero to protect people. His firm conviction couldn't be shaken

so easily.

“I refuse.”

“...Don't say I didn't warn you.”

Currently, Yun Seung-Ah was half-covered by her mask. It was the same for Kim Suho. As a result, they were unable to recognize each other.

“I don't know the reason you want to kill him, but...”

“Move!”

“Uuk!”

The current Yun Seung-Ah didn't know mercy. She kicked Kim Suho's solar plexus without a shred of hesitation, and Kim Suho knelt down on one leg as he staggered from the shock.

“Ah, hey! You stop right there!”

But thanks to Kim Suho, Jain managed to find an opening to jump out the window.

“See you later, crazy bitch... Eh?”

However, her attempt to jump out the window stayed an attempt.

From beneath the window, a thick darkness gushed up at Jain.

The darkness swallowed Jain, who was about to escape, then spat her back out into the room.

“...”

The darkness dyed the room in black. Yun Seung-Ah who was furious, Kim Suho who was writhing in pain, and Yoo Yeonha who ran away sullenly all held their breath and stared at the darkness.

Then, from the darkness, a figure of a man emerged.



“...Damn it”

On the other hand, Chae Nayun was comparing her surroundings to the map on her smartwatch. After every couple of steps, she stopped to check her watch before continuing on her way. Eventually, she saw a familiar sign.

[Goût Céleste]

“What!? This is where I ate lunch!!”

She raged. After walking for hours, she had arrived in the same place she started from.

“I can’t believe this.”

She stared at her smartwatch, fuming. If a user got lost after looking at a map, the problem lied with the map.

“What company made this!? Damn it...”

Chae Nayun’s anger fell on the smartwatch Cube provided. She flipped her smartwatch harshly and saw the word inscribed on the back.

‘Daehyun’.

It was her father’s company.

“ .. ”

Chae Nayun called Yoo Yeonha once again.

“Kuuuk... Why isn’t she picking up!?”



“So this is the item containing ancient wisdom...”

The Djinn who appeared from the darkness held up a ring. The setting sun gave the ring a faint red glow. It was the ring Jain had put in her magic pouch.

“Ah, when did you take... Ak!”

After checking her magic pouch, Jain muttered despondently. Yun Seung-Ah immediately ran up to Jain, grabbing her by her hair before pointing her sword at the Djinn.

“Put that down.”

“Haha.”

The Djinn made a magnanimous smile. Yun Seung-Ah became nervous. It was obvious at first glance that the Djinn was completely different than a human. Reddish black skin and blood-red eyes. A Djinn’s appearance strayed further from a human’s the more one was engulfed by a devil. From his appearance, Yun Seung-Ah could estimate his strength.

“This item isn’t something that suits people like you.”

A few days ago, Evil Society had confirmed this item’s location and potential through an informant.

Homer’s Ring – a cradle of wisdom that amplified all abilities involving magic power. They didn’t expect someone else to steal the ring, but all was well since they managed to get their hands on it without much effort.

“Now then.”

When the Djinn was about to put away the ring in satisfaction...

*Whish—*

A streak of light broke through the window and enveloped the ring. In the blink of an eye, the ring was snatched away, disappearing outside the window.

“W-What!?”

The Djinn screamed and turned to the direction the ring flew out.

Outside the window, on a faraway hill, he caught sight of someone who was holding onto a wire-like object.

Someone... wearing a mask of a beast.

That someone, Kim Hajin, put on a thin smile.

# Chapter 51

## Change of Heart (1)

—So this is that ancient artifact...

The ring was snatched by the Evil Society's Djinn. Now that it was in their hands, the chances of Yun Seung-Ah or Kim Suho taking it back were grim.

I had no other choice. Even if I had to attract the Djinn's attention, I had to make my move.

I compressed a portion of Aether around my hand, weaving it into a wire.

As Aether changed its form according to its owner's will, it was both with and without form at the same time.

The only problem was that the wire wasn't long. In fact, it was short enough to fit in one hand. But when I threw this 'Aether wire', it would elongate accordingly.

That said, the wire was still unlikely to reach the castle. Although 'throwing' was included in the scope of Master Sharpshooter, I didn't have the strength to fuel the throw.

Thankfully, I could use Stigma's magic power to make up for what my physical body lacked.

I concentrated magic power on my right arm. The two streaks of Stigma I had radiated an intense light. There was no need to go easy. I poured 80% of my remaining magic power and converted it into kinetic energy.

My strength remained the same. Stigma's magic power only amplified the kinetic energy. It didn't increase my physical ability. Thus, I didn't know how powerful my throw would be. I only knew that it would be more powerful than Kim Horak.

"Huap!"

I threw the wire with a spirited shout.

My target was Homer's Ring, which was being held by the Djinn.

In an instant, the short dagger-length wire elongated immensely, moving like it was

alive and snatching its target. Immediately afterward, I pulled the wire back.

*Whoosh—*

The wire shot back in the blink of an eye and fell into my hand.

As expected of an ancient artifact, there wasn't even a scratch on the ring.

"Nice shot."

At first, I smiled in satisfaction, but my smile quickly disappeared.

It was because of the wire's unexpected destructive power.

To make the wire reach the castle, I had no choice but to throw it in an arc. Because of it, the wire didn't only snatch the ring. During the process, it severed a portion of the castle's walls, and on its way back, it swept through the floor, slicing apart the foundational base of the castle.

As a result, part of the castle's second floor crumbled down.

I watched the unexpected scenery in a daze.

Although I didn't intend for this to happen, my heart immediately dropped a beat. I hoped no one was hurt by my carelessness.

However, I didn't have time to worry about others.

The Evil Society's Djinn was looking at me directly. It was extremely unlikely that he could see through my mask, but I knew I had to leave as quickly as possible.

I began to run using the escape route I prepared beforehand.

"OY!"

When I was hurriedly plowing through tall grass, someone shot down from the sky in front of me. It was a Djinn who looked like a Caucasian man. Blocking the path in front of me, he glared with killing intent.

"You see this, right?"

He tapped on his waist, where a bladeless hilt of a dagger was hanging.

I knew what it was – a magic sword.

It was a weapon created using state-of-the-art magic engineering technique. This weapon was often used by people who were confident in their magic power. As long as one's magic power capacity was large enough, it would display greater power than

most low-rank artifacts.

Now, it just so happened that an exponential increase in magic power was the most basic benefit someone gained from becoming a Djinn.

“If you know what this is, you better hand that thing over.”

Without waiting for my answer, he pulled out his magic sword. He looked a bit funny holding just a sword hilt, but a magic sword’s might wasn’t something to scoff at, especially for my current self.

“Um, why don’t we talk it out? I can just give it to you.”

“Why should I? I can just kill you and take it.”

“But weren’t you talking like you wanted to negotiate just now?”

“Was I?”

The Djinn sneered and imbued his magic sword with magic power.

*Wiing—*

Just like a lightsaber, a blade of magic power shot up from the hilt. But that only lasted for a second. The sword’s blade flickered, then disappeared.

“...What?”

Confused, he imbued his magic power again, but nothing changed. Just like a lightbulb that exhausted its energy, the magic power blade flickered and disappeared.

I immediately realized what was going on.

“Hahaha. Hahaha.”

With a hearty laugh, I transformed Desert Eagle into the shotgun mode.

“W-What’s wrong with this thing...!”

Flustered, the Djinn swung his sword hilt aimlessly, but there was no way that a state-of-the-art weapon would fix itself by being swung.

“Well, you see, that weapon won’t work today.”

I scraped together what little magic power I had left and converted it to the magic power of light. This white magic power would flow into the shotgun shell and obliterate the Djinn.

“Because I’m very lucky.”

“...Shut it! Even without a weapon—”

*KWANG.*

The shotgun shell perfectly struck his head.



On the other hand, Chae Nayun was sitting on a bench near the traveling club’s meeting place.

She had long since given up on finding the masquerade party. It was already 7 P.M., but Yoo Yeonha and Kim Suho were nowhere to be seen.

“...Tsk.”

She wasn’t bothered that they were missing, but for some reason, she felt anxious. But because she didn’t know why she was feeling anxious, she was killing time playing a game.

[Leveling-up Monster]

It was an RPG game that came out only a few days ago. It wasn’t a VR game, but a mobile game, making it convenient to play on her smartwatch. But it wasn’t fun. It was pretty interesting at first, but her thoughts kept wandering. Just what were they doing at the masquerade party that they weren’t picking up her call?

“...Where are all these police going?”

Because siren noises constantly rang out, she couldn’t focus on the game either. In the end, Chae Nayun turned it off and checked her messenger app. No new messages had arrived.

“Haa.”

'I'm upset, but why am I upset?'

When Chae Nayun was sighing in annoyance, someone sat down next to her. Chae Nayun turned her head to that direction.

"...What's up with you?"

It was Kim Hajin, but his face was pale and he was covered in cold sweat. Clearly, he was exhausted.

"Are you sick?"

Chae Nayun asked out of courtesy. Then, Kim Hajin stared at her silently.

"...What? Answer me."

"I'm a bit tired."

"What?"

"Well... I can't move my body."

Kim Hajin smirked. Then, he suddenly closed his eyes and leaned on Chae Nayun.

"Whoa!"

Chae Nayun quickly moved out of the way, afraid that his sweat would touch her. Consequently, Kim Hajin fell down on the bench.

"H-Hey! What are you scheming—"

"Ah, Nayun-ssi. You're here."

At that moment, Oh Hanhyun arrived with his girlfriend. His face was grim.

"Club leader? Why are you so late?"

"So you didn't know. Something happened nearby. Kim Suho-ssi and Yoo Yeonha-ssi are being questioned."

“Eh?”

Chae Nayun’s jaws dropped. She thought, ‘just what the hell happened while I was gone?’

“Ah, it’s nothing serious. They weren’t injured, and since their identities are clear, they’ll be released soon.”

With that, Oh Hanhyun glanced at the bench, where Kim Hajin was panting.

“...What happened to him?”

“I don’t know. He came here just now and suddenly collapsed.”

“Hmm.”

Oh Hanhyun approached him and placed his hand on his forehead.

It was hot.

“Babe, can you take a look at him?”

“...Babe?”

Chae Nayun grimaced. Oh Hanhyun smiled somewhat embarrassedly, then the ‘babe’ standing next to him stepped up.

“I introduced her before, right? She’s my girlfriend, Natasha.”

“Ah... Yeah, um, that’s a pretty name.”



Father’s face suddenly popped up. His black hair carried a few strands of grey.

It was a face from 8 years ago, or perhaps even longer before.

It was the once in a lifetime trial and task that every high school senior in Korea had to face – the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT).

I had bombed the test magnificently.

I must have expected it before I even took the exam, as I told my parents, who insisted

on coming to pick me up, to stay home.

Mom and Dad said yes and returned home.

After the exam ended, I trudged to the school gate. It was then that I saw him.

—Hajin.

Father was looking at me with a warm smile. Riding the same car he had used for 10 years, he was looking at me with an aged face.

I immediately broke out into tears because I felt sorry.

Father had never once consoled me before, but on that day, he patted my back and said just two words.

—It's okay.

“...Is he okay?”

The voice that overlapped with Father's must be Chae Nayun's.

I opened my eyes.

“Ah, he just woke up. Eh? He's crying?”

Chae Nayun pointed at me as she snickered. I raised my hand and touched my eyes. It was wet.

“Did it hurt that much? What, did you catch an illness?”

“...”

Annoyed, I glared at Chae Nayun. Was it because of the dream? I didn't feel too good.

“W-What?”

“...Just get back.”

Thankfully, Kim Suho pulled Chae Nayun away from me.

I raised my head and looked out the window. It was already dark outside.

“Are you okay?”

A Caucasian woman asked as she looked down at me. It was probably Oh Hanhyun's girlfriend.

"Yes, I'm okay..."

"You collapsed from light exhaustion."

I nodded. It would have been weird if I were fine. I had instantly used up two streaks of Stigma and had even raced to the Eiffel Tower like a madman. Not to mention, I took the most roundabout way to avoid people's gazes.

"Where are we?"

"It's your room. You'll be sharing it with Kim Suho-ssi."

The woman's voice was soft and gentle, making me trust her instinctively.  
...This was why you couldn't judge a book by its cover.

"The large mansion that's supposed to be our lodging?"

"Yes, that's right. It's already 10 at night. They said they would prepare dinner if you want."

10 at night.

Thankfully, I managed to wake up before the incident broke out.

"No, I'm fine."

I turned down the offer for a late dinner, and the woman nodded with a smile.

"Then I'll be going. Come with me, Nayun-ssi."

"Eh? Why me?"

"This is the men's room."

After packing up a thermometer and an icepack, the woman left the room with Chae Nayun.

Only then did I have time to look around the room.

It was a fairly large room with two beds and plenty of antique furniture. So I would be sharing this room with Kim Suho.....

“Are you feeling better?”

Kim Suho asked. I turned my wandering eyes to Kim Suho. He was wearing a gentle smile.

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

“I’m glad.”

“..”

It was... awkward.

Without saying anything else, I was about to lie down on the bed when I suddenly recalled what happened just a few hours ago.

I wanted to ask Kim Suho about what I missed, but I had to calm myself first. I was the one who destroyed the castle. As the perpetrator, I had to be careful about what I said.

I picked up my smartwatch, which sat on a shelf next to the bed. I immediately looked up the news.

[Djinn appears in a Paris castle! Cube’s cadets coincidentally present...]

Perhaps because Cube’s cadets were involved, the news spread fast.

I read through the entire report.

Thankfully, no one was killed or critically injured. It was also reported that Djinns had demolished the castle.

Fantastic.

It seemed Jain managed to get away as nothing about her was written on the report. I swallowed the sense of relief rising from the depths of my heart.

“Hey.”

“Hm?”

I projected the report I was reading so Kim Suho could see. Clearly, I was asking him if he knew anything about it.

“Oh, that?”

He took the bait instantly.

“I can’t tell you anything in detail, but nothing major happened. The Djinns all ran away before the Heroes arrived too.”

“Mm, that’s a relief.”

With that, silence descended once again. Kim Suho must have been bored as he cut an apple and gave it to me. I took it without saying anything.

*Crunch, crunch.*

*Tick, tock.*

The sound of me biting the apple and a ticking clock filled the room.

A bleak wind swept against the window.

Feeling uncomfortable by the awkward atmosphere, I looked out the window. The moon was hiding behind clouds.

Currently, it was 10:15.

In just 2 hours, ‘that incident’ would occur.

“...Hm.”

But it seemed Kim Suho had no plans to leave the chair by my bed. I glanced at him uncomfortably. Then, I discovered a faint scar on his cheek. It was likely from when he stopped Yun Seung-Ah’s attack.

“...Take care of your body more.”

“Huh?”

Kim Suho sounded confused. I pointed at the scar on his cheek.

“You’re the main character. You can’t get too hurt.”

Kim Suho was the main character, the one I created myself. But today, he charged at Yun Seung-Ah fearlessly. In other words, he was almost killed.

Yun Seung-Ah's killing intent was real. If the Djinn appeared a little bit later, Kim Suho might have lost a limb.

Of course, I understood why he did what he did. After all, he was the main character who walked on the path of righteousness.

However, I had doubts.

Whether the main character who only pursued righteousness could end this story, whether he could overcome this twisted story with only his sense of justice.

And...

Whether he could send me home.

"Main character? There is no such thing."

Kim Suho shook his head. He must have heard these words before from people who mocked him sarcastically. I remembered it too.

—Does he think he's some sort of a main character?

Shin Jonghak often liked to say this.

"...Really?"

"Of course. If I'm a main character, you're one too. No, everyone in this world is a main character."

The main character said so.

What he must have said thoughtlessly touched me in a meaningful way. I pondered over his words silently.

"...By the way."

At that moment, Kim Suho, who was staring at me fixedly, carefully spoke up. He seemed to be hesitating. Considering how needlessly nervous he was, this must be what he really wanted to ask me.

"Go on, tell me."

"...The report you wrote for Chae Nayun, I saw it too. You were a bit harsh."

For the record, the report I wrote on Chae Nayun received an A-. Although my criticisms were valid, me telling her to give up on the bow was deemed too harsh, dropping the grade from an A+ to an A-.

“I wasn’t harsh. Chae Nayun isn’t a borne archer. She needs to drop the bow and pick up the sword.”

“...Is that why you made that bet with Chae Nayun?”

“Yeah. If I win, I’m going to make her give up her bow. She said she’d do anything.”

At my determined reply, Kim Suho’s expression stiffened.

“But it’s the path she chose. I don’t think it’s something someone else should decide for her.”

He was both stern and soft at the same time.

I stared at him, and he stared back at me. His eyes were shining brightly with his own will.

His thoughts were different than mine.

But that didn’t mean he was wrong.

“...Then do you want me to encourage and console her, fully knowing that she’s walking to a dead-end?”

“No, that’s not what I—”

Without giving a chance for a rebuttal, I continued.

“You can’t succeed just by hearing encouraging words. What if you reach a dead-end after endlessly toiling away? What if the only thing waiting at the end is a greater despair? Will you take responsibility?”

When I finished, Kim Suho let out a sigh. His breath was full of heat. He then spoke in a low voice as though he was angry.

“How can you be so sure that Chae Nayun isn’t talented with bows, but swords? Are you saying all this because *you* can take responsibility?”

In Kim Suho's perspective, what he said was completely justified. Chae Nayun had trained for countless hours using the bow, but someone who seemingly wasn't close to her was telling her to give it up.

But I was angry.

Chae Nayun was someone I created with affection.

Her appearance, her personality, and even her tiniest hobbies and trauma were my creation. Of course, a few things had changed, but still...

"...I've been thinking about her for far longer than you... And I've been watching over her all this time."

Even if Kim Suho was this world's main character, there was no one else in this entire world who knew Chae Nayun better than me.

"So I know far more about her than you."

"...What?"

A strange light flickered in Kim Suho's eyes.

When we were staring at each other in silence...

—*Thud*

Both Kim Suho and I heard a faint sound coming from the other side of the door. I immediately looked through the wall.

The person running away with a flushed face... was Chae Nayun.

I didn't know from when, but she must have been eavesdropping on our conversation.

A good archer needed to be skilled in 'stealth'.

If anything, she learned that one thing well.

# Chapter 52

## Change of Heart (2)

Chae Nayun slammed the door to her room close, then jumped on her bed. At first, she was going to simply ask the guys out for a night time snack. But when she was about to knock on their door, she heard them having an interesting conversation and ended up eavesdropping instead.

—I've been thinking about her for far longer than you and I've been watching over her all this time. So I know far more about her than you.

It was the first time she had heard something so direct. It was partly because few men were confident enough to approach her, and it was also because she blocked such situations from happening.

“Is he really crazy?”

What Kim Hajin said still lingered by her ears.

‘Should I wash my ears? Or should I have gone in there and smacked his head?’ Chae Nayun bounced around on her bed while striking it repeatedly.

“What’s going on...?”

And Chae Nayun’s seemingly drunk act woke up Yoo Yeonha who was sleeping peacefully.

“Nayun... What are you doing?”

“H-Huh?”

Chae Nayun flinched.

Yoo Yeonha glared at Chae Nayun with narrowed eyes. Why was this woman beating up a poor bedsheet?

“Are you sick or something?”

“I-It’s nothing.”

Chae Nayun couldn’t tell her what she had just heard. She couldn’t even imagine telling someone about such personal matters.

“...Then sleep. I’m tired.”

Muttering so, Yoo Yeonha plopped back down on her back.

“Uh, yeah, good night. I’m going to sleep too.”

Chae Nayun also buried herself under her blanket.

‘Right, it doesn’t matter. I only overheard it anyways. Regardless of what Kim Hajin’s intentions were, I just have to ignore it.’

With such thoughts, Chae Nayun pulled the blanket over her head.

But for some reason, she couldn’t fall asleep.

*Thinking about her... Watching over her all this time...*

Fragments of Kim Hajin’s words kept wandering around her head.

‘Watching over me all this time? Is he a stalker? No, if he is, there’s no way I wouldn’t have noticed him.’

A sharpshooter’s senses were extremely sharp. A stalker was someone who secretly took pictures, followed women late at night, and things like that...

Kyaaaak—!!

Suddenly, a high-pitched voice rang out in the mansion. Chae Nayun opened her eyes abruptly and shot up.

“W-What!? Ah, aaak!”

Yoo Yeonha also got up in shock, tripping on her bedsheet and falling down. With her hands on the floor, she glared at Chae Nayun resentfully.

“Chae Nayun! Y-You!”

“No! It wasn’t me this time!”

“Then who was it!?”

“...Outside.”

Chae Nayun turned the lights on. Just at that moment, lights shone through from under the room, signaling that the lights in the hallway turned on. At the same time, they could hear loud footsteps running around. Yoo Yeonha finally understood the gravity of the situation.

“Was that a real scream?”

“Yeah. Hurry up, we should go.”

Chae Nayun put on a jacket.



Kim Suho ran out of the room the moment the scream rang out. I was just about to follow him when I noticed something and stopped.

Sitting on the shelf was a white handgun. Right, it was my Desert Eagle. I couldn’t put it away because I didn’t have any magic power left, but it seemed someone had taken care of it for me.

“ ... ”

The handgun’s figure struck me with a flash of inspiration.

“With this... No.”

I quickly cast the thought away, but it kept coming back to me.

What Kim Suho told me lingered in my ears.

—If I’m the main character, you are one too.

Unpredictability.

Because I was afraid of this, I was trying my best to stay away from altering the original story.

But even if I didn't think too deeply, I could see that the story was already altered by a certain damned guy.

Right, this world was already full of unpredictability. Worrying about it was foolish.

"...I'm sure it'll work out somehow."

After fighting off my hesitation, I picked up my gun.

Then, I quickly ran down the hallway to the mansion owner's room.

The other 14 members of the traveling club were all standing by the door with shocked expressions.

"T-This..."

In a dark room larger than six ordinary living rooms put together, the mansion owner was lying on his bed with a dagger sticking out of his heart. In front of this horrific scene, a maid was sobbing traumatically. Presumably, she was the one who first discovered the scene.

"Bedel-ssi..."

Kim Suho muttered Belbet's false name. I could understand why everyone was so shocked. During dinner, Belbet must have talked to them like a kind grandfather next door, trying to draw their sympathy by saying stupid things like, 'my son who died before me also wanted to become a Hero.'

"Wait. Let, let me confirm what state he's in."

While the cadets were standing in a daze from shock, Oh Hanhyun's girlfriend appeared.

Natasha the doctor. I closely scrutinized her movements. She slowly approached Belbet and checked his pulse. Then, she shook her head.

"...He's gone."

She closed Belbet's eyes, who died with his eyes open, then returned to Oh Hanhyun's

side. It was laughable seeing her pretend to be sad as she leaned against his shoulder.

“W-What happened...”

At that moment, the head butler ran into the room.

Now, he would break out into tears, talking about all the fake good deeds Belbet has done and reiterating the threats and attempted murder Belbet received from supposed evildoers.

I originally planned on letting the story continue as it did in my novel, but I no longer had the desire to watch this farce.

Belbet was supposed to become a schemer who used his shrewd brain to help out Djinns. Because of the nature of his character, I didn't know what he would do if left alone.

If possible, it was better to get rid of him now.

“S-So they did it! Those bastards...”

“Calm down, head butler.”

While the cadets were busy consoling the sobbing maid and butler, I turned the lights on. Immediately, the room became bright.

“Hey, why did you turn on the light!?”

Seeing the scene of a murder and the bloody corpse, Chae Nayun shouted in surprise. I glanced around the room before slowly walking up to Belbet.

“Excuse me! Don't get close!”

Natasha shouted hastily. Ignoring her, I put on an act of examining Belbet's face and state. I lifted up his clothes to check his wound and pressed down on the bloody bed. Simply put, I was acting like a detective.

“You can't mess up the scene of the crime before the police arrive...”

Unable to endure it any longer, Natasha came over to drag me away. However, I pulled out my gun from my pocket and aimed it at her.

“Don’t come close.”

“...!”

Natasha raised her hand in shock, while the butler, who was crying only a moment ago, shot up and shouted.

“W-What are you doing!?”

It wasn’t only the butler. The cadets gathered here also shouted the same thing. Facing their loud voices directly, I began to get a headache. Was it because I just woke up from exhaustion? I suddenly felt irritated. Gritting my teeth, I shouted.

“SHUT THE FUCK UP!”

Even I was surprised by how loud I was. Silence descended immediately. I let out a sigh, then continued calmly.

“This person is trying to trick us. He’s not dead. He’s in what’s called a state of suspended animation.”

“D-Don’t be stupid. I’m a doctor. What do you know about—”

“I’m going to explain, so shut up and wait.”

I continued with my gun still pointing at Natasha.

“First, this scar is too unnatural. It’s too shallow for someone to have stabbed him from above.”

I just reported what I observed and concluded from the scene. I wasn’t an expert in crime scene investigation, so I could be wrong in all honesty. But since I knew the truth, the process didn’t really matter.

“Next, there’s too much blood. He only has one fatal injury to his heart, but the blood is covering this huge bed and even dripping down to the floor. Almost as if to emphasize that this man was dead.”

I stole a glance at Natasha's expression. She didn't seem agitated yet.

"Finally and most importantly..."

Using my smartwatch, I projected the International Wanted List. I might have lied about everything else, but this was real.

Belbet, the conman.

Although he looked thinner in the photo, the man lying dead on the bed looked similar to the man in the photo.

At this point, the cadets were shaken up.

"Of course, you can argue that they're different people since the man in the photo is so much thinner, but if taking the other two clues into account, you have to think something's up."

"...Head butler, you called the police and ambulance, right?"

However, Natasha was still calm.

The butler quickly retorted to Natasha's question.

"Y-Yes, I called them."

"Then we can just ask them instead of making a fuss like that man."

I couldn't let that happen. Once the bribed police and medical personnel came, Belbet would escape this place safely.

I had to resolve the situation before then.

With a grin, I moved my gun away from Natasha, pointing at Belbet. Only then did Natasha begin to lose her composure.

"W-What are you doing!?"

"What do you mean? I'm going to shoot him."

"The police will be here soon!"

"He's dead anyway, right?"

I put my finger on the trigger.

“T-This scoundrel! Honey, stop him!”

Natasha shook Oh Hanhyun and urged him to step in.

The head butler, Belbet, and Natasha.

They were all on the same boat.

“Um, Hajin...”

Oh Hanhyun spoke up carefully.

“If you move even a single step, I’ll shoot. Especially you, Kim Suho. I’m only looking at you.”

“...Got it.”

Kim Suho, who was slowly approaching me, stopped and raised his hands.

I also made the other cadets back off. Then, I spoke to Natasha.

“It’s loaded with real bullets.”

“We already called the police! Put that gun down!”

Natasha was trembling with her entire body. Her reaction should be enough of a proof, but I still needed something more decisive.

“If you don’t confess by the time I countdown to one, I’m going to shoot. Since he’s dead, it doesn’t matter, right?”

“Confess what!? He’s already dead!”

I began to count.

“Three.”

I diverted my focus to the cadets in case anyone of them would try to do something stupid.

“Two.”

But contrary to my expectations, Kim Suho stayed calm, while the usually timid Oh Hanhyun tried to operate his magic power.

At that moment, someone stepped in and stopped him.

“Wait.”

It was Yoo Yeonha.

Thanks to her, I could finish my countdown.

“One.”

Natasha still didn't react.

“Then he'll have to die.”

*Click.*

I pulled the trigger.

“NO!”

It was just that it wasn't loaded.

But Natasha, who wasn't aware of this, quickly ran up to me and pushed me aside. Then, she prostrated on top of Belbet as if to protect him.”

“Don't shoot! Don't shoot!”

“...Hm.”

I calmly put my gun down. This was enough proof.

Natasha was Belbet's daughter. The reason Belbet, who was constantly on the run, settled in France and how he managed to bring Cube's cadets were all thanks to Natasha.

“Instead of the police, call the Hero Association. Tell them we caught a wanted criminal.”

With that, I loaded my gun, then fired. The magic bullet grazed the leg of the butler

who was running away.

“Aaak!”

After that short scream, only silence remained.  
Feeling the other cadet's gazes, I walked outside.  
My heart was beating crazily.



The assassination incident was a plot devised by Belbet and Natasha. Belbet was a wanted criminal in practically all European countries, and he had formulated this plan to avoid their narrowing investigation. His daughter had coincidentally seduced a pushover cadet from Cube, bearing the plan to fruition.

The so-called operation Return to Life.

Though expensive, there was a medicine that could place someone in a temporary state of suspended animation. As a doctor who was a part of Cube, Natasha could easily get her hands on one.

Everything afterward was supposed to be simple.

Belbet would take the medicine after receiving a fake injury with the help of a fellow conman magician, and spray the crime scene with blood packs. The emergency medical personnel wouldn't be able to tell apart suspended animation from death, and Belbet had already bribed out a local Paris police branch.

Next, during the ambulance ride, Belbet would swap himself with the corpse of a man who looked similar and had the same build.

Afterward, Cube's cadets would take care of the testimony. Cube's cadets carried one of the greatest levels of trust on the planet.

The government workers he bribed would then ensure he was officially dead, and the real Belbet would be reborn under a new name.

All this was something Kim Suho would find out in the future.

But now, I had completely destroyed parts of the story related to Belbet. Belbet was arrested while he was still in a state of suspended animation. When he woke up, he would find himself in jail.

[Belbet, the man you requested to find has been arrested by the French police and is

currently being transported to a local Hero Association branch.]

[Congratulations! As you are our first customer, this question was answered free of charge.]

Currently, it was 9 A.M in the morning.

Crouched down on the ground, I replied to Belbet's victim, who had asked about him on Truth Agency.

"...Are you Sherlock?"

At that moment, a voice rang out.

It was Yoo Yeonha. I smiled without answering her.

In truth, what I said last night was an amateurish deduction at best. But because of the unexpected situation they were in, no one had thought deeply about what I said.

But surprisingly and perhaps thanks to luck, the investigation revealed what I said to be mostly correct.

"The incident with Yun Hyun and now this. You might as well open up a detective agency."

"Sharpshooters have good eyes."

"That's true, but how did you recognize him? Do you have the faces of wanted criminals memorized?"

I flinched. As expected of Yoo Yeonha, she sharply pointed out one of the flaws in my action.

"I apologize. That's a private matter."<sup>[1]</sup>

That was all I could tell her.

"What's up with the sudden polite speech..."

Yoo Yeonha retorted bluntly, then made a meaningful expression. 'Family matter, family matter...' She seemed to be wandering off to her own world of imaginations. At this point, I wasn't even curious what misunderstanding she was cooking up.

But speaking of family affair, I suddenly got curious about my own.

To be more precise, about Kim Chundong's family. All I knew from reading his official record was that he was from an orphanage.

It was probably worth looking into once I got home.

---

1. The word, private matter, can also mean family matter.

# Chapter 53

## Vestige (1)

Evil Society was one of the most notorious Djinn associations in the world, being officially recognized by the UN and the Hero Association as the number 1 wanted group. Although there were groups that were more vicious and wicked than Evil Society, the latter was just too widely known throughout the world.

But that didn't mean that someone purposely spread their name. Their notoriety was the result of their evil doings. They caused countless incidents in countries all over the world. From the Artifact Scramble incident in China to the Suwon Battle in Korea, they participated in human-Djinn wars of every scale.

"Say that again."

Evil Society's hideout was surprisingly not far away.

In an artificial cave under Russia's Vladivostok waters was the hideout Evil Society has kept secret for over 40 years. As the years went by, the technological advances made the cave a state-of-the-art facility that looked nothing like a cave.

"My apologies."

"No, don't apologize. I said to say that again, Silasen. You said... a cheetah messed with our plan?"

"No, it was a panther. Um, a man wearing a panther mask."

Artifact retrieval was Evil Society's first and foremost task. In the first place, they were an organization formed by devils to steal artifacts.

Homer's Ring was the artifact that Kim Hakpyo, Evil Society's artifact retrieval team leader, desperately wanted.

This ring of wisdom amplified all abilities related to magic power, such as magic power control, adaptability, and materialization. It was an incredibly useful artifact for Djinn who had abnormally high amounts of magic power.

"You mean a panther that looks like this?"

Kim Hakpyo showed a sketch of the masked man depicted according to Silasen's description.

"...Yes. He wasn't an ordinary individual."

"I know. I heard you lost a subordinate."

"Yes, we lost Sidius. From what we observed from his life clock, he seems to have been killed in one blow."

"..."

Sidius. Although he had a weak defense, because of his superb swordsmanship, his attack power was something even Kim Hakpyo acknowledged. He was supposed to be capable of handling up to low-intermediate rank Heroes, making him one of the organization's rising stars.

"He wasn't a Djinn?"

It was surprisingly common for Djinns to kill each other.

"No, but he didn't seem to be a Hero either."

"Then he must be a mercenary or a hunter. Look into it. Of course, don't think about confronting him alone even if you find him."

Homer's Ring was something Kim Hakpyo vowed to obtain when he heard about it from the Collector. And when it came to his vows, he had no intention of breaking them.

"His weapon?"

"Yes?"

"Sidius' magic sword, it's expensive. Did you retrieve it?"

"Ah... no."

Magic swords were created by humanity but could display the same power as an artifact depending on one's magic power. Naturally, it was extremely costly. Low-rank artifacts went for 500 million won, and naturally, so did magic swords.

"I see. That makes sense. Someone who knew to take the ring wouldn't have missed something that expensive."

Kim Hakpyo accepted the reality. Only a fool wouldn't take 500 million won lying on the ground.

His anger then turned to Silasen.

"By the way, why are you announcing to the world that you're a Djinn?"

"...Yes?"

"Your god damn appearance."

Kim Hakpyo pointed at Silasen, who was still maintaining a Djinn's black skin and blood-red pupils.

"I'm asking WHY you're revealing that you're a GOD DAMN DJINN!"

Kim Hakpyo's fury resounded, shaking the cave's interior. Silasen quickly turned back to normal.

"M-My apologies!"

In truth, he had just made an honest mistake of forgetting to put his disguise back on. After Devil Transformation, Djinn's looked completely different from humans, so they had to put on a disguise to hide that they were Djinn's.

However, the Djinn's society wasn't so lenient when it came to mistakes.

Silasen fell to his knees in a hurry.



"...What am I supposed to do with this?"

Sunday night.

I pondered as I examined the magic sword I picked up. It was a spoil of war I obtained

from defeating a Djinn, but it was completely useless to me. Not only was I unable to wield magic power like normal people, I also didn't have plans to use a sword which required me to fight in close range.

Of course, I would be able to sell it for a vast amount of money, but even if Violet Banquet guaranteed my anonymity, I felt uneasy about a Djinn buying it.

So for now, I put the magic sword away in my drawer.

“And what do I do with this?”

This time, it was Homer's Ring. Because it hasn't been awakened yet, it looked shabby as though it was forged with mud, but in reality, this ring was quite a unique artifact.

===

[Homer's Ring] [Artifact] [Unawakened]

A ring worn by Homer in the past.

Contains hidden abilities.

===

Awakening this artifact would be easy for a Djinn, but it was a bit tricky for me. Thankfully, I didn't need to use the normal method for awakening this artifact. Using my Setting Intervention, I just deleted the “un-” part of “unawakened”.

[49 SP will be used.]

It didn't require too much SP, likely because the method for awakening the ring was rather simple. You just had to put in a certain amount of magic power, probably about 1.5 times the amount Chae Nayun currently had.

Once I saved the setting, the surface of Homer's Ring cracked and split. A beautiful platinum colored ring appeared from beneath the dirt husk.

===

[Homer's Ring] [Artifact] [Awakened]

A ring worn by Homer in the past.

Resonates with nature and endows its wearer with clear energy.

[Intelligence Increase – increases the wearer's intelligence by 0.001 points every 24 hours up to a maximum of 0.365 points.]

[High rank magic power amplification]

[Camouflage]

===

Homer's Ring not only amplified its wearer's magic power, it also increased 'intelligence', an invariable stat. Since the intelligence increase had a limit, one only needed to wear it for a year to receive its maximum benefit. 0.365 points of intelligence was equivalent to about 7 IQ.

"I guess I need to hold onto it for at least a year."

Homer's Ring wasn't a binding item. If I gave it away after increasing my intelligence for 365 days, the intelligence I gained from it wouldn't disappear.

At the same time, it was inefficient for me to continue holding onto it. The source of my magic power wasn't Kim Hajin, but the Stigma drawn on my upper arm. Obviously, there was no way to equip the Stigma with the ring.

...But just in case, I tried rubbing the ring on my upper arm.

"...What am I doing?"

I put it back on my finger.

Homer's Ring better suited Kim Suho and Chae Nayun. Purely in terms of efficiency, Chae Nayun was the best candidate as she beat Kim Suho in magic power.

"Now..."

For the first time in some time, I checked my stats.

===

[Strength 2.56]

[Stamina 2.575]

[Speed 3.250]

[Perception 4.215]

[Vitality 2.665]

[Magic power 1.925]

===

The stats other than speed and perception had stopped growing.

I had reached a wall. A wall referred to a bottleneck in growth. The first wall was between 2 and 3, the next was between 4 and 5, the next was between 6 and 7, and so

on.  
Most people faced these walls on every 2 stat points, and cadets usually had their upper limit around the 12 to 13 area.

“My magic power isn’t going up at all.”

It was likely that my magic power would stay at that level forever, but that didn’t discourage me in any way. After all, my magic power came from my Stigma.  
Next, I saw some encouraging alerts.

[You managed to throw a weapon that is difficult to wield!]  
[Beginner’s Luck applies! Your wire throwing accuracy and power increases.]  
[Your Gift, Master Sharpshooter, becomes grade 6!]

===

▷[Master Sharpshooter]  
[Intermediate rank] [Spirit attribute] [Evolving — Grade 6] [Proficiency EXP 0%]  
—Master Sharpshooter’s Training  
\*Can wield all long ranged weapons more skillfully.  
—Thousand-Mile Eyes  
\*Can see far away and predict a target’s movement path well.  
\*Increases speed and perception by 1 point.  
—Bullet Time  
\*In combat only and once every 24 hours, you can spend up to 80 seconds in ‘Bullet Time’.  
—Sharpshooter of Reversal  
\*Depending on Kim Hajin’s invariable stat, ‘luck’, you can deal bonus damage against a stronger opponent.

===

Master Sharpshooter finally evolved from low-intermediate rank to intermediate rank.  
It was faster than I expected, but the Gift’s real growth was only now beginning.  
Most likely, the same amount of effort I put in to go from grade 10 to grade 6 would be needed to go from grade 6 to grade 5.

“With this, I should be able to beat Chae Nayun.”

Murmuring, I was about to close the laptop when I suddenly remembered something.

“...I almost forgot.”

My family, or to be more precise, Kim Chundong’s family.

It was unlikely that the co-author left Kim Chundong’s past in a blank slate, especially when it was the easiest setting he could modify.

I immediately grew curious.

Kim Chundong was admitted to Cube. Although he was an extra in my novel, in the real world, he would have been an elite. Furthermore, genes played a huge role in determining one’s Gift. In other words, Kim Chundong’s parents weren’t likely to be ordinary people.

I entered Violet Banquet.

*Tak, tak.* From the numerous available categories, I clicked on [detective agency].

[100% trustworthy information agency, ‘Veteran’.]

[Information agency, ‘Echo’. Anything you want to know is at our disposal.]

There were several sellers, but agencies displayed on banner ads weren’t top tier agencies. After all, well-known and self-confident agencies didn’t need to advertise their product.

The real deal was here.

[Private Broker Yoo Jinhyuk]

Yoo Jinhyuk. This man was the best of the best in this field.

When it came to individuals in particular, there was nothing he couldn’t find out. Naturally, his service was extremely expensive. Just his base price was 50 million won.

“...Oh right.”

I was about to put in a request when I remembered something.

“I don’t have money.”

I had already invested everything I had into stocks.

*Wiing—!*

At that moment, something sitting on my drawer began to vibrate.

Once again, it was Evandel's Seed.

The tiny seed even stood up vertically and shook its body. It was protesting that it was hungry.

"I know, I know."

I took out a new gauze and gave it to the seed.



[Monday 1 P.M.]

The eventful weekend passed and a new Monday came by.

Rather than Monday's usual class, the exam we couldn't complete was continued today. Thus, cadets met in the exam room from two weeks ago. While groups 14 to 25 took the exam, other cadets were busy writing their reports.

'Family affair...'

However, only Yoo Yeonha was immersed in thoughts completely irrelevant to the exam.

Family affair.

What Kim Hajin said the day before kept bothering her.

Kim Hajin had immediately recognized Belbet's face, but it didn't make sense for him to know Belbet's face out of numerous criminals.

From her research, she found out that Belbet was a conman who worked exclusively in Europe. In other words, he couldn't have had anything to do with Kim Hajin. It made more sense to conclude that Kim Hajin memorized the face of every international wanted criminal.

'But why...'

After thinking about Kim Hajin's strange obsession with wanted criminals, Yoo Yeonha came up with a hypothesis.

A horrible thing had happened to him in the past, but he didn't know who the culprit was. So to find the culprit, he had the International Wanted List memorized.

Of course, this was only a hypothesis.

But...

‘Orphan.’

Adding in another keyword, the hypothesis became more logical.

Kim Hajin didn’t have parents. That was something almost every cadet knew because Shin Jonghak’s lackeys often harassed him as a parentless bastard.

‘So that must mean...’

Kim Hajin’s parents were dead. No, they were killed. Because of this, Kim Hajin had memorized the faces of criminals and was hiding his power to find and kill the culprit. It made sense.

Yoo Yeonha added another keyword to her notes.

‘Sad past’

“Yeonha, what are you writing?”

Chae Nayun suddenly asked at that moment. She peeked at Yoo Yeonha’s notes with tired eyes as though she just woke up from a nap.

“Family affair? Orphan? Sad past?... Are you adopted?”

“...Are you crazy? I’m just curious about something.”

“Hm... Well, I guess you’ve always been curious about random things. You know, you always tenaciously dig up things you can just ignore without gaining anything. You’re kind of a dunce. No, you *are* a dunce.”

“If you’re going to sleep, just keep sleeping, Nayun.”

Yoo Yeonha spoke as she gritted her teeth. Chae Nayun let out a big yawn, then leaned against the back of her chair.

“Huaam~ Yeah, I should.”

The heckler went away, and Yoo Yeonha fell back into the boundary of delusion and thought.

If Kim Hajin really had a past like that, she felt she could use it as an advantage when trying to recruit him in the future.

It was illegal to investigate a cadet's background, but that just meant she had to avoid being caught.

That was how much she wanted to bring Kim Hajin into her guild. With the last incident, she became even more convinced. Kim Hajin was perhaps even more valuable than Kim Suho. At least, that's what Yoo Yeonha thought.

"Hmm..."

Someone that could investigate Kim Hajin's family background.

She knew of one such person. If he wanted, he could even draw up the family tree of a cockroach.

The only question was whether he would help her.

"..."

Yoo Yeonha turned her smartwatch on.

On the bottom of her contacts list, a number she had kept sealed for the past 5 years was printed.

[Uncle Yoo Jinhyuk]

Yoo Yeonha closed her eyes tightly and sent him a message.

# Chapter 54

## Vestige (2)

—*Ding*

“Ah, god damn it!”

The sudden smartwatch message clogged up the game screen at a crucial moment. Yoo Jinhyuk roared and shot up like a spring.

“What, you lost again?”

His secretary asked apathetically.

“No, but hey! Did you link my smartwatch with the computer?”

“No.”

“You did! I lost because of the alert!”

“It wasn’t me.”

Yoo Jinhyuk grabbed the back of his neck, feeling blood pressure rising. He had just lost 50 million won from that loss.

“My life... What?”

But his sullen mood disappeared in an instant when he saw the name of the messenger – Yoo Yeonha.

It was the name of his adorable niece.

“Did the sun rise from the west today? My niece just messaged me!”

If he remembered correctly, the last time they had talked was five years ago. Yoo Jinhyuk quickly checked the content of the message.

[Uncle, I need you to look into someone's family history.]

Yoo Jinhyuk tilted his head.

"Mm? Well, that's surprising."

"Is it work?"

His secretary's eyes lit up.

"No, I told you it's from my niece."

"So is it work?"

"...I guess it is. Haaaam."

Yoo Jinhyuk yawned and slumped down on his couch. Yoo Yeonha sent a follow-up message.

[Cube's cadet, Kim Hajin.]

"Kim Hajin... Who's that?"

"Why are you asking me?"

"Look into him. He's apparently a Cube cadet."

"Is he?"

The number of Cube cadets was at most 6000 in any given year. Given such a small pool, finding someone was a piece of cake for someone in their line of business. The secretary's hands moved like lightning on her computer keyboard.

Soon, a general overview of the cadet in question popped up.

"He's an orphan. He has a 300 million won debt."

"Oh, so that's why she said family affair. She must want to know who his parents are. Also, he has that much debt?"

“Yes. He also has a brokerage account. I don’t know how much he has in it though.”

Yoo Jinhyuk murmured as he picked his earwax.

“Well if it’s only that, I guess I can do it for free.”

“...Ehew, there goes my paycheck.”

“You’re going to get your pay. Honestly, don’t you think you’re taking too much? 20 million won per month for god’s sake.”

“That’s because I’m worth that much.”

“Tsk.”

Yoo Jinhyuk clicked his tongue as he berated his secretary. Then, he suddenly shot up.

“Get ready.”

“Are you really going to do it for free?”

“Yeah, I have a favor I want from Hyung anyways.”

“Aha.”

The usually uptight secretary was immediately convinced. There was one reason why Yoo Jinhyuk was the best in this field.

“Is it 16, 17 years ago? Let’s start from the day he was born.”

He could experience people's past.



On her way back to the dorm from classes, Yoo Yeonha pouted as she stared at her smartwatch. Three hours had passed since she messaged her uncle but there was no reply. It wasn’t that he didn’t read it since her message was clearly marked with “read”. In other words, he had ignored her.

“...Why isn’t he answering?”

“Who’s he? Don’t, don’t tell me, you got a b-boyfriend?”

Chae Nayun who was next to her asked, looking shocked. Yoo Yeonha glanced at her. For some reason, Chae Nayun recently began to act oddly friendly. Yoo Yeonha didn’t know how to feel about it. Chae Nayun used to be aloof and uncaring in the past, so she couldn’t figure out why she was acting this way.

“I’m going out with Jonghak.”

“The whole world knows that’s a lie.”

“...Ehew. Fine, it’s my uncle.”

“Uncle?”

Yoo Yeonha sighed, and Chae Nayun turned to the side as she snickered.

“You go ahead. I have to go practice archery.”

“Archery?... Oh right, your bet with Kim Hajin is coming up.”

“Yeah, I even rented an archery range for the bet. Do you want to come spectate?”

In the past weekend, Chae Nayun thought about Kim Hajin by herself and came to her own conclusion. If Kim Hajin had romantic feelings for her, she told herself that she’d chastise him after winning the bet. That the way he expressed his affection was wrong and that she was better suited to a bow.

“...Spectate?”

Yoo Yeonha asked in interest. No matter how she thought about it, she couldn’t see Chae Nayun winning. From her experience, Kim Hajin’s confidence was always well-founded.

“Yeah, I invited a bunch of people over.”

“Is Jonghak also going?”

“Yep.”

“...He’s going to bring more people.”

Shin Jonghak would likely do things no one asked him to. To save face, he would bring ten or so cadets with him. If Kim Hajin won, Chae Nayun would be embarrassing herself in front of a large crowd.

“I’ll use this opportunity to put him in place.”

“...”

Yoo Yeonha stared at Chae Nayun’s confident face.

Imagining her overconfident face becoming distorted with embarrassment and despair, Yoo Yeonha thought to herself to not miss the bet.

“I’ll come watch.”

Happy just thinking about it, Yoo Yeonha smiled brightly.

At that moment, her smartwatch rang.

Yun Seung-Ah: [Let’s grab lunch this weekend. I want to apologize for what happened before.]

She quickly checked her smartwatch, but seeing that it wasn’t Yoo Jinhyuk, she furrowed her brows in disappointed.

“Who is it now?”

Chae Nayun stopped and asked again.

“Why are you suddenly so curious?”

“I’m just wondering. Who is it? Kim Suho?”

“...Vice-leader Yun Seung-Ah.”

“Eh? Seung-Ah unni? What about her?”

Yun Seung-Ah and Chae Nayun had a connection in that they were both disciples of the Master rank Hero, Yoo Sihyuk. Of course, that was in the past. When Chae Nayun was being taught, she was only 8 years old, while Yun Seung-Ah was 21.

“She wants to apologize for what happened at the masquerade party.”

“...Ah, I should have gone to that party. If only I didn’t get lost...”

“You should have swapped with me. I wanted to go to that restaurant.”

“The place Kim Hajin took me to?”

Yoo Yeonha nodded with a bitter smile. Although she loved fast food, the Hero Cook’s cooking was something people would kill to eat.

“Now that I think about it, Kim Hajin must not be so simple if he can make a reservation for a place like that.”

“...”

But this woman was only realizing this now. Yoo Yeonha let out a deep sigh in disappointment.



I went on my way while listening to the conversation of the two girls in front of me. I was a bit shocked when my name came up, but it wasn’t anything important. It did surprise me that Yun Seung-Ah planned to eat with Yoo Yeonha. After all, they were destined to become competitors.

Then, someone approached me from behind.  
When I turned around, a familiar face entered my eyes.

“Hello.”

It was Rachel. She greeted me with a slight smile.

“Ah, yes, did something happen?”

“Here. Thank you again for before.”

She handed me a small box that could just barely fit a car key. I looked back and forth between the box and Rachel, then took the box.

“Can I open it now?”

“Yes.”

As soon as Rachel nodded, I opened the box. I was a bit nervous thinking it might be a real car key, but in it was a key to Cube’s laundry house.

“Ah, clothes?”

With this key, I should be able to pick up a Cloth Armor of some sort.

“Yes, defensive equipment are England’s pride.”

With that, she bowed and began walking to the girls’ dorms. Her actions perfectly matched my description of her – ‘Rachel dislikes talking about personal matters.’ I watched her leave. I could feel a royalty’s elegance and grace just from the way she walked.

\*

After picking up Rachel’s gift from the laundry house, I returned to my dorm. When I took off the plastic wrap, a stylish coat emerged.

“Whoa.”

It wasn’t heavy nor light, having a perfect weight. It wasn’t too long either as if it was tailored for my height.

However, this wasn’t a fashion item.

Although it came with a certificate of quality, I checked its functionality with my laptop.

===

[Royal Black Coat – Jacket] [Partial Artifact]

A coat created by English Royal Court's master craftsman. Patched with parts of an artifact.

[Pinnacle grade Temperature Control]

[Low-intermediate grade Defense]

[Camouflage functionality]

[Form change functionality: Coat ↔ Jacket]

===

Defensive equipment were rarely fully-fledged artifacts. The number of defensive equipment artifacts was far smaller than weapon artifacts, and because they were difficult for modern day people to wear, they were often cut apart and reproduced into other defensive equipment.

'Partial Artifact' referred to defensive equipment created in such a way.

"...This is amazing."

Furthermore, England was a country renowned for their cloth-type defensive equipment. Since this item was crafted by the English Royal Court, it had to be worth several hundred million won.

I put it on. Just as I expected, it was a perfect fit.

I sent Rachel a thank you message.

[Thank you for the coat. I love it.]

She replied immediately.

[No problem ☺ ☺ Use it well ^^]

"...She's surprisingly good at texting, huh."

She was usually expressionless and quiet, but...

[(~.~)]

She even sent emoticons in her messages.



It was now the middle of May. Since I began attending Cube in February, it would almost be four months since I came to this world. By now, both theory classes and combat training felt like a daily routine.

“The finals are coming up in 4 weeks.”

At the end of the class on Friday, Kim Soohyuk made a solemn announcement. Just like he said, another exam period was coming up. The final exam period would be the final hurdle of this half of the year.

“Written exams will be the same, but combat exams will be completely different.”

Midterms and finals were different. Unlike the midterms which had a festival-like atmosphere, finals were rigorous, serious, and cold.

“Everything you’ve learned until now will be tested in a single exam.”

The exam Kim Soohyuk was talking about wouldn’t be made public until much later, but I already knew what it was.

They would drop cadets off in a remote island filled with wild animals and monsters. Cadets would need to survive in this island for a week while amassing as many points as possible.

Each monster would be worth one point, and cadets could also defeat other cadets to gain points.

Cadets were free to form teams as they wished and were allowed to give points to others.

Cadets would only find out about the content of the exam on the day of the exam itself. In other words, everyone would be dropped off in a remote island without any preparation. They would only be given two days’ worth of food.

But I planned on preparing for the exam thoroughly. Since most people wouldn’t have even the most basic camping equipment, I would be at a massive advantage in this regard.

“You don’t have to worry about safety. High-intermediate rank and high-rank Heroes

will be closely watching you from the shadows.”

Kim Soohyuk dismissed the class after intimidating everyone.

“Now, go back and have fun. I’ll see you on Monday.”

Cadets got up from their seats. I also packed my stuff to go back to my room.

“Hey, is your practice going well? You didn’t forget, right? Our bet’s next week.”

When I was about to leave through the back door, Chae Nayun appeared out of nowhere and asked.

She looked at me with a confident smile. At the same time, the surrounding gazes all fell on us. They were watching our psychological battle with interest.

“No, I didn’t practice at all.”

“...What?”

“I can win without practice.”

After giving a cocky smile, I left the room.

“Hey! Grr, that guy...!”

Only seven days remained until our archery battle.



My last interaction with Chae Nayun ended up being pointless as I saw her again soon. The hunting club had resumed. To celebrate, the hunting club’s leader rented a mountain cabin and planned an overnight trip on Friday.

“Why am I paired with you again...”

“How should I know?”

Currently, we were climbing a mountain. Everywhere we looked was covered in white, and a cold wind blew violently.

This white world where the boundary between earth and heaven seemed faint was Northern Europe's Norway.

The hunting club had come all the way here for an overnight trip.

It would have been sheer lunacy were I on Earth, but in this world where Portals existed, traveling between countries was extremely easy for Cube's cadets.

To be honest, I was excited about this trip.

Traveling abroad was something I always wanted to do when I was on Earth, and Norway was one of the places I wanted to go.

"You worked something out with the club leader again, didn't you?"

"What?"

"Don't play dumb. I know you pulled strings to become paired with me."

"...Are you out of your mind?"

Today's pairs were chosen by a computer program. Despite that, Chae Nayun and I being paired again had to be because of my luck. After all, Chae Nayun was the prettiest one in the club.

"...Anyways, you keep doing things behind my back, but keep it moderate."

"Worry about yourself. There are plenty of traps around here because of hunters."

I ignored Chae Nayun's nonsensical drivel and pointed below her. Startled, Chae Nayun stopped. There was a huge bear trap under her.

"Oh, geez. That surprised me."

Currently, we were in the middle of the hunting club's event. To celebrate the club resuming, the traveling club was running a scavenger hunt. Flags were buried around the mountain, and written on these flags were gifts prepared by seniors who were currently active Heroes.

*Whiiish—*

Suddenly, a fierce wind blew along with a flurry of snow.

“Aah, uuu, my face feels like it’s going to explode.”

The wind disappeared in a moment, but Chae Nayun’s face turned red from the cold.

“You cold?”

“A, a little bit. I should have brought a coat too.”

“I’m not cold.”

For the record, I was wearing the coat Rachel gifted me. Thanks to its temperature control function, I wasn’t a bit cold.

“...Did you buy a new coat?”

“Yeah, it’s amazing.”

“...”

Chae Nayun gave me an aggrieved look. Then, we walked for a bit without talking. Our footsteps let out gentle noises as we stepped on fluffy snow. I quite enjoyed the scenery of Norway’s snowy mountain.

“Ah, over there! There’s a flag.”

Chae Nayun pointed at a nearby mountain peak. On the edge of a cliff, a single flag was waving dangerously.

“That must be the first place flag.”

It had to be, considering the dangerous place it was in. But would anyone be crazy enough to climb up there?

“Hey, let’s go up.”

The person in question was right next to me.

“...We don’t need to.”

I took out a roll of wire from my pocket. It wasn't Aether Wire, but a normal roll of wire. I brought one as a supporting weapon.

"You're going to throw it and pull it out? Is that even possible?"

Without answering to Chae Nayun's doubt, I tied the wire around a knife. Then, I attached some of Stigma's magic power on it. Recently, I've been thinking more about ways to use Stigma's magic power.

"Huup!"

I threw the knife in full force. The knife flew in a straight line and easily surpassed the flag's position.

"Pft. Nice try."

But suddenly, the knife bent in a strange angle, spinning around the flag and wrapping around it. Then, it returned to my hands along with the flag.

Stigma's magic power followed my will. I attached Stigma's magic power to the knife so I could move it to my will.

I separated the wire and knife, put them back in my belt, and then held up the flag.

"...N-Not bad."

Chae Nayun tried to sound unimpressed as she snatched the flag out of my hand. Then, the flag shrunk down to a piece of paper, which I snatched back from Chae Nayun.

"Ah."

There were two lines written in pretty handwriting.

[First place. The prize is Yun Seung-Ah's contact number. That's me! You know who I am, right? If you need any help call me any time. I'll help you out once as long as it's something I can help with~]

"...Why is Yun Seung-Ah popping out from here?"

“Yun Seung-Ah? Address her more politely. Also, this is amazing.”

I was extremely disappointed, but Chae Nayun seemed happy.

“You can take it then.”

“What? You’re giving this to me? Seung-Ah unni is the vice-leader of a rank 1 guild!”

“I don’t need it.”

I handed the paper to her without much thought. After all, I already had her contact number.

Chae Nayun, who was about to accept it with a grin, suddenly paused and put on a serious face.

“No, you take it. Why give me what’s yours? I don’t need it.”

“...Uh, yeah, sure.”

I was taken aback by her strange change in attitude, but I didn’t say much about it for now.

# Chapter 55

## Bet (1)

It was 2 A.M. in Korea, but 7 P.M. in Norway. The two countries were in different time zones, but their skies were equally dark.

Darkness descending on the snowy mountain marked the end of hunting club's event. Chae Nayun and I obtained the first place and fourth place flags. The first place flag rewarded a piece of paper with Yun Seung-Ah's one-time help coupon, and the fourth place flag rewarded a VR gaming set worth 3 million won. All the prizes were fantastic as expected of gifts from active Heroes.

Chae Nayun and I returned to the cabin, where a warm barbeque party was waiting. Other club members who just came back greeted us with smiles.

"Wow, you got the first place flag!? I'm jealous!"

The club leader saw the flag in my hand and exclaimed. Other club members also sent looks of envy, to which I made a bitter smile.

"Now, let's eat."

The barbeque party started. Club members put meat on the grill. The sizzling sound was pleasant to hear, to say the least, but these kids were terrible at grilling. Realizing that they were just teenagers, I stepped up.

"I'll handle the grilling. You guys can rest."

When it came to cooking meat, it was a matter of pride for me. Because my aunt ran a Korean BBQ restaurant, I was quite confident in my grilling technique.

"...You're different than what the rumors say, huh."

A male senior gave me a look of surprise as he handed me the tongs he was holding. Without talking, I focused on grilling. Knowing when to flip was the most important thing in cooking meat, and it was best to delay cutting them until the end. Of course, even as I devoted my attention to grilling, I kept my ears open. The seniors began to

give their juniors valuable advice.

“I know your finals are coming up. Be careful. Finals will be more rigorous than any of the previous exams. Don’t trust anyone, especially during the finals.”

“Is it that difficult?”

“It’s difficult, but more importantly, I’ve seen friendships dissolve because of it. Because it’s directly connected to the cadet rankings, everyone will be on the edge. Also, you guys know that there’s a separate class for people being held back, right?”

“Ah, yes.”

“There are about 200 of them per year. You have to be especially careful of those guys. They won’t stop at anything to pass since they’ll be expelled if they don’t pass this time.”

Cadets held back from the previous year, they would be the source of trouble during the finals. Of the 200 repeaters, close to 20% were contracted to Djinnns or were part of high profile organizations. There could be even more if the co-author manipulated the numbers.

“Hey, um... Haejin?”

“It’s Hajin. Kim Hajin.”

“Ah, Kim Hajin. You’re a great griller! But you should eat some too.”

“I’ve been eating while grilling, so I’m full.”

“Really?”

The barbeque party continued for 20 minutes. Because I did a great job on the grilling duty, everyone was seeing me more favorably.

“The original plan was to go out for a night hunt... but let’s just rest since we’re full.”

The club leader made his decision.

“Team 1 will use Cabin A. Team 2 will use Cabin B.”

The 18 club members split into two separate cabins. Chae Nayun and I were assigned to Cabin A.

The cabin was surprisingly big. The first floor had three rooms and a large living room, while the second floor had six rooms, with each person having their own room.

After unpacking our belongings, we met in the living room, where we began to play Mafia as a group bonding game.

But every time Chae Nayun became the mafia, she was killed in the first town vote. When she took important citizen roles like the doctor or the cop, the mafia killed her on the first or second night. Even when she was a normal citizen, she was killed relatively fast. It wasn't anyone's fault but her own.

She was simply terrible at the game, because she didn't know how to hide her emotions.

“...Ah, I haven't laughed that hard in some time.”

Now, the game had ended and everyone had gone to sleep. I left the cabin and sat down on a bench outside. Chae Nayun's wronged face kept popping up in my head, and I couldn't help but laugh. If we pushed her just a bit further, she might have even broken out into tears.

But soon, I stopped my laughter from coming out and turned on my laptop. Truth Agency had received another request.

[There is a conman called Jerome Müller. He was acting as my asset manager when he took the money and ran. Here are several pictures of his face, his height, and other identifying information. Please tell me where he is.]

It was the second request I ever received. Judging by his German name, he must have been introduced by the first customer.

Since the conman's face and identifying information were all present, it wouldn't be difficult to find his location with the Book of Truth. Without putting it off, I released Stigma's magic power and opened the Book of Truth.

To find his current location, close to 80% of my current magic power was used. Feeling lightheaded, I staggered slightly.

[It will cost 5,000,000 points.]

I held myself back from asking for 50 million. Surprisingly, I immediately received a message saying the money was deposited. I wrote back exactly what the Book of Truth said.

There was no reply.

I closed the Book of Truth and put away my laptop. Then, I looked into the distance. Norway's untouched nature entered my sight. In front of this scenic beauty, a thought suddenly popped up in my head.

Cigarette.

"Ah, I stopped smoking..."

I had only just realized. Before I came to this world, I smoked half a pack every day because of stress, but after coming to this world, smoking never even crossed my mind.

"You used to smoke?"

"Whoa!"

I jolted at the sudden voice.

"W-What! Where are you!?"

"Above you, idiot."

I immediately looked up. Chae Nayun was peeking her head out from the second-floor window. Since when was she there?

"So you used to smoke? A real delinquent, huh. Do you also have tattoos?"

Her stinging, pitying words made me flinch. My eyes fell on my upper arm. Thankfully, the two streaks of Stigma were covered by my clothes.

"What, you really have them? Let me see."

"I don't."

"Hmm."

Chae Nayun raised her eyebrows as she looked down at me. But soon, she looked back up into the air. It seemed she didn't see me opening the Book of Truth.

"...By the way, are you confident?"

Chae Nayun asked as she looked out at the horizon.

"Confident? About what?"

"About winning against me."

Faced with her straightforward question, I retorted arrogantly.

"What about you, are you confident in being able to give up on your bow if you lose?"

"...That's something that can't happen, so it never crossed my mind."

"If you end up losing, are you going to cry?"

"Do you want to cry now?"

"You almost cried today because of Mafia."

"...Screw off."

We exchanged blows. I felt like I was the winner, but then I wondered what I was doing with a kid. Being around them, I felt like I was becoming a kid myself.

In the end, I sat back down on the bench and continued watching the scenery.

Only snow and evergreen trees were within my view, but when I looked up at the sky, a whole new scenery emerged. The sky was full of stars. It was my first time seeing such a scene. I began to understand why Chae Nayun opened her window. She was looking at the stars too.

"Oh right, traveling club is apparently canceled this week."

Chae Nayun suddenly mentioned traveling club's cancelation, which wasn't particularly surprising. The same thing had happened in the original story. In the original story, Belbet's plan succeeded, so Natasha broke up with Oh Hanhyun. But now, she broke up with Oh Hanhyun because Belbet was arrested. Oh Hanhyun should

be writhing in the pain of breaking up right about now.

“By the way, have you seen the news article from France?”

“News article? Is it about me?”

“Yeah, Yeonha showed me. They’re calling you the Korean Sherlock who captured the conman of the century.”

“Oh.”

“I can’t believe a delinquent who smokes and picks fights with me for no reason is Sherlock.”

“...Just go to sleep.”

“I was going to even if you didn’t tell me!”

*Tak.* Chae Nayun closed her window shut. I also got up to leave, but then my smartwatch rang.

Chae Nayun had sent me a link to a news article.

[Conman of the Century Captured by Korean Cadet.]

So there was an article like this. I laughed in slight embarrassment and read the translated article.

[Belbet was arrested in a large mansion on the outskirts of Paris. Belbet is a conman who had scammed thousands of people over the past 20 years... Belbet tried to bury his wrongdoings by feigning his death, but his clever methods were seen through by a Cube cadet with keen insight and reasoning...]

*Tak.*

Chae Nayun opened her window again, then asked with a voice full of curiosity.

“Hey, what does a cigarette taste like?”

“...”



“Oh, man.”

Yoo Jinhyuk came back from his journey. During the past two days, he saw 24 hours of a person’s past. The reason his limit was two days was that he could only hold in his bowel and bladder movement for that long. He ran to the bathroom the moment he woke up.

“Did you find anything out?”

His secretary spoke to the bathroom door.

“Yeah, there were a few strange things.”

“What did you see?”

“The day he entered the orphanage, he spent 23 hours and 55 minutes in front of the orphanage door.”

Yoo Jinhyuk could move around in a virtual reality of someone’s past. However, because he would be in a spirit body formed with magic power, he used up magic power whenever he moved. As such, it was better to stay still if possible.

“Some kid dropped a kid off.”

“...Huh? A kid gave birth to a kid?”

“No, the kid was too young to give birth, but I don’t know too much more. That’s where it ended. His past is strangely dense, so I’ll have to maintain my peak condition if I want to look into it more.”

*Pffft, pfft.* Unpleasant sounds rang out from the bathroom. The secretary furrowed her brows.

“Anyways, this is looking like it will take a while. I don’t know if I can do it for free.”

“You have to because another request came in.”

The secretary sent a message to his smartwatch. On the screen was a familiar picture.

“What, it’s Kim Hajin again?”

It was the same picture of Kim Hajin as the one his niece sent.

“Yes, but look at the purchaser’s rank.”

“Rank?... Red, Red Diamond?”

Red Diamond was Violet Banquet’s highest rank. At the same time, it was the same rank Yoo Jinhyuk had.

Red Diamond members were able to see the ranks of purchasers and sellers. Furthermore, because only a few Red Diamond members existed, they could recognize each other. Naturally, Yoo Jinhyuk knew who this account belongs to.

[Requesting for this person’s background information. You are not allowed to hurt him. We will deposit 100 million points as a security deposit, then an additional 500 million points when the job is done. (Contract will be canceled if the target finds out or is hurt)]

The brief and succinct sentences and the amount of money they offered immediately hinted at their identity.

“This...”

Short and to-the-point sentences, the extravagant use of money, using 600 million won to investigate a person’s background...

He was certain.

This was Chameleon Troupe’s account.

Yoo Jinhyuk stared fixedly at the picture of Kim Hajin.

“...There might really be something about him.”

At the first interesting request in some time, Yoo Jinhyuk made a deep smile. Currently, he was sitting on a toilet.



A week passed by in a breeze and the long-awaited day finally arrived. Today was the day of my archery duel with Chae Nayun. I had to prove that I wasn't lying when I said I could beat her in archery with just a month of practice.

As soon as classes ended, I headed to the archery range. Chae Nayun and her group of friends followed after me. Even with a glance, I could see that she brought quite a entourage of people. There had to be at least 70 people, and among them were well-known cadets like Kim Suho, Yoo Yeonha, and Shin Jonghak.

After walking for about 15 minutes, we arrived at an archery range built on an artificial mountain.

The archery range looked similar to a skeet shooting range, but unlike in a shooting range, the lanes were huge. Chae Nayun was standing in a lane about 50 meters away, warming up.

"We'll be doing the same thing. You practiced archery for the past month, right?"

I retorted lightly.

"No."

"What?"

"I didn't do it this way. Explain."

"..."

Chae Nayun furrowed her brows.

"Huu. You see that in the distance? The maximum range is 1km. We'll start from the 100m mark, and the distance will increase by 50m every time we succeed..... Here, let me show you."

Chae Nayun held up her bow. After clearing her throat, she shouted.

"Shot!"

Immediately, a target shot up from the 100m mark. It moved here and there, seemingly trying to dodge Chae Nayun's arrow. When the target reached its highest point, Chae Nayun fired a wooden arrow. The arrow then pierced through the target cleanly. She had a textbook posture, and her arrow followed a textbook trajectory. The spectators cheered. To be honest, my jaws also dropped slightly.

"Why? Is it more difficult than you thought?"

At Chae Nayun's confident question, I responded with a slight smile.

"No, I was just thinking it was too easy."

Then, I held out my hand to Chae Nayun.

"...What."

"Give me your bow and arrow. I don't have them."

"...I thought you'd do something like this and prepared them for you."

Chae Nayun revealed her teeth and growled before looking behind her. Immediately, some guy ran up to her with a bow and a quiver full of arrows.

"Take it."

"Thanks."

I put the quiver down and examined the bow first.

"You ready?"

"Wait."

This was the first time I was touching a bow. Because a bow was considered a main weapon, I couldn't rent one from Cube without paying money. Thankfully, the bow in my hand was a traditional bow, so I at least knew how to use it.

I tried pulling on the bowstring and knocking an arrow.

“Is this how you shoot?”

It seemed my Gift couldn't do anything about my posture.

“..”

Chae Nayun glared at me dumbfoundedly. I laughed meekly and muttered.

“I'm kidding. I'm ready, let's go. Start.”

In any case, I could just copy Chae Nayun's posture.

Chae Nayun clicked her tongue and looked at her target. She shouted loudly.

“Start!”

Her voice echoed out.

# Chapter 56

## Bet (2)

“You have three lives. Whoever can hit a target farther away wins.”

In truth, this archery duel followed the general archery competition rules. I had seen Heroes have archery battles on TV a couple of times, though, of course, Heroes’ archery battles had all sorts of additional effects like earthquakes or whatnot.

“Am I going first?”

Chae Nayun asked.

“Yeah.”

“Alright. 100 meters is too easy, so let’s start at 200 meters.”

Chae Nayun knocked an arrow and pulled on the bowstring. Her sharp eyes stared at the 200-meter mark from which the target would shoot up.

“Shot!”

With her short shout, the target shot up from the right side. Chae Nayun turned her bow 60 degrees to the right and fired, hitting the target 200 meters away with ease.

“Hey, it’s your turn now.”

Chae Nayun crossed her arms with a smile and examined me with an arrogant look. I clumsily copied the same posture Chae Nayun took. With my feet spread apart appropriately, I placed my center of gravity between my legs. Knocking my arrow, I tightly grabbed the bow and bowstring on each of my hands.

Now, was it voice recognition?

“Shot?”

I muttered, and a target shot up. Startled, I let go of the bowstring. Naturally, the arrow was way off target.

“Pfft. Puhaha.”

Chae Nayun laughed, but she didn't *just* laugh, she grabbed her belly with one hand and pointed at me with the other.

“Did you really not practice? Do you want to start over from the 100-meter mark?”

I shook my head.

“It's a handicap.”

Although I failed once, I got a feeling for how to position myself.

Chae Nayun had a textbook posture, but I didn't need to do the same. In the first place, textbook postures were made to be applied in practical use. You couldn't become an expert just by perfecting textbook material. It was only the minimum requirement to become an expert.

And my Gift made me an inborn master.

“I have to go again, right?”

“Yeah, yeah. You only have two lives now, so you're out if you miss twice.”

I nodded and stood tall. I didn't need to take aim. The target moved anyways, so there was no reason to take aim beforehand.

“Shot.”

The target shot up. I predicted its trajectory and fired so that it would miss the target by a bit. Then, the arrow grazed by the target.

“...Is this a joke?”

I was putting on a show, but Chae Nayun seemed to have lost interest. The same could be said for the spectators, who were starting to call me a big-mouthed fool that was desperate for attention. It seemed missing twice in a row was too much.

“I got the feeling for it now.”

“Yeah right.”

“I’m going again.”

I muttered quickly.

“Shot.”

This time, I fired the moment the target shot up to about 2 meters. My arrow flew through the sky and pierced the target perfectly.

“Oh...?”

Chae Nayun seemed surprised at how quickly I fired. It was the same for the spectators. With a leisure smile, I gestured at Chae Nayun.

“You’re up. No pressure.”

“...I guess you did practice.”

Now, the distance was 250 meters. Chae Nayun glared at the distance with her bowstring pulled.

“Shot!”

The target shot up, zigzagging through the air. After taking a moment to deliberate, Chae Nayun fired, then her arrow pierced the center of the target. It was still easy for Chae Nayun.

“You’re up next.”

The following back and forth was extremely boring. We each took turns firing and hitting our targets.

However, the spectators didn’t seem to think the same way as they were staring at us with excitement clearly visible in their eyes.

300 meters, 350 meters, 400 meters, 450 meters... The distance continued to increase

and eventually came to 500 meters. From this distance, the target could barely be seen with the naked eye.

“ ... ”

Chae Nayun’s arms began to tremble with nervousness.

If my thoughts were correct, she would soon self-destruct. Chae Nayun’s personality wasn’t suited to being a sharpshooter. She wasn’t patient and was easily shaken up and angered. She wasn’t the type of person who could win in a nail-biting competition like this.

“Shot.”

Even so, Chae Nayun calmed herself with a deep breath and fired.

“...Ah.”

However, her arrow brushed past the target. She had missed for the first time at the 500-meter mark. I could immediately tell that she was shaken up.

“Shot.”

She managed to succeed on her next try, but she was now left with two lives. She breathed out a sigh of relief.

“Whew...”

However, Chae Nayun wouldn’t be able to surpass the 600-meter mark.

I would force her hands.

To pressure her psychologically, I shouted as soon as Chae Nayun’s turn finished.

“Shot.”

I fired immediately, and the arrow perfectly pierced through the center of the target. With a darkened expression, Chae Nayun held her bow up once more, but I stopped her.

“Since we're at the half-way mark, I'll go first from now.”

Without asking for her confirmation, I held up my bow and knocked an arrow.

“Shot.”

The target shot up from the 550-meter mark, but I could see it as though it was only a meter away. It was a bird-shaped doll covered in a black cloth. My eyes could also predict what path it would take. After putting the speed of my arrow into the calculation, I fired at the bird doll’s glimmering silhouette.

Just like last time, my arrow pierced the target perfectly.

“You’re next.”

Chae Nayun, who was staring at the target in a daze, flinched. Her lips were now dry, and she swallowed hard before silently holding up her bow.

“You know it too, right?”

Before she could fire, I provoked her. Simply put, I was trash talking her to shake up her mentality.

“You suck at using a bow.”

Chae Nayun immediately glared at me. In reality, being able to hit 550-meter away without using magic power was commendable, as wooden arrows couldn’t ignore air resistance even with a high-quality bow.

However, being commendable wasn’t the level Chae Nayun longed for. Just by being decent at shooting, she couldn’t accomplish her ‘goal’.

“But why...”

“Shot!”

Chae Nayun shouted loudly and cut me off. Gritting her teeth, she fired at the target that shot up.

However, impatient archers could never hit their mark.

Chae Nayun’s arrow flew past the target.

“But why you insist on using a bow... I got curious, so I spent some time thinking about it.”

“Shut up!”

Chae Nayun shouted in frustration.

“Shot!”

This time, she concentrated as much as she could and fired. Thankfully, she managed to hit the target. I shouted back without giving Chae Nayun a chance to rest.

“Shot!”

My target shot up before the remnants of Chae Nayun’s target could even hit the ground. When I fired, the target was instantly destroyed. I didn't feel pressured in any way, but Chae Nayun’s face began to pale.

I continued what I was saying.

“Deep inside, you know it too. You’re more talented with swords.”

Chae Nayun didn’t become Yoo Sihyuk’s disciple for show. As a Master rank Hero, Yoo Sihyuk didn’t care about people’s background. The only thing he took into consideration in picking his disciples was their talent.

Chae Nayun was one of the so-called 'Children of Yoo Sihyuk'.

“I said shut up!”

Chae Nayun blurted out in rage. I held up my bow.

Now it was the 600-meter mark. Unless magic power arrows were used, the maximum range for the light bow I had in my hand was 1.4 kilometer. Although the 600-meter mark didn’t even reach half that distance, 1.4 kilometer was purely the ‘maximum range’.

The realistic range, which even professional archers could only hit with a 50% accuracy, was exactly half that distance. But in this competition, targets were even flying through the sky.

The current Chae Nayun was simply incapable of hitting a target of this distance.

“You’re scared. You’re scared of fighting with a sword, and you’re scared of being drenched with blood.”

That was how she was in the original story. Her mother being murdered etched a deep trauma in her heart, but in this timeline, her trauma should be even deeper because of what happened with her older brother.

“That’s why you’re justifying yourself every day. That you’re just as talented with a bow. That you can become the greatest Hero even with a bow.”

I took a moment to breathe.

“But with a bow, you won’t be able to kill a single Djinn, much less get revenge for your older brother.”

That was the killing blow. *Tak*. Chae Nayun let go of her bowstring. Her arrows flew through the empty sky, marking her third failure. She had lost.

“What did you just say...”

Chae Nayun glared at me with eyes full of rage. From her hands holding onto her bow, I could see blood oozing out.

“With that strength, you should use a sword.”

I stared into the distance. Then, I shouted, “Shot”. Not once, not twice, but thrice. 600 meters, 650 meters, 700 meters.

Three targets shot up into the air with little delay. I quickly fired three times, and then the three arrows pierced through the three targets.

I didn’t stop there. I wanted to know the limit of grade 6 of Master Sharpshooter. Since Chae Nayun was finished, I continued shooting by myself.

750 meters, 800 meters... The atmosphere became heavier as the distance increased, and Chae Nayun’s heavy breathing became louder. I could feel her stinging breath filled with anger and defeat.

“900 meters. I’ll stop here.”

Because I felt like the 900-meter mark was my limit, I gave up afterwards. I didn’t want to try the 950-meter mark, where I had a high chance of failure.

“550 meters vs 900 meters. My victory, right?”

I stared at Chae Nayun. Before I noticed, her glaring eyes had watered up. Currently, Chae Nayun was unable to win against her anger. Normally, she would have jumped when I mentioned her older brother, but she probably didn't want to seem like someone who was making a fuss after losing.

"I got lucky."

I grinned and put my hand out to Chae Nayun. Her face became distorted. Unsurprisingly, she didn't shake my hand.

"What do you want?"

Instead, Chae Nayun muttered briefly. Unexpectedly, she accepted her loss easily. I smiled.

"Nothing. I want nothing."

If I forced her to give up being an archer, she would do so in frustration and regret. But if she didn't give up out of her own will, if she couldn't overcome her attachment to bows and her fear of close ranged combat, she wouldn't be able to reach the apex of swordsmanship.

And I knew that she could overcome her fear and trauma. She always grew through frustration, defeat, and anger. That was something that shouldn't have changed.

"But, I want you to think for yourself. What your Gift is, what your talent is."

I said so as I pushed my hair up. Perhaps because I focused too much, I was sweating quite a bit.

Then, I suddenly remembered that the bow I was holding belonged to Chae Nayun.

"Oh, and I'll take this bow."

Even the cheapest bow cost millions of won. I had to save money where I could. Chae Nayun didn't seem to mind either, or at least, she might not even have heard that last part.

Her shoulders were trembling ever so slightly. She was crying quietly.

I turned around without speaking further, then left the archery range where only the sound of wind resounded.



At the same time, on the highest floor of Seoul's 5-star hotel.....

"Boss, are you really going? You don't have to go yourself, you know."

In front of a fancy dressing table in the penthouse room, Jain asked worriedly.

"I am."

Boss nodded.

"I'll go examine him myself."

"...Ehew. You're fixated on something again."

Boss was very adamant.

Without a choice, Jain released her magic power. Covering Boss' face, a new face appeared on top.

Jain's Gift could be used on someone else as long as that person was within a 10-kilometer range of her. Using her Gift, Jain had changed Boss' face and physique to that of a certain 'cadet'.

"So, do we just wait somewhere under the sea?"

After finishing her operation, Jain murmured as she studied Boss' expression.

"Jain, are you scared?"

"No, I'm not scared. It's just that... you know, Yun Seung-Ah that crazy bitch might come."

Yun Seung-Ah and Jain were like cats and dogs. If Yun Seung-Ah came as an exam overseer, Jain wasn't confident. Confident, in letting her live.

"I missed that ring because of her. If I see her again, I don't think I can hold myself back."

Boss stared at Jain quietly before nodding.

“Then just wait somewhere nearby.”

“...Okay. Ah, and here, it’s the detail of the cadet Boss is disguising as. At least glance over it.”

Jain gave Boss a thick stack of paper. Jain could copy her target’s outer appearance as well as their habits onto herself, but the latter only applied to herself.

Boss began to read the document with the cadet’s background information.

“You’re good at acting, right Boss?”

“Of course.”

“...Okay.”

Three weeks remained until the final exam.

# Chapter 57

## Bet (3)

When Chae Nayun easily struck the target 200 meters away, the spectators broke into applause. Chae Nayun was an amazing archer. That's what everyone felt, including Kim Suho. He looked around at other archers spectating the match. Because it was an archery duel, there were ten or so cadets with bows hanging on their backs.

"Chae Nayun's posture is amazing."

"She's been doing it for a long time."

"Yeah, but still, how can it be so perfect?"

They began to comment on the match. Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, Yoo Yeonha, and Yi Yeonghan, who didn't know much about archery, naturally listened in on their explanations.

At that moment, Kim Hajin fired. His first arrow missed the mark by a mile.

"The hell... His posture is completely off."

Kim Suho placed his ear on the commentators and his eyes on the archery duel. Kim Hajin fired a second shot, which missed once more.

"Er, maybe he really didn't practice."

"No, he changed his bow's direction at the last second. He missed on purpose."

"Huh? Why would he do that?"

"I don't know."

Then, Kim Hajin fired his third arrow. This time, his arrow hit the target perfectly.

"See? He missed his second shot on purpose."

“Okay, but why?”

“Fuck man, I don’t know!”

...For now, Kim Suho continued to watch their duel.

“But I’ve never seen him before at the archery range.”

At that moment, one of the cadets muttered.

There were two facilities for sharpshooter cadets – the shooting range and the archery range.

More often than not, the shooting range was used by cadets to practice archery with magic power, while the archery range was used for pure, traditional archery practice. Furthermore, there was a limited number of archery ranges that first years could use, so most first year sharpshooters had seen other sharpshooters' faces at least once.

“Have you seen him?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“Maybe he comes after midnight?”

“No, that’s when I’m here, from midnight to 3, and I’ve never seen him.”

Kim Suho was at a loss for words. Did Kim Hajin really not practice at all?

But Kim Hajin’s archery was too keen and quick for that to be true. His arrows shot after his target like a starving wild beast.

Soon, the archers began to compare their practice hours to discuss this mystery.

Their busy conversation came to a stop by the time the distance reached 400 meters.

Kim Hajin was shooting too well.

One of the cadets muttered in a daze.

“450-meter mark is my record...”

But soon, Kim Hajin easily surpassed the 450-meter mark. The noisy crowd slowly began to quiet down, and sounds of hard swallowing increased.

“Ah, Chae Nayun missed.”

And at 500 meters, Chae Nayun missed for the first time. On the other hand, Kim Hajin succeeded just as easily as before.

The same thing happened on the 550-meter mark. When Chae Nayun failed a second time, Kim Suho realized she would lose.

Now, it was the 600-meter mark.

Kim Suho could see Kim Hajin saying something to Chae Nayun, but because they were too far away, he couldn't hear them. Curious, he focused his magic power on his ears.

—But with a bow, you won't be able to kill a single Djinn, much less get revenge for your older brother.

Kim Suho frowned.

“What is he...”

Perhaps because of what he said, Chae Nayun failed again on the 600-meter mark. Chae Nayun immediately gave Kim Hajin a fierce glare, but Kim Hajin ignored her and concentrated on shooting.

“Whoa, what the hell!?”

At that moment, other archers exclaimed in shock. Kim Hajin had shot down three targets at 600-meter, 650-meter, and 700-meter marks. Kim Suho had to admit, Kim Hajin's technique was like a form of art. But seemingly unsatisfied, Kim Hajin continued. Kim Suho stared at him with mixed feelings.

On the other hand, Yoo Yeonha was watching Kim Hajin in satisfaction. His performance was exactly what she expected to see. Furthermore, she felt what he showed today was only a tiny fraction of his real power. She couldn't help but wonder how much of his real strength he was hiding.

“...What is he?”

“I don't know.”

“It must be a Specialized Gift.”

A nameless archer put out an idea. Hearing the word Specialized Gift, Yoo Yeonha strained her ears.

Specialized Gift. Just like its name suggested, it was a Gift specialized to a certain role. Although it wasn't a showy Gift like Kim Suho's or Shin Jonghak's, Specialized Gifts stood at the peak of the field they specialized. Furthermore, most people with Specialized Gifts had an additional Gift.

Because of this characteristic of Specialized Gifts, they were rare and valuable.

"Then there's no way Chae Nayun can beat him in pure archery. Not unless she uses magic power."

"But Kim Hajin uses a gun. It was determined that his Gift was the greatest gun-related Gift."

"Maybe his Specialized Gift is for bows and his other Gift is for guns."

"Wow, then imagine if they were both for bows."

"That wouldn't be fair. If that was the case, he would be in the same league as Jin Seyeon."

Hearing that, the archers began to nod in agreement. For the record, Jin Seyeon was Korea's Master rank Hero, titled the Divine Archer.

At that moment, Kim Hajin turned around after hitting the 900-meter mark target. Facing him, the archers suddenly froze.

"..."

In the dead silence that followed, Kim Hajin walked past the crowd of spectators. Kim Suho eyed him as he walked by, and Kim Hajin did the same expressionlessly.

Soon, Kim Hajin completely passed by Kim Suho, and Kim Suho stared at Chae Nayun who was left standing alone in the huge lane.

Kim Suho began to walk towards her.

"Nayun."

Chae Nayun's body jolted. Standing an appropriate distance away, Kim Suho picked out the words to comfort her.

“Um, I heard from the other guys, it seems Kim Hajin has a Specialized—”

“It’s fine.”

But Chae Nayun interrupted him.

“I’m... I’m not in the mood to talk. And Specialized Gift or not, that means there is a difference in our talents.”

“Nayun, don’t be so hard on yourself...”

“Just leave.”

The entire time, Chae Nayun refused to turn around.

“...Okay.”

In the end, Kim Suho returned helplessly.

At the same time, he caught sight of a man staring at him with a big smile on his face.

“Haha, you should know your place. Move over.”

Shin Jonghak sneered at him and began to walk towards Chae Nayun. However, Yoo Yeonha carefully grabbed Shin Jonghak’s sleeve, attempting to hold him back.

“Jonghak, I think you should leave her alone for now.”

“No, I’m different.”

Despite Yoo Yeonha’s dissuasion, he confidently walked up to Chae Nayun.

“Chae Nayun, I think you’re...”

“I SAID LEAVE!”

Chae Nayun’s thunderous roar startled Shin Jonghak.

“C-Chae Nayun? I’m not Kim Suho, I’m Shin Jonghak...”

Somewhat in a daze, he placed his hand on Chae Nayun's shoulder. Chae Nayun immediately smacked his hand away.

"I SAID LEAVE! SCREW OFF!"

"...Eh? Uh, um... uh, yeah."

Shin Jonghak staggered backward as though his soul was sucked out.

"Didn't I tell you?"

"..."

By the time Shin Jonghak returned to Yoo Yeonha with a devastated face, Chae Nayun was running into the forest.

Yoo Yeonha watched her leave with a grin on her face, happy to see Chae Nayun running away after being completely stomped.

But separately from her heated emotions, her cold reasoning was working on a plan.

Helping someone when they were down was the most effective way of making connections.

Chae Nayun had a grade 1 priority in Yoo Yeonha's Connection Management List. Just being a fourth generation chaebol was enough to give her that grade, but her family conglomerate wasn't one that ran a guild. In other words, she was the greatest connection she could bring into her guild.

"...Don't worry, I'll console her."

Yoo Yeonha began to run after Chae Nayun.



Not long afterwards, she discovered Chae Nayun sitting crouched down behind a bush. With her face buried between her knees, she was shaking up and down.

"Nayun?"

When Yoo Yeonha called her, she trembled but didn't respond. Yoo Yeonha quietly sat down next to her, and Chae Nayun waddled to the side in response.

“...”

Yoo Yeonha didn't say anything. She only occasionally signaled to Chae Nayun that she was still there, all the while waiting patiently.

She had to wait for a fairly long time. The wind blew, leaves fell, and the sky began to grow dark.

After about 30 minutes, Chae Nayun raised her head, wiping her tears as she sobbed.

“Yoo Yeonha.”

She then called Yoo Yeonha, who responded with a casual, tender voice.

“Yeah?”

Chae Nayun opened her mouth within the forest's silence.

“Did you guys... not hear him?”

“Hear what?”

“He... mentioned Oppa.”

“...Really? We were too far.”

Yoo Yeonha was genuinely surprised. To Chae Nayun, her older brother was a bottom line that shouldn't be crossed, the reverse scale of a dragon that shouldn't be touched. Every cadet took special care not to mention him even as an accident...

“Yeah, that bastard... Haa, that was the second time.”

Chae Nayun couldn't even continue her sentence. She was burning up from a mixture of embarrassment and rage. She wanted to let it out, chase after him and punish him, but because she was so thoroughly crushed, she didn't have the strength to do so.

“Mm...”

Seeing this Chae Nayun, Yoo Yeonha scratched her neck. Things had gotten more complicated than she anticipated.

Yoo Yeonha disliked Chae Nayun, but she also wanted to make her into her ally. However, the same could be said for Kim Hajin, and he was even a benefactor who saved her life.

Rather than choosing between one of them, she told herself that the best thing to do was to mend their relationship.

Of course, she also wondered why Kim Hajin would say something like that.

“Haa.”

Yoo Yeonha sighed and began to contemplate on what to say.

And exactly three minutes later, she thought up a good idea.

*Kuhum.* After clearing her throat, Yoo Yeonha spoke.

“...It’s understandable.”

“What?”

“Your Oppa is alive.”

“...Are you crazy?”

Chae Nayun glared at Yoo Yeonha as though she was ready to strangle her at any moment. Yoo Yeonha calmly received her aggressive gaze, then carefully continued her sentence.

“Did you know? People feel a sense of kinship with others who share similar wounds.”

\_Sssss. \_The forest’s leaves shook.

Chae Nayun looked confused. Yoo Yeonha continued.

“But when the depths of those wounds are different... so, if someone who should feel less pain is crying louder, the person with the deeper wound might find it unsightly.”

Yoo Yeonha recalled the message she received from Yoo Jinhyuk three days ago.

[It’ll take longer to look into him. But know this, there is something about Kim Hajin.]

'There is something about Kim Hajin.

'From this meaningful sentence, Yoo Yeonha obtained assurance of her hypothesis. Kim Hajin's parents were killed by someone, and Kim Hajin was searching for the person or group who had ruined his happy life.

"What are you talking about? I..."

"That person, he's an orphan. Probably because of a reason similar to yours."

"...What?"

Chae Nayun's eyes widened.

It was a reaction Yoo Yeonha expected. Chae Nayun was someone who didn't care about other people's past. In a way, it was a defensive mechanism, since if she dug up others' past, they could also dig up her own.

"Don't you know that people are harassing him about it?"

Chae Nayun looked completely oblivious. In the first place, it wasn't something she could imagine. From her perspective, people who made fun of others for losing their parents couldn't exist.

Chae Nayun swallowed hard and asked again.

"He endured it?"

"...That's the only thing you're curious about?"

Yoo Yeonha furrowed her brows as though she was tired.

"Kim Hajin is being harassed because of you. Because you told Jonghak."

"T-That's..."

"Nayun."

Yoo Yeonha collected her breath before continuing.

"...You're not the only one with a painful past."

At that moment, Chae Nayun's face drew a blank.

Chae Nayun thought back to the day she talked to Shin Jonghak because of what Kim Hajin said about her older brother.

That was when harassments and bad rumors about Kim Hajin began. She was the source of it, yet she didn't do anything to stop it. She had purposely ignored it, something she couldn't deny.

Still, she truly didn't expect that those delinquents would even dig up his past...

"K-Kuhum."

Seeing Chae Nayun's soulless face, Yoo Yeonha held back her laughter by clearing her throat. This was enough. Investing any more time and emotion was something that didn't fit her personality.

"Then I'm leaving now. I'm only a third party in all this, so talking about deep things will only cause misunderstandings. You can think the rest for yourself, Nayun."

Yoo Yeonha gently stroked Chae Nayun's shoulder and turned around to leave.

"...Uh, yeah."

Chae Nayun's voice was much weaker than before.

Yoo Yeonha felt like she gained points from both of them. Satisfied, she went back with a light heart.

"..."

In the vast, silent forest, Chae Nayun was left all alone. She stared into the distance blankly.

*Chwaaaaa—*

From the darkness, cool wind blew and brushed against the forest's leaves.

Seeing leaves shaking and falling, Chae Nayun took time to self-reflect.



"...Haha, you sure got big."

With a big grin, I looked down at Evandel's Seed. The way it quivered to absorb blood

was surprisingly cute.

I already knew what the seed would look like once it hatched. At first, she would look like a 3 to 4-year-old child.

But Evandel was a very special witch. Temporarily transforming herself into a cat or a dog shouldn't be a problem for her.

“Should I go with a cat? Or a dog...?”

That was my worry. Raising a child at Cube was absolutely not allowed, but it was okay to own pets. In fact, Cube encouraged cadets to own pets as they supposedly helped with cadets' mental health. There was even a pet adoption center inside Cube.

“When will you hatch?”

I gently rubbed the seed's belly. The seed quivered, almost as if it was ticklish.

“Haha, you're so cute.”

I suddenly remembered Mong, a dog I used to own. He only liked Mom and Dad and never gave me a glance, but at this point, I missed everyone from Earth.

At that moment... an alert popped up on the laptop I had open on my desk.

[You obtained 253 SP.]

[An incredible luck applies to your human relationship!]

[Narrow Escape from Death (2/9) – A special stat, accumulation of luck, becomes partly unlocked!]

“...What's this?”

It was an alert I couldn't understand.

# Chapter 58

## Change

Dorm 4, penthouse.

Chae Nayun was lying on her bed in this large, empty room.

Today was Sunday, and classes would resume tomorrow.

“Haa...”

Chae Nayun let out a deep sigh. Thinking about tomorrow, fear came over her. The result of her bet with Kim Hajin should have spread by now, that she was completely overwhelmed. Some people would feel elated, while some would worry. Chae Nayun hoped that the emotions directed at her would be schadenfreude rather than worry and sympathy.

But what worried her more than anything else was Kim Hajin himself.

“Smoking...”

Chae Nayun remembered her conversation with Kim Hajin in Norway. He had murmured that he quit smoking. At the time, she thought he was just trying to act cool, but with the information she had now, she had to believe that he had a reason for smoking. That with no one to rely on, he had to rely on an object to relieve his pain...

Chae Nayun fell flat on her bed.

There were ample traces of the harassment Kim Hajin suffered. Shin Jonghak’s lackeys had written posts on forums and commented on his social media, and Chae Nayun looked through them all. Just like Yoo Yeonha said, she could hardly read most of them without furrowing her brows. Embarrassment, shame, and remorse became tangled up inside her into a complicated emotion.

Change of weapon and position.

Thinking about it now, Kim Hajin had experienced them first.

She read that Kim Hajin was originally a swordsman. Even so, he gave up on his sword. Most likely, it was because he realized his Gift wasn’t suitable for it.

Abandoning everything he had worked towards his entire life, choosing an unorthodox weapon like a gun... Chae Nayun wondered what he must have felt.

Chae Nayun pushed her hand below her bed. From there, she took out a fairly big suitcase. She got up from her bed, then opened it. Immediately, her treasured memories resurfaced.

Inside the suitcase were hundreds of pictures. They were something she had buried deep inside her heart to avoid being hurt, but each picture was something she could never forget as they were taken with people she loved the most.

Her mother and her older brother. Inside the pictures, they were happily smiling together with Chae Nayun. The young Chae Nayun looked so happy that she teared up simply by looking at her younger self.

“Huup.”

Chae Nayun held back her tears. Then, she picked up the short sword placed in the suitcase.

The sword was only about a meter long, but because it was enchanted with a special magic, it increased in length when it absorbed magic power. From what she remembered, the maximum length was about 4 meters. This mystical sword was gifted to her by Yoo Sihyuk eight years ago.

For the first time in a long time, Chae Nayun held the sword in her hand. Although it looked like a cute toy, it was a deadly weapon that was heavier than the world when she was young.

“What was my limit again? I doubt my magic power control was good when I was 8, but I remember it being around 2 meters...”

Chae Nayun imbued the sword with her magic power. The blade shot up and became long enough to reach the ceiling.

“Wow... I grew a lot.”

Realizing something obvious, Chae Nayun stared at the sword for a long time. Then, just like how her master taught her in the past, she enveloped the sword with magic power. Her blue magic power rose up clearly around the blade.

*Jiiing.*

The sword resonated with her magic power, manifesting sword qi.

“ ... ”

Chae Nayun put her forehead against the sword. Then, she closed her eyes. The cold metallic touch and the ringing of magic power, Chae Nayun engraved the sensation in her heart.



Sunday. I had a meeting with Cube’s faculty. It was because of something called a Specialized Gift. The rumor that I defeated Chae Nayun and hit the 900-meter mark had already spread all across Cube.

They asked whether the rumor was true. After thinking about it for a bit, I nodded. Then, they asked whether I wanted to release the information to the public or keep it a secret.

I chose the latter. In reality, it didn’t really matter which one I chose as it would be revealed regardless. The only difference was that the latter option made me a product. If someone wanted information about me from Cube, they would have to buy it from Cube. Of course, since rumors of it had already spread, they would only be paying for a confirmation of the rumor.

In any case, once the meeting ended, I left the administration building. As final exams began in two weeks, there was practically no one walking outside. Everyone was likely studying in the library or training at the Fitness Center.

However, I headed back to my dorm.

Opening the familiar door, I sat down on the couch and opened my laptop.

There were numerous things I needed to buy for the upcoming exam.

[Automatic Tent]

[Porkchops]

[Chicken Breast]

[Frying Pan]

[Portable Grill]

...

...

I put all the camping equipment I could think of into the shopping basket. It cost me

two million won in total, but I made the purchase without hesitation. Instructors would go through our bags before the final exam to look for personal weapons and defensive equipment. However, items like the ones I bought were permitted. If they ask why I brought them, I had more than enough excuses to give. The simplest one was to say that I prepared everything just in case.

[Your purchase has been completed.]

Immediately after the confirmation message popped up, Park Soohyuk also sent me a message.

[Hajin, we made our website. Take a look. You're on our list of investors.]

[[wmw.shagency.com](http://wmw.shagency.com)]

“Oh?”

It was an agency website. I immediately went into it.

[Cultivation of Trust – SH Agency]

[SH Agency Introduction] [List of Investors] [List of Affiliated Hunters]

The design was quite decent. But still, affiliated hunters? Was it there just for the sake of being there? I snickered as I clicked on it.

===

[Jamie King]

Date of birth: 08/03/1997

A hunter with 5 years of experience

[Joshua]

Date of birth: 09/01/2005

A hunter with 1 year of experience

===

“Oh, there actually are some?”

Surprisingly, he had already found two hunters. I didn't know who they were, but the important thing was that they were there.

This time, I clicked on the list of investors and was immediately surprised. I thought I would be the only one, but someone else had joined the ranks.

[Kim Hajin.]

[Yoo Yeonha.]

She was quick as expected.  
With a grin, I closed the laptop.

[How's the website?]

[It's clean and nice, but I think you should put Yoo Yeonha's name before me on the list of investors.]

Even if she might not act like it, she actually cared a lot about such things.

[Why? I don't really care, but shouldn't you come first? You know, both alphabetically and by who came first.]

[No, just do as I say.]

If left unchanged, the number of investments he got in the future could very well decrease.



The next day.

“Huu.”

Standing in front of the classroom door, I collected my breath.

I was especially nervous today. The archery duel had about 70 spectators, so what happened in the duel was bound to spread. Now that four days had passed since the duel, it would be strange if anyone didn't know.

Because of it, I was somewhat apprehensive about going into the classroom, but I still opened the door and walked in.

Everyone's eyes immediately fell on me, and I could hear them murmuring about me. Ignoring whatever they were saying, I walked to my usual spot and sat down. Chae

Nayun wasn't here yet.

"...?"

No, I thought she wasn't here, but hearing a familiar voice, I turned towards that direction.

There, I saw Chae Nayun who was different than her usual self. To be more precise, her long brown hair, which reached her chest, had been shortened to her shoulders. Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha were talking in whispers.

"...So how's the short hair? You do look good in it."

"Hair is hair. I do like that it's less hot though. You should also cut your hair."

"I like mine the way it is... By the way, you didn't cut your hair because of the bet, did you?"

"I did it because it was hot. Plus, you can't always win. Do I look like someone who would dwell on the past?"

From what I could see, she was the same other than her hair being shorter. But at that moment, Chae Nayun stretched and turned her head sideways. Because it felt like she was looking at me, I quickly buried my face on my desk.



Chae Nayun pretended to stretch and peeked at Kim Hajin. He had only just arrived but was already studying hard.

"Kuu~ I'm tired."

Chae Nayun turned back to the front.

"Oh right, did you study?"

At that moment, Shin Jonghak, who was sitting behind Chae Nayun, asked. Chae Nayun gave a simple reply.

"I did enough."

Theory classes only held a minor role in Cube. Combat exams and written exams had a 7:3 ratio in their impact on grades, but because combat exams better reflected the level of cadets, cadets who ranked near the top in combat exams usually scored similarly in written exams. Of course, there were exceptions as well.

“Enough? Then you should be around rank 600 again, hahaha.”

Thinking Chae Nayun, who was pretending to be fine, to really be fine, Shin Jonghak made fun of her insensitively.

“...”

Chae Nayun glared at Shin Jonghak fiercely. Feeling the hostile look, Shin Jonghak stopped snickering and awkwardly backed off.

“Oh right, here are the Phenomenon Realm Analysis notes you were asking about yesterday.”

Kim Suho changed the topic in a hurry.

“Thanks. I’ll copy it quickly and give it back.”

“Don’t expect too much. Phenomenon Realm Analysis is difficult for everyone except Kim Ha...”

Kim Suho paused in the middle of his sentence, realizing he made a mistake.

“You’re right. It’s difficult for everyone except Kim Hajin. It’s fine, geez. You don’t have to be so careful.”

Chae Nayun shook her head and put Kim Suho’s notebook in front of her. Although Yoo Yeonha was better at studying than Kim Suho, Yoo Yeonha was untrustworthy. Even in reality, Yoo Yeonha had two notes because she didn’t want to lend her real one to Chae Nayun.

*Drrrrk—*

Then, the theory class professor walked in.

“Now, now, quiet down. You know your exams are in two weeks, right? It’ll cover everything until Aurora Reaction.”

The noisy classroom immediately became silent. The professor announced the scope of material covered on the test before starting today’s class. Chae Nayun opened her notebook and grabbed her pen.

‘I’ll study hard today. I have to show that I’m different than before... but I’m a bit sleepy... this is the professor’s fault... ’

When she woke up after dozing off, there was a ton of material she needed to write down.

“Alright, here’s a calculation problem, your favorites type. Now I know some of you don’t understand why you need to learn this. But, once you go out into the real world and begin entering dungeons, you’ll be on your knees thanking me. If you don’t want to cry tears of blood, don’t slack off now.”

It seemed the professor finished explaining the theoretical concepts of today’s class as he already moved on to example problems. Chae Nayun couldn’t understand this rift in time.

“For this problem, I want somebody to help me solve it. Let’s see...”

The professor paused for a moment and began to look over the list of cadets. Chae Nayun immediately became nervous, worried that he might call her name. She was already embarrassed to death because of the archery duel. The last thing she wanted was to face another embarrassment.

“Ah. Cadet Kim Hajin. Come out.”

Thankfully, it wasn’t Chae Nayun.

Kim Hajin got up from his seat and sauntered up to the teaching podium as everyone’s gazes fell on him. Then, he stepped up the podium and was handed a hologram pen by the professor.

He then proceeded to solve the problem without a pause. His procedures and calculations were both flawless, and even his penmanship was impeccable. Chae Nayun stared at the variables and numbers he wrote down in a daze. Then, she suddenly snapped out and began to copy everything down.

“Good. Very good.”

The professor applauded as soon as Kim Hajin finished. Everyone else was busy copying what he wrote.

“Perfect. As expected of rank 1 in the world. You can sit now. I’ll do the explaining.”

Rank 1 in the world? Kim Hajin tilted his head in confusion, but then went back to his seat without further questions.

“Look everyone. This is what we call a flawless, model answer.”

The professor gathered everyone’s attention. This time, Chae Nayun also paid attention with widened eyes.



Monday night, 10 P.M.

I went to the shooting range as soon as I finished working out in the Fitness Center. I cranked up the difficulty to stage 10 where the targets also attacked and started practicing.

But while I practiced, faint shouting continued to pierce through the wall.

Huap! Hiyaap! Something like that. Curious, I peered through the wall.

“...Hm?”

In the shooting room next to me, Chae Nayun was brandishing a sword against a dummy she must have brought from somewhere.

It was a bit strange seeing someone train with a sword in a shooting range, but I still felt good about it.

In the original story, Chae Nayun changed to a sword only about a year after she graduated from Cube. The reason for it was the Genghis Khan Artifact Scramble, which occurred in Mongolia. There, she encountered the Djinn who killed her mother but was unable to kill him with her bow.

If Chae Nayun started honing her swordsmanship now, by graduation, she would likely be a monster second only to Kim Suho. Feeling pleased with myself, I stretched and ended today’s practice.

But when I left the shooting room, the door next to me also opened. From inside, Chae Nayun walked out as she wiped her sweat. I instantly froze, and it was the same for Chae Nayun.

“...”

“...”

To be completely honest, I felt sorry about things I had said to Chae Nayun. Although I had good intentions of trying to encourage her, I had still hit her nerve twice. So before Chae Nayun attacked me, I opened my mouth first.

“...D-Did you finish your archery practice?”

“Huh? Oh, uh, yeah.”

Chae Nayun awkwardly retorted.

“W-What, I can’t?”

“No, keep up the good work.”

I wanted to end the conversation and quickly leave, but Chae Nayun stopped me.

“Hey.”

“...”

I was a bit scared, but I still turned around and faced her.

“What.”

“You, um... said you quit smoking.”

“...What?”

I was caught off guard by her unexpected words.

Indeed, I did say that during our trip to Norway. To be exact, Chae Nayun overheard what I muttered to myself.

“I did.”

“...How did you quit?”

It seemed like a completely irrelevant question to ask. Was she trying to offer me a poisoned cigarette or something?

“You don’t need to know.”

It wasn’t a question I could answer, so I cut her off and left.  
From my back, I could feel Chae Nayun’s gaze.

# Chapter 59

## Final Exam (1)

A week before the final written exams.

*Tiiring— Tiiring—*

I was playing a VR game when I received two messages on my smartwatch.

[Hajin, do you have any plans to sell a study guide?]

[Hajin, this is Yeonji. Can you lend me your notes? ㅏㅏ I'll pay you back with ranking points when we become Heroes ㅏㅏㅏㅏ Pleaaaaase? ㅏㅏㅏㅏ]

I could see that people were getting desperate, as people I've never seen or talked to started messaging me. It wasn't long ago that they were talking behind my back, calling me a delinquent, so I had no intention of helping any of them. Who even was Yeonji?

"Yeah, no."

When I blocked them, another message came in.

"What now..."

My furrowed brows immediately went loose.

The sender this time was Rachel.

[Um, can you perhaps help me with this problem ㅏㅏ.ㅏㅏ? It's a calculation problem, but it's too hard... :( ]

Rachel sent a picture of a problem.

"..."

I began to quietly solve it.



Four days before the written exams.

Yoo Yeonha was writing a talent report late into the night. Unlike her usual self, she was wearing round glasses, which gave her eyes increased fatigue recovery and typo checking functionality.

===

[Kim Hajin]

[Physical] ★★☆☆☆ ~ ★★★★★☆

[Intelligence] ★★★★★

[Utility] ★★★★★

[Potential] ★★★★★

[Gift] ???

Evaluation – Grade 1

—Hiding his power for some reason, but strength surpassing the level of cadets can be seen.

—Sole flaw is that his Gift hasn't been revealed. But it is estimated to be at least four stars.

===

===

[Kim Suho]

[Physical] ★★★★★☆

[Intelligence] ★★☆☆☆

[Utility] ★★★★★☆

[Potential] ★★★★★

[Gift] ★★★★★

Evaluation – Grade 1

—His Gift, Sword Saint, is more than enough to give him full points.

—His elegant swordsmanship is well known among cadets.

—Although not as much as Kim Hajin, he has the potential to reach the pinnacle of Heroes...

===

“...Auuuu, I'm exhausted.”

Yoo Yeonha put her glasses down.

It had taken her five whole hours to write this report. She quantified the ability of seven cadets, including Kim Hajin and Kim Suho, and provided close to 200 pages of data in support of her estimate.

Recorded inside were things that weren't revealed to the public, which only Yoo Yeonha knew about. This report would now become Essence of the Strait's top-secret document and reach its leader, Yoo Jinwoong.

Although the finals were right around the corner, this report was more important to Yoo Yeonha than her grades. Of course, getting good grades wouldn't be bad, but Yoo Yeonha's goal wasn't becoming the greatest Hero. Not only was she cognizant of her limits, but she also knew that a Hero was only one individual no matter how strong he was and that he would never be able to win against society.

However, Yoo Yeonha wanted to cultivate her own society in Korea. The reason she entered Cube was solely to obtain the status of a Hero and to make connections.

"...Is he going to continue ignoring me?"

Yoo Yeonha grumbled as she picked up her smartwatch.

Yoo Jinhyuk had yet to reply to her.



Three days before the written exams, Friday.

The head of the Chameleon Troupe collected her breath in front of an unfamiliar door.

—Boss, no one is going to notice your disguise, so you don't have to worry. Remember, your name is Seo Ijin. Don't forget about it. Find me if anything happens. I'll be in the infirmary.

Jain's voice rang out in her ears. Just like she said, her disguise was perfect. The cadet named Seo Ijin had similar build and hair color as her, so it didn't take much magic power to disguise her either.

—Go in.

Boss nodded and opened the door.

As classes would begin soon, the room was full of cadets. She had already memorized

everyone's faces. She then walked to the group that Seo Ijin often hung out with. At that moment...

"Hey! Seo Ijin!"

Someone struck her head.

She didn't suffer any huge injury, but she fell in a daze. She thought back to what just happened, and coming to a realization, she stiffly turned her head to the side.

There, she saw a man she didn't recognize.

"Did you study well?"

The man said, looking down at her. She replied just as she practiced.

"...Un, I did." [1]

"What were you doing yesterday? You weren't respon—"

Before the man did anything else, she sat down on her seat.

"Ijin~"

Immediately, a pair of arms wrapped around her neck. She was slightly startled, but she wasn't as shocked as before. Maintaining her calm, she looked back at the girl who clung to her back, feeling like a huge cicada had landed on her. Just like a cicada, the girl could also be killed by a single fist.

*Drrrrk—*

At that moment, the door opened. Boss turned towards the door, and there, she saw the reason she infiltrated this class.

She stared at Kim Hajin, who walked in while yawning and met her eyes. Immediately, he froze.

\*

'...The hell.'

I gazed at a girl I usually wouldn't have cared about. I didn't know her name, but I knew she was in my class. The way she interacted with her friends looked completely

normal from the outside.

However, I could see through her outside appearance. My Gift, Observation and Reading, could perfectly unmask Jain's Gift.

That girl wasn't a normal cadet, but the boss of the Chameleon Troupe.

She was likely here to observe Kim Suho. Still, this was something that never happened in the original story.

"Hey, why did you stop being active in your social media? Did you find a boyfriend?"

Cadets who didn't know this touched her body here and there. It seemed the girl she disguised as was a bit of a pushover.

"Hoho, boyfriend? What do you mean? I just slept because I was tired."

Boss responded in an awkward way, and I broke out into a cold sweat as I watched her. With one wrong move, I felt like their limbs and bones would break apart.

"Ah, Ijin, your cheeks are chubbier than usual. Did you eat ramen before sleeping?"

At that moment, one of the girls pinched Boss' cheeks. Boss' face immediately stiffened. I opened my mouth almost instinctively.

"Hey. Hey."

Perhaps because I wasn't loud enough, they didn't hear me, and Boss' cheeks were already extended to the limit. I could see her clenching her fists.

"HEY!"

In the end, I yelled loudly. This time, I went overboard with my volume. The classroom fell silent in an instant, and everyone's gazes fell on me. Of course, I didn't care about any of that.

"Can you shut up!? I'm trying to study!"

I yelled as I pointed at the notebook on my desk. If Boss exploded, everyone in this room could die.

“...What, you think you tell us what to do just because you’re smart?”

Though they grumbled unhappily, they stopped messing with Boss thanks to me interfering.

Afterward, Boss gave me an odd look, then buried her face on the desk. The rest began to talk behind my back.



For the entire duration of the written exam week, I carefully observed Seo Ijin, who Boss was disguised as. I didn’t just observe her. I even talked to her like a friend, hoping to obtain some SP.

She talked like a generic high school girl trying to sound cute, which didn’t suit her at all, and she even bought me an ice cream. I didn’t eat it, and that ice cream was still in my refrigerator.

In any case, the written exams ended without much trouble. Cube’s weekend after the exams was desolate. Cadets who pulled all-nighters to study for the exams were focused on going back to their peak physical condition. As a result, the weekend also went by like a breeze.

“Now, focus!”

Monday finally arrived. It was the day the final exam would really begin.

The 1300 first year cadets went to a harbor in Busan, and everyone was currently on ships separated by class.

“We will now begin the baggage inspection.”

As soon as cadets all got on the ship, the instructors began the baggage inspection.

Three instructors each called on cadets, and it eventually became my turn.

I entered a room where an instructor was the only one in it and handed him my magic pouch.

“Weight?”

“10kg.”

“What’s inside?”

“Food, tent, frying pan, torch, grill... things like that.”

“...I’m opening it.”

'Why ask what's inside if you're going to open it?'

As I grumbled inwardly, the instructor pulled everything out of the bag. He stared at the assortment of items in disbelief.

“Why did you prepare so much?”

“Well, the announcements said that a single exam will go on for the whole week, so I had a general idea of what the test would be. I prepared accordingly.”

“...Clever.”

The instructor grinned, but still carefully looked through everything. Then, he sent me back. Thankfully, he didn't find out about Evandel's Seed. I brought it with me since it could hatch at any time. It seemed he thought it was a slightly big almond or something.

“Hua.”

After the inspection, I sat down on a bench near the ship's bow.

In the distance, I could see an island coming into view. A countless number of drones were flying around the island like seagulls.

“...I'm a bit nervous.”

Now that the exam was right under my nose, I began to grow nervous. This exam would be difficult, especially since I couldn't use my Desert Eagle.

...No, I could use it. I just had to avoid being seen by those drones.

And there was a simple way to avoid their watch.

I just had to hack into them.

“Now, I will explain how this exam will work.”

Once the baggage inspection finished, an instructor came out to explain the rules.

“In 30 minutes, you will split into groups of 10 and land in different areas of that island. You will stay there for five days, and you will have to survive on your own. We will, however, provide half a day’s worth of food.”

The food supply had decreased from a full day’s worth of food in the original story to half a day’s worth of food.

At the instructor’s shocking words, the ship began to get noisy.

“The exam is rather simple. The number of points you get will be your grade. Obtaining points is equally simple. There are wild animals and monsters living on that island. Wild animals are obviously there for you to eat, and monsters will be what you hunt to gain points. Depending on their rank and grade, you will get 1 to 10 points. You should have all received special smartwatches for this exam. Scan their corpses with them, and you’ll be able to see the number of points you got.”

The instructor’s explanation continued for a while.

In summary, cadets could steal, sell, and buy points from each other. They could eliminate other cadets, from which they would gain an additional 5 points on top of all the points the eliminated cadet had. However, cadets could only fight each other after the first 12 hours.

“In addition, exam overseers will have huge nametags on their chest. Although I doubt anyone can succeed, you can steal these nametags for 200 points each.”

Despite the huge point values these nametags had, no one seemed interested in them.

“Finally, you see that tower in the middle? You are eliminated if you have your smartwatch stolen, so you can head to the tower and wait for the end of the exam.”

Once the instructor’s explanation ended, heavy tension emerged from the ship’s deck. No one was talking to each other. Soon, the instructors brought out boats. Cadets would now be transported to the island in groups of ten.

“Chae Nayun, Jin Yooyun, Selen, Haize...”

The starting group was very important as it determined your potential teammates or enemies.

“Kim Hajin, Jin Seoha, Yoojoong, Wang Shifu, Blen... Rachel, Tara.”

I got on the boat and exchanged awkward looks with nine other cadets. Rachel was also in my group.

Soon, the boat set off. I gazed at the island and fell in thought. Rachel would be exposed to the greatest danger in this exam. Lancaster, who was already resentful towards her, had become a bigger threat in this world on top of becoming more aggressive.

“Here’s your stop.”

But before I could carefully plan out my actions, the boat arrived at the island. The moment we landed, I talked to Rachel.

“...Rachel-ssi, would you like to team up with me?”

I didn’t expect her to agree, and Rachel shook her head as I expected.

“I’m more comfortable going alone.”

That’s what Rachel said. However, I didn’t simply back down. I gave her my exam smartwatch’s live coordinates. This exam smartwatch had three functionalities – scanning monsters, allowing for point trading, and location sharing. The latter two functionalities were there to encourage teaming up.

“Just in case you change your mind.”

I spoke as I pointed at my watch, then Rachel smiled and left. Meanwhile, the remaining cadets were murmuring to themselves about me being rejected. Since these guys didn’t seem useful, I also just went on my way, running into the forest.

After finding a random tree to lean on, I opened my laptop. It took a reasonable amount of SP to access the drones’ servers. Once I paid, my laptop screen split into 60 smaller screens. Thanks to my Gift, my eyesight could clearly analyze all of them simultaneously.

Most of the important cadets were alone. Chae Nayun was already preparing to get lost, Kim Suho was fighting a monster, and Yoo Yeonha was the only one teamed up with someone. If I remembered correctly, the girl she was with was rank 15. It seemed she already won over a skilled cadet.

However, they weren't who I was interested in.

"...There."

I soon discovered a group of five cadets who were part of the repeater class. I had already looked up the faces of those who would be threats. In the original story, only two of those five were Djinn, but it was likely that all five were Djinn in this world. However, there was still some time before they would start to get active. After all, cadets weren't allowed to fight each other for at least the next 12 hours.

Before then...

"I guess I should find a camping spot."

1. She talks kind of like a kid.

# Chapter 60

## Final Exam (2)

An hour passed by since I entered the island. I was still walking through the forest. Currently, I was heading to my chosen camping spot, a place that was near a river with a mountain on one side. It was the region the ancient sages would have called, 'back to the mountain, face to the water'.

I was prepared thoroughly for an exploration. On my right hand was my laptop, which constantly showed drone footages from the island, and in my pocket was a map of the island outputted by the Book of Truth. In other words, I was full of cheat keys.

But before I could arrive at the camping spot, I ran into a monster.

Clown monkey. Just like its name suggested, it was a monkey with colorful spots on its body. However, its face was a bit grotesque for a monkey, and because it was the size of an adult man, people were taken aback the first time they saw it.

"...Jesus, it looks horrifying."

Clown monkeys should be low-intermediate rank grade 9. Of course, there were individual differences, but the one in front of me didn't look any stronger than the average clown monkey.

I took out my training handgun.

Because it was quick, it would be troublesome if I didn't finish it in one blow. So, I aimed for its vital point, its tail. Clown monkeys were innately nimble, but because they would lose their sense of balance without their tails, they were easy to deal with.

I pulled the trigger without hesitation. The fired magic bullet drew a straight line across the air, then pierced the clown monkey's tail. It tried to jump up in response to the sudden ambush, but with its tail injured, it lost its balance and fell. I quickly fired five bullets into its head, though the fourth bullet was enough to penetrate its skull.

"That was easy."

After scanning the clown monkey's corpse with the smartwatch, I continued on my way.

After about 30 minutes of walking, a river stream appeared.

The source of the water was located in the northernmost area of the island, which flowed down and split into eight branches. This river seemed to be a branch of a branch but had no problem to serve as a water source. Furthermore, there was a rocky mountain behind the river and a dense forest above it, making it an ideal camping spot.

I took out my tent, which looked like a small disk and could be opened up by imbuing magic power. When I put in some of Stigma's magic power, the disk moved by itself and formed a huge tent.

"Wow."

I entered the tent. It was cozier than I imagined. There was even furniture inside, a bed and a small table.

Since nothing big would happen at the beginning of the exam, I decided to get some sleep.

"Huaam."

With a big yawn, I jumped on the bed.



Nine hours after the start of the exam.

The blazing sun had set, and darkness descended on the island and sea.

"Haa..."

Amidst the fiercely blowing wind, Rachel was sitting on a rocky mountain and collecting her breath.

She had set out by herself after rejecting several offers to team up, but now, she was feeling the need to team up more than anyone else.

The biggest reason was food.

"...Auu."

Rachel looked down at her food supply with a mixed feeling. Only half of the provided food remained. She ate only two hours ago, but she became hungry again after scuffling with a monster.

Cadets had to find their own food in this place by looking for edible vegetation or hunting wild animals. Anyone could guess that wild animals stayed near rivers.

But even if she hunted wild animals, there was the problem of cooking them. Cutting their skin, taking out their bones, and obtaining the meat... Rachel had no experience with butchery.

Since she already hunted six monsters, she could also trade with other cadets. But points were precious. She was trying to eat for the sake of obtaining points, so paying points to buy food didn't make much sense.

When Rachel was pondering with a grave look...

A faint scent of meat tickled her nose.

“ ... ”

She stood up and looked down the mountain. Below, she could faintly see the red color of fire. It especially stood out in the dark.

There were likely cadets there. From the smell, they had to be grilling meat.

Rachel swallowed her saliva. Although she still had half of her food supply remaining, she knew she had to save it as much as possible. Not only would the desperate side be at a disadvantage in a trade, the provided food supply was also clean and trustworthy.

Rachel jumped down. After running down from a 300m height in just three minutes, Rachel reached the ground. Then, she chased after the smell.

Not long afterward, she found five cadets cooking a giant boar. The cadets noticed her presence and turned their gazes.

“Eh?”

Three male and two female cadets. It was a well-balanced group. Rachel stared at them silently.

“...What do you want?”

They put up their guard. Rachel estimated their battle prowess. However, it was still too early to fight other cadets. Rachel pointed at the boar.

“I’d like to buy some.”

“Ah~ Haha, you’re working alone.”

A male cadet, who seemed to be the group’s leader, stood up. He approached Rachel and held out his greasy hand. Rachel tried to shake his hand anyway, but the man pulled his hand back before she could do so.

“Ah, my hand is dirty.”

He laughed heartily and continued.

“You’re welcome to join in. We’re all cadets here. That’s fine with you guys, right?”

The man turned around and gave the others a meaningful look which Rachel couldn’t see.

The man then turned back around.

“Oh right, you must not know our names. We know yours.”

“...”

Rachel silently nodded. The man scratched his neck and spoke.

“Well, Rachel-ssi is famous... I’m Joo Yeohoon.”



“Argh, where am I?”

Chae Nayun wandered in the woods for 14 hours. During this time, she hunted 9 monsters, likely placing herself near the top of the leaderboard. It was the result of simultaneously using a bow and a sword.

“There’s no end...”

She plowed through vines and tall grass, but no matter how much she walked, she couldn’t find a useful source of water or food. In fact, she never even ran into a cadet.

Now, she was exhausted.

When she was on the verge of passing out...

Like a light of salvation, a faint torchlight appeared in the distance. She felt that it could even be a campfire.

“Oooh!”

Chae Nayun ran towards the light, and as she approached the light, she could smell a spicy fragrance.

After escaping the endless field of tall grass, Chae Nayun witnessed the source of the light.

“Eh?”

There, she saw Kim Hajin munching on a piece of meat. With chopsticks in his hand and a plate full of meat, he was staring at her.

“...What?”

He tilted his head and asked.

Chae Nayun swallowed hard. Although she favored high-class food, she had moved for 14 hours with little rest or food. She had long since devoured the provided food. If it was something that could be eaten, she was prepared to eat it tastily.

Chae Nayun first observed Kim Hajin and his surroundings. There was a huge, cozy-looking tent behind him. The source of the light wasn't a campfire like she had thought, but a portable grill. Not only that, he had a table, a chair, a frying pan, and packaged meat that was being cooked...

“W-What the heck, where did you get all these?”

“...I prepared them for the exam.”

“What? How did you know about the exam to have prepared all these?”

“I brought them just in case. Don't you know I'm number 1 in the world?”

Kim Hajin tapped on his head and spoke.

“I’m pretty damn smart.”

“...Yeah, good for you.”

Chae Nayun’s sarcastic remark only lasted for a moment. She swallowed hard looking at the meat.

On the other hand, Kim Hajin was wondering if their encounter was brought about by luck. Thinking about it, it did seem like points had walked into him on their own.

“You hungry?”

“..”

Chae Nayun nodded without speaking.

“How much food do you have left?”

“...I lost it when I was fighting a monster.”

She had eaten them already, so she made a small lie.

“R-Really, I’m a bit clumsy.”

“Hm.”

Kim Hajin crossed his arm and fell in thought, while Chae Nayun held her breath and waited for him to speak.

“How many points do you have?”

Chae Nayun immediately breathed a sigh of relief in her heart. Things were going as she hoped.

She killed nine monsters and obtained a total of 35 points, but she didn’t say the truth.

“Twenty... five.”

“Then give me half.”

“H-Half?”

Half. It was an expensive price to pay for a single day’s meal.

“Yep, But in exchange, you’re sleepy, right? I’ll also lend you a sleeping bag. Just say no if you don’t want to.”

“N-No! I mean, yes! I, I want to.”

Chae Nayun turned on her exam smartwatch. This watch could recognize other smartwatches within a 3m radius.

[Kim Hajin]

—Point trading

—Location sharing

She clicked on ‘point trading’.

Half of 25 was 12.5, but only whole numbers could be used in trading. After thinking about it for a bit, she sent 12 points to Kim Hajin and stealthily sat down next to him. After confirming that he received points, Kim Hajin gave well-cooked pork chops to Chae Nayun.

“But are you okay with just this? They’re pork chops.”

“...I’ll have to eat to live.”

Chae Nayun heard that something like this was a common occurrence in Dungeons and Towers.

She put a pork chop in her mouth. Was it because she was hungry? She found it quite delicious. Then, she saw Kim Hajin dipping his pork chops in a sauce. She did the same thing and found that it was tastier.

The two of them continued eating for 20 minutes.

During this time, neither of them talked.

“Ah, now I’m full.”

Once her hunger went away, Chae Nayun felt a bit awkward. She wasn’t particularly close to Kim Hajin. In fact, their relationship was better described as uncomfortable.

Just when she was thinking about running away...

“Here.”

Kim Hajin gave her a bottle of water. Chae Nayun only stared at it in hesitation.

“It’s mineral water, not river water.”

Did this guy have mind-reading abilities?

*Kuhum.* Chae Nayun let out a dry cough and took the water. *Gulp, gulp, kyaa.* After emptying half of it in one go, she let out a satisfied sigh.

“...By the way, what’s that?”

Then, she suddenly caught sight of a ring on Kim Hajin’s index finger.

“.....”

Kim Hajin’s face stiffened. For a moment, he rubbed his ring without talking. It was as though he was choosing his words. Seeing his solemn yet flustered reaction, a flash of insight arose in Chae Nayun’s mind.

“Ah, nevermind, nevermind. I’m not curious at all.”

‘I might not act like it, but I’m someone who can take a hint. It must be a keepsake of his family.’ Chae Nayun finished the rest of water without waiting for Kim Hajin’s answer.

Meanwhile, Kim Hajin stared at Chae Nayun with the eyes of a dead fish.

“I never said you could drink it all.”

“...Eh?”



The next morning arrived. Birds chirped and the howling of monsters rang out from the forest.

Waking up to the noise, I got up from my bed. Though I felt a bit stiff, this much was a

luxury on this island.

“Auuu.”

I left the tent to bask in the sunlight. However, no sunlight shone down outside the tent.

“...Is it a polar night?”

The outside world was that dark. It was likely because of the magicians of the island’s central tower.

I looked around. On the ground, Chae Nayun was buried in her sleeping bag, still asleep. Last night must have been cold as she only had her face peeking out. In a way, she looked like a caterpillar.

*Tong!*

Suddenly, the seed sitting on my tent table jumped up. By the looks of it, it had already finished its meal. It must have felt my gaze as it began to quiver.

“...Why are you so cute?”

I tickled the seed and wrapped it with a new gauze. Then, I retrieved the tent. In the first place, I had no intention of continually staying in the same place. Chae Nayun was still using the sleeping bag, but well, I could just gift it to her.

Now that cadets were allowed to fight each other, I had no plans to sit still. I planned on picking fights aggressively, especially against dangerous individuals.

Of course, I wasn’t allowed to kill. Some of the Djinn here didn’t even know that they were Djinn, and in reality, they weren’t Djinn *yet*.

That was the difference between a Djinn who contracted another Djinn and a Djinn who contracted a devil.

In the case of the former, Djinn were supplied with magic power by their contracted Djinn, so they could avoid going berserk, and their contracts were also less tight. These Djinn were often treated like expendables, being abandoned or killed if they failed their mission.

On the other hand, Djinn who directly contracted devils were rarer.

Examples of such Djinn were Sven, Yun Hyun, and Lancaster. But because directly contracting devils caused large side-effects, the only 'cadet' on this island who managed to overcome this side-effect was a man named Joo Yeohoon.

"I'll have to go higher."

For now, my goal was reaching the World Tree located in the center of this island. Although it had a grandiose name, it was just an extremely big tree. It had its roots in the center of the island, and it was called the World Tree solely because of its size.



In just 24 hours since the start of the exam, Yoo Yeonha managed to form her own group. It was a small team made up of five people with Yoo Yeonha as its leader. Utilizing their strength, Yoo Yeonha was amassing points easily and efficiently.

"Yeonha-ssi, I found someone."

A sharpshooter named Rose whispered to Yoo Yeonha, but before waiting for Yoo Yeonha's orders, she drew her bow.

But right when she was about to fire, Yoo Yeonha's whip flew in like lightning and snatched her bow away.

"Eh?"

"Don't."

Yoo Yeonha glared at Rose with stern eyes.

"...You can't touch that man."

"Eh? I-Isn't that person rank 934?"

Rankings didn't change until after the final exam, and in accordance with the final exam's rule, every cadet was wearing a nametag with their rank on it. But even without a nametag, the man Rose was aiming at was someone most people knew.

He was known for his gun-related Gift among other things, the rank 934 cadet, Kim Hajin.

“No, you can’t win against him.”

However, Yoo Yeonha lightly cut her off.

At that moment, Kim Hajin made his move. Almost as if to save Yoo Yeonha from having to explain, he climbed up a giant tree with impeccable movements.

After reaching the peak of a 150-meter tree in a few breaths, he went into the dense leaves.

This series of unrealistic maneuvers caused Rose to be dumbstruck.

Yoo Yeonha spoke with a stern voice.

“See that? I just saved your life, Rose-ssi. To that man, a rank is just a number. If you had let go of that bowstring, you would have lost for sure. Not only that, the rest of us would have also been in trouble.”

“Ah...”

“There are many hidden dragons in this world. It’s the same reason that the Hero Association can’t do anything about hunters of the Vast Expanse. Next time, don’t do anything before I give the order.”

Rose nodded like a child being scolded by her teacher.

“Also, about that man being uncharacteristically strong, keep it a secret.”

“Eh? Why?”

However, Rose couldn’t help but question this order. Yoo Yeonha gave a brief explanation.

“Because he might become one of our family members. For the record, I like people with heavy mouths.”

Rose shuddered.

Essence of the Strait, the world’s second ranked guild.

For Rose who was a rank 68 cadet, it was too enticing of an offer.

“Ah, yes! I’ll keep it a secret! Until death!”

“Good.”

After generously smiling at Rose who was as obedient as a dog, Yoo Yeonha stared at the giant tree Kim Hajin climbed up.

It was a monstrous tree that even the most courageous people would hesitate to climb. Just looking up at the tree would cause one’s neck to hurt, but Kim Hajin had climbed to its peak in mere minutes.

“...Hm.”

‘Should I modify Kim Hajin’s physical ability rating?’ Yoo Yeonha began to think about her report.

*Tiiring—*

At that moment, a message arrived on her smartwatch, ending her thought.

“Ah, Ijin-ssi contacted us. Let’s go back.”

People who shared locations with each other could also message each other. This was likely something that Yoo Yeonha was the first to find out.

# Chapter 61

## Final Exam (3)

Long after Kim Hajin left, Chae Nayun opened her eyes which she had kept tightly shut. She got up only after confirming that Kim Hajin had completely disappeared. She had woken up a long time ago, but her mind was still in a daze. It was most likely because of what Kim Hajin said.

—Why are you so cute?

“...”

Chae Nayun’s cheeks flushed red. Her appearance was praised ever since she was young, but she had never expected to hear such a thing from Kim Hajin’s mouth.

“Auuu...”

Chae Nayun shook her head fiercely and shook off her thoughts.

“Whatever it was, I didn’t hear it. He was talking to himself. There must have been a cat or a dog nearby. Definitely.”

Chae Nayun murmured and crawled out of the sleeping bag. The sleeping bag was just as warm and cozy as a bed, something that made her night extremely enjoyable.

‘Should I leave it here? Or bring it with me?’ Chae Nayun began to think. ‘Since Kim Hajin left it here after saying... saying how I was cute... he must have wanted me to take it.’

After coming to that conclusion, she folded up the sleeping bag, which reduced to a size of a fist-sized ball.

“Was it this small?”

She was astonished by the tiny sleeping bag. After putting it away, she checked her

smartwatch. It was 7:20 in the morning, but it was still dark outside.

“It must be a polar night...”

Chae Nayun stretched and began to prepare for the day.



On top of the World Tree, I looked around in all directions. Thousand-Mile Eyes were unrestricted by obstacles, allowing everything to enter my vision.

A day had already passed, and cadets were discovering their preferred method of survival. Some sold food to obtain points, some chased after monsters, and some concealed themselves and waited for unsuspecting cadets to walk by.

“Mm?”

When I found someone, a rather mischievous idea popped up in my head.

A method to blow my nose without using my hand. To be more precise, it was a method to eliminate cadets who were too strong for me to deal with.

I snapped off a decently sized tree branch and gave it a sharp end. Then, I inscribed a coordinate and some words on it.

Next, I grabbed the tree branch and threw it at ‘him’. Because he was so far away, I had to use some of Stigma’s magic power.

The tree branch flew like an arrow and struck the ground after lightly brushing past his face.

The cadet who was walking imposingly stopped and looked at the tree branch on the ground.

From where I was, I could only see his back. But I knew very well what emotion he was currently feeling.

He grabbed the tree branch I shot out. After checking the words written on the side, he turned to the direction the tree branch came from. Although he couldn’t possibly see me from this distance, I still dodged his gaze.

Now, I just had to wait.

...Just like that, an hour went by.

I was watching the drone footages on my laptop when I suddenly noticed a change.

“What? Already?”

Under the thick darkness, Rachel was heading somewhere with Joo Yeohoon. I quickly expanded my sight and tracked them. Their destination seemed to be a wooded cliff. At the end of the cliff were two people. One was out in the open, and the other was hiding above a tree.

I didn't know who they were, but I could safely assume that they were Djinns. First, I moved a drone over to them. But to my surprise, the drone's signal died when it got near. I was notified of the reason by an alert that arrived on my laptop.

[Joo Yeohoon – has various connections with other Djinns. Made contact with Lancaster family Djinns.]

“...”

Rachel accompanying Joo Yeohoon also happened in the original story, but Lancaster was never a part of this exam. But now that he was involved, his goal had to be Rachel. Surprisingly, they were planning on fighting in an open area. Most likely, this was because secluded areas like caves were being used by other cadets as hideouts. Furthermore, because the area they chose belonged to that exam overseer, it was likely that no one would interfere in their plan.

But still, their method was too poorly planned.

“They must be the bottom rung.”

These brainless fools were likely part of the lowest class of Djinns who were blinded by their desires to make achievements and be loved by Lancaster. Since they were Djinns, they had to be stronger than average cadets, but they still didn't look all that strong.

However, they were still a threat with three of them working together.

I took out my Desert Eagle.

After transforming it to a sniper rifle, I peered into the distance.

There, I could see Rachel walking with Joo Yeohoon. Rachel likely joined Joo Yeohoon's team temporarily to find food. In the original story, it was Kim Suho who came to her rescue.

I had shared my location with her to prevent this from happening, but she was a

stubborn girl.

“Ah, maybe...”

Suddenly, I thought of Kim Suho. To check if he was nearby, I expanded my vision a bit farther.

“Pft.”

Even in this serious situation, I couldn't help but laugh. Did the original story have an enforcing power? Kim Suho was slowly walking towards Rachel. Next to him was Chae Nayun, who must have ran into him as well.

With this, it was three on three. Even without me having to help, Kim Suho and Chae Nayun would be more than enough to save Rachel.

“...Tsk.”

However, Kim Suho was Kim Suho, and I was Kim Hajin.

I had my own methods.

I attached my rifle's gunstock. I could see my targets clearly. My eyes could see further than any scope in the world.



Joo Yeohoon's team continued to offer Rachel their food. Although they offered it for free, Rachel still gave them some of her points as payment.

However, she felt uneasy. She valued her combat exam grades just as much as written exam grades. Since she didn't know how many points would put her on top, she had to collect as many as possible.

In the middle of her worry, Joo Yeohoon asked her to join him for a hunt, saying that they had found a grizzly bear monster that would give 10 points.

“I'm a sharpshooter, so I'll support you from the back. I only need 3 points, and Rachelssi can have the rest.”

“No, we should split it evenly.”

She didn't ask why it was only the two of them going. She followed him readily. In her

mind, she wouldn't lose in a one on one battle even if Joo Yeohoon betrayed her, and she knew she would gain more points if there were fewer people in the group.

"It was here..."

However, standing on the cliff she was guided to wasn't a bear, but a man. His long hair covered half of his face, and two gauntlets ominously glowed in his hands. On the fingertips of the gauntlets were claw-like daggers.

"Who are you!?"

Joo Yeohoon put on his best act. Just in case things went awry, he was preparing an escape route. The long-haired man also played along with him, raising his gauntlet-covered hands and charging at Joo Yeohoon. In the blink of an eye, the man cut Joo Yeohoon's shoulder, and he screamed and ran away. The man didn't chase after him.

"Haa..."

Just like that, Joo Yeohoon disappeared.

'What was that?' Rachel sighed as she held up her rapier.

"...Who are you?"

At her question, the man made a chilling smile.

"\_\_\_\_\_"

The man said something, but Rachel couldn't understand him. It wasn't Korean or English. The man murmured to himself, then suddenly charged at Rachel.

"Uup!"

Rachel drew her magic power around her rapier and defended herself. Her rapier clashed with the man's gauntlets, creating hot embers that scattered out. Although the man had more magic power, Rachel could hold on thanks to his rough control.

Next, the man's gauntlets struck down a few more times, which Rachel blocked with ease. Gauntlets versus rapier. The former had greater destructive power, but Rachel overwhelmed him with technique. As long as she maintained a safe distance, she felt she could come out victorious.

“Haat!”

Then, in the middle of a fierce exchange of blows, Rachel spotted an opening in the man’s defense. Without missing this opportunity, Rachel took a step forward, then rushed in. With a stab, she scratched the man’s ribs, then tried to jump back.

However, for some indiscernible reason, she couldn’t move her feet.

At that moment...

Someone jumped down from the tree above her. It was another enemy. Rachel saw him land in front of her, then twist his sword and stab at her widely open back...

“Kuaaak!”

A scream rang out. Rachel didn’t close her eyes as her thinking stopped momentarily. However, realizing that she was still alive, she reexamined the situation. The assassin, who just dropped down from the tree, was rolling on the ground, writhing in pain.

“...Eh?”

She looked down at her sword, wondering if she had attacked subconsciously. Immediately afterward, she dropped this nonsensical thought as another attack flew towards her.

However, the attack wasn’t aimed at her.

Five streaks of highly powerful beams flew in, piercing through the assassin’s stomach, limbs, lung, and heart. The assassin fell to the ground helplessly, then scattered into dust.

‘What’s happening?’

Rachel was taken aback, but she didn’t have the time to think as the gauntlet-wearing man shot towards her. The man knew the weakness of long-range sniping. When the target was close to an ally, sniping became virtually impossible.

Furthermore, Rachel couldn’t distance herself from the man. By now, she realized that her feet were stuck to the man’s shadow. It was the magic, ‘Shadow Tag’.

Although she couldn’t move her feet, she still did her best to defend and counterattack. Her movements made it seem as though she was dancing in a tiny space. Her nimble, fleeting movements caused the man to become enraged.

Frustrated, he tried to stomp down on the ground itself when— the unidentifiable attack flew in once again. Before anyone could react, the attack dug through the minute gap between him and Rachel, then blasted his shoulder.

Using this opportunity, Rachel stabbed at his flank.

But before her rapier could reach him, a sword strike flew in and struck the man's shoulder.

“Kuak!”

With his shoulder cut, the man took a huge step backward, then jumped down the cliff.

“Who was that!?”

Two people ran up to Rachel. Kim Suho and Chae Nayun. They were cadets Rachel knew.

“Rachel? Who was he?”

Chae Nayun asked her. Kim Suho ran to the edge of the cliff and looked down.

“Did he disappear?”

Although she couldn't fully understand the situation, she still asked the question she most wanted to know.

“Yes, he's gone.”

“...What's up with that polite speech.”

Kim Suho mocked Chae Nayun's sudden use of polite speech.

‘It must have been Chae Nayun who helped me. That attack must have been her secret technique, something like invisible arrows.’

Meanwhile, Rachel tried to understand what happened.

“Thank you. You saved...”

At that moment, the moonlight reflected off of something and pierced her eyes.

That something was underground. It had dug into the ground but managed to reflect a faint moonlight.

Rachel slowly approached the object, then picked it up.

'...A bullet?'

At that moment, Kim Suho muttered seriously.

"Let's move first. We don't know if that... person will come back."



*Tzzz— Tzzz—*

Rachel examined the bullet on top of a campfire.

Staring at it didn't reveal any new information, but Rachel had a person in mind.

Kim Hajin.

He had used a shotgun when he helped her before, and the mysterious person who saved her had done so by sniping. However, Kim Hajin was the only one she knew who used a gun.

"...Hmm."

However, she couldn't think of a motive. He helped her during the midterm exam, but that was likely because he was next door.

If Kim Hajin was the one who helped her again, then it would mean he helped her from far away through sniping.

If that was true, she had three questions.

First, how did he know that she was in danger?

Second, if he was the one who helped her, why didn't he show himself?

Third, why did he help her?

"So, did you decide to change to a sword?"

At that moment, Kim Suho's voice rang out. He was talking to Chae Nayun. Rachel turned her gaze sideways and stared at Chae Nayun's waist. Just like Kim Suho said, she had a sword by her side.

Chae Nayun scratched her head as though she felt awkward. Rachel became alert.

“No, I just didn’t want to rely on a bow only during such a big exam. So, um, it’s a secondary weapon.”

Chae Nayun had brought two main weapons. One was a bow, and the other was a sword. Since cadets could only borrow one main weapon, she had purchased a training sword from Cube directly.

“Oh, rather than that.”

Chae Nayun clapped. Clearly, she was trying to change the subject.

“Rachel, we have a plan. Do you want to come with us?”

Rachel tilted her head in silence.

“It’s like a cooperation team. You know, we can do fine even without forming teams. So, we’ll each take turns finding food, finding a place to sleep, and standing guard. Then, we’ll go off on our own to hunt, and meet back up later.”

Rachel thought it was a good idea. After postponing her answer for a moment, she turned on her exam smartwatch.

[Location Sharing List]

—Kim Hajin

—Joo Yeohoon

Kim Hajin.

His location was still being shared.

“...It’s a good idea, but I’ll have to decline.”

Rachel got up, and in response, Kim Suho blinked his eyes and asked.

“Where are you going? Wouldn’t it be dangerous now?”

“It’s fine. I’m going to meet up with someone.”

“Then we’ll take you there.”

“No, I can go alone.”

She rejected him resolutely. Kim Suho scratched his head and nodded.

“Don’t be so cocky. Do you think every girl in the world loves you?”

Chae Nayun used this opportunity to deal a piercing blow.

# Chapter 62

## Final Exam (4)

The situation came to an end with Kim Suho's arrival, but I spent another hour looking around the surroundings before climbing down the World Tree.

"Agh, what a pain."

I couldn't help but groan as I landed on the ground. Even though I had Parkour, the tree was just too abnormally big.

Shaking off the numbing feeling in my hands and legs, I checked the number of points I had.

[22 Point]

22 points. It should be a bit below the average. Since I practically took 12 of these from Chae Nayun, the amount I gained from monsters only came to 10 points.

In the original story, the first place cadet scored 130 points, so I needed to obtain another 50 points to stay in the safe range.

It should be possible as long as I worked busily today and tomorrow.

I turned around, thinking optimistically.

" ... "

But as soon as I did, my body stiffened and my hair stood on ends. I was so mind-numbingly shocked that I couldn't think of anything.

In front of me was the Chameleon Troupe's boss, who was disguised as Seo Ijin. She approached me without making any sound and was staring at me with her black eyes.

Why was she here?

Cold sweat ran down my back, and my survival instincts began to roar.

I forced myself to calm down. She should be here to observe, not fight.

“What’s the matter?”

But contrary to my expectations, she took out her sword and pointed it at me.

“...”

Silently and with unshaken eyes, she stood there. A chilling light flashed from her sword blade.

My thoughts ceased. I didn’t know why, but she was undoubtedly picking a fight with me. But whether it be close ranged or long ranged combat, there was no way I could beat this woman. I would die instantly or be beaten painfully until I die.

“You know what.”

She spoke with a tranquil voice. Just like she said, cadets were currently enemies. However, this woman was simply too powerful to be an enemy. It was the same reason that insects couldn’t call humans their enemies. To them, humans were predators.

But in this life-or-death situation, I found a glimpse of hope.

In this exam, cadets didn’t fight each other to kill. What was important was to take the other side’s exam smartwatch. Even if you subdued someone, if you didn’t take that cadet’s smartwatch, it wasn’t your victory. Additionally, if you subdued someone, but had your smartwatch taken, it was your loss.

Currently, the smartwatch around her left wrist was loose.

It could be that she equipped it loosely to begin with, or that it was unable to withstand her unleashing of magic power and became loose, or that I was simply lucky.

Regardless of the reason, this was the only way I could escape this situation.

From my sleeve, I began to weave Aether to be thin, thinner than a spider thread. Then, I controlled the thread so that she couldn’t see it. Like a worm trying to dodge a preying hawk’s eyes, it slowly squirmed towards her left wrist.

Currently, her focus was entirely on me. Just meeting her deep eyes seemed to strangle me, but I continued to stare into her eyes. That’s how I bought time.

Eventually, the Aether thread reached her left wrist, then took off her smartwatch

without her noticing.

At that moment, she opened her mouth.

“Your weapon, take it out.”

“...Weapon?”

When I asked, she gave a simple nod. Meanwhile, the Aether thread was traveling to her wrist, hovering only a centimeter above the ground, as Boss’ close proximity to me made the ground her blind spot.

When the smartwatch came close enough, I yanked it into my hand.

“Whew.”

Was it because of my luck? Or was it Boss’ clumsiness? In any case, I succeeded. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Next, I reached into my pocket, pretending to take out my weapon, but brought my hand up holding Boss’ smartwatch.

“...You’re surrendering?”

When she saw the smartwatch, she gave a disappointed look. As I thought, she really didn’t notice.

Because her skin was an added layer from Jain’s Gift, it didn’t have the same level of sensitivity as her normal body. Not to mention, she hadn’t released any of her seals yet.

“Does this look like it’s mine?”

I asked as leisurely as I could, and Boss immediately furrowed her brows.

I pointed at her wrist with my eyes. She tilted her head in doubt, then slowly turned her head down to her left wrist.

“...Eh?”

Her eyes widened. She rotated her wrist around, confirming that her watch was gone.

“You know you’re out the moment I crush this, right?”

I spoke as calmly as I possibly could. Boss still seemed to so be in shock that she didn't notice as she was in a daze. She was only staring at her wrist as though she had lost her country.

“This... this can't be...”

Would that reaction get me about 50SP?

I feigned a carefree smile before gently grabbing her wrist and putting her smartwatch back on.

“W-What, what are you?”

She acted even more flustered than when I stole her watch, but I continued to put the watch around her wrist.

Still maintaining my smile, I bluffed.

“I'll let you go this one time, okay?”

“...Let me go?”

Meanwhile, her sword was still aimed at my neck. But because I could feel that it had lost its edge, I ignored the sword and turned back.

“W-Where are you going?”

Boss tried to hold me back. I, of course, ignored her and continued forward. I focused on my legs more than ever before in my entire life. Just by meeting her eyes for a bit, my entire body felt numb.



After Kim Hajin left, Boss stared at the smartwatch on her left wrist. Even now, she couldn't understand how Kim Hajin managed to steal it.

Her plan was to confirm Kim Hajin's ability, but she was only left with greater shock. Even though half of her sense of touch was gone because of Jain's Gift, she never expected to suffer such humiliation to a 17-year-old cadet.

She pondered, ‘When did he snatch it? When we first met? When we were staring at

each other? No, neither can be right At the very least, Kim Hajin never moved his body. His magic power didn't show any sign of movement either.'

Boss turned her gaze to her right wrist on which a four-leaf clover was tattooed. This was a Seal Release Spell. Each of the clover's four leaves sealed a portion of her true strength. Staring at the completely sealed clover leaves, Boss wondered if she should have had one of them released.

"Haa."

In the end, she asked for help from an eyewitness.

"Jain, did you see?"

—... Hm? See what?

But the reply she got after a short delay wasn't what she expected. Jain sounded like she didn't know the current situation.

Boss' face immediately contorted with a frown.

—Ah, ah, ah, sorry. I got distracted for a moment. But it's not my fault! Droon kept pestering me to buy him Legos. So, what's up?"

"..."

Boss immediately continued her thought, 'Kim Hajin stole my watch in that short amount of time? Even though my power is sealed, his dexterity and craftiness are beyond the level of a cadet.'

—Tell me. What happened?

"...I'll tell you later."

—No, tell me now, you're making me curious. Argh, it's all because of that brat, Droon. Boss? Boss?

Boss ended their contact cold-heartedly. With the previous incident, she became certain of Kim Hajin's potential. Now, she just had to confirm Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak's...

At that moment, her smartwatch rang.

[Ijin-ssi, where are you? Hurry up. Didn't I tell you to come back by the half-hour mark? —]

“ ... ”

Boss stared at the message with emotionless eyes.

She thought, 'Yoo Yeonha. Why did this girl keep ordering me around?'



After successfully escaping from Boss, I found a camping spot.

It was just as good as the other one.

...But in truth, I had stopped at the first area near a river because I didn't have any strength in my legs. I thanked my luck once again.

After opening up my tent and the foldable table and chair, I sat down and placed my bullets on the table.

14 bullets for the sniper rifle and 20 for the shotgun.

These were all modified from normal bullets using SP. Although they greatly boosted my strength, each of them cost about 7SP, so I couldn't easily waste them.

“...I should have at least 20 of each type.”

If I ran out of bullets during battle, that would be a disaster.

I opened my laptop.

[Current SP – 1214]

I currently had 1214 SP. To create a decent Gift, I needed about 2000, but because I kept using them to create bullets, my distance to the goal kept increasing.

But still, that was better than someone dying.

I restocked my sniper bullets and took out my portable grill.

I was hungry from using Parkour so much.

Today's lunch was... braised chicken. It was also too dark to be lunchtime. Without my Thousand-Mile Eyes, I could barely see what was in front of me.

From my magical pouch, I took out a frozen chicken.

[If you can wield magic power, add some to increase the chicken's flavor.]

After placing the frozen chicken on my frying pan, I imbued magic power like the instruction said. I didn't know the specifics, but the chicken suddenly became fresh. When I was thinking, 'I should be able to eat it now'...

*Pssss Pssss—*

A faint sound rang out from the tall grass nearby.

I quickly pulled out my gun and aimed it at the direction of the sound. At the same time, I saw through the grass with my eyes and upon finding out who it was, I put down my gun and grinned.

Soon, the ruffling noise became footsteps.

The person who walked out of the tall grass... was Rachel.

"Rachel-ssi?"

I acted surprised. There was a leaf sticking out of her hair. It must have fallen on her while she was walking through the forest, but it seemed she didn't notice.

"..."

Rachel looked around silently. She seemed shocked at the high-tech tent and grill as her mouth was half-open.

Other than being silent, her reaction was no different than Chae Nayun's.

"Ah, I like to prepare thoroughly."

When I said so with a cool smile, Rachel finally snapped out of her daze. She then stared at the grill, where a chicken sat, emitting a tantalizing smell.

"Would you like to join me for lunch?"

"...Can, can I?"

"I'll take 4 points to be fair."

I opened another foldable chair. Rachel sat down with slight hesitation.

I took out a plate, then placed half of the chicken on it.

Lunch then began. Rachel must have been hungry as she finished the chicken silently in just 10 minutes. Even following her eating pace was difficult.

The chicken disappeared seemingly in the blink of an eye, and I began to clean up the dishes when Rachel asked.

“Um, what have you been doing until now?”

“...Yes?”

I tilted my head.

Seeing as how she came all the way here, she must have realized I helped her.

Was she feeling me out?

“Well, I was just running around, trying to get points.”

I pretended to be ignorant, mostly because it would have been too embarrassing to say, ‘I’m the one who saved you’.

“Hmm...”

Rachel scrutinized me with a strange expression but didn’t ask further questions. But, she seemed to be thinking about something as she began to stare at the campfire I set up.

...I thought she’d keep asking. I was planning on telling her when she asked me for the third time...

“Oh, did you get hurt?”

Then, I suddenly discovered a fairly deep wound near her collarbone. It seemed she got it from her previous fight with the Djinn.

“Ah, yes. Something happened...”

At that moment...

Evandel’s Seed, which I had placed inside my pocket, suddenly popped out.

“Ah?”

The seed bounced towards Rachel, then jumped on her collarbone. Rachel shrieked at the unexpected ambush.

“Ah! W-What!?”

“...Ah, um, you see...”

I shot up, just as surprised as she was.

“Ah, this, what is this!?”

Rachel tried to pull the seed off of her, but the seed cleverly jumped inside her clothes, specifically towards her armpit area. I froze as I could no longer do anything about it.

“You see, it’s um... my pet almond... er, not almond, pet seed. Um...”

While I was making excuses, Rachel put her hand into her clothes. I quickly turned around.

Next, a splattering resumed.

After a bit of a fierce struggle, the situation seemed to have been dealt with as Rachel’s deep sigh rang out.

I slowly turned around.

Rachel was tidying her clothes with a flushed face. I dropped my head first and foremost. I didn’t think the seed would do that.

“Um, I’m sorry.”

Rachel looked back and forth between me and the seed, then spoke.

“...A pet seed?”

“Ah, yes. Yes.”

It sounded just as stupid in my head as it probably did in hers, but since this world was full of mysterious things, I hoped she would buy it. In truth, I didn’t have a better excuse to give.

Rachel let out another sigh, then handed me the seed.

“I think it’ll be calmer... if you raise it by planting it in the ground.”

“R-Right.”

I took the seed and trapped it in a container.

# Chapter 63

## Final Exam (5)

After lunch, when the awkward atmosphere caused by Evandel's Seed died down, Rachel offered me to team up. She brought up the task cooperation team that she formed with Kim Suho and Chae Nayun in the original story. I couldn't help but smile.

"You're saying the same thing as Chae Nayun."

"Ah... Did Chae Nayun make the same offer before me?"

"No, it's not that. Anyways, I like the idea."

I didn't see a reason to refuse. After all, it was Rachel. But when I accepted, Rachel made a worried face as though she had something on her mind.

"Oh right... um, there's someone I formed something like a team with."

"Who?"

Because I was watching her from the beginning, I already knew who she was talking about.

"Have you heard of Joo Yeohoon...?"

I replied confidently.

"Don't mind him."

I didn't explain things to her in detail, but I had already taken care of him. To be precise, I gave him to an even stronger psycho.

"...Yes?"

“Don’t worry about it. Just team up with me.”

I made a meaningful smile.

No matter how powerful Djinnns who contracted with devils were, there were cadets they couldn’t touch due to a few reasons.

And Shin Jonghak was most certainly one of such cadets.



After offering Rachel to Lancaster’s Djinnns, Joo Yeohoon hunted monsters to rack up points before returning to his base.

However, the base he returned to wasn’t the base he knew. What should have been a cozy abode emanating the smell of wild boar and deer was now the complete scene of a disaster.

The grass hut he built was collapsed, and the blood and flesh of animals littered the ground.

For a moment, he was worried he came to the wrong place.

“...What.”

However, a man was sitting arrogantly and proudly in the center of the mess as if to pronounce to the world that he was the culprit behind this chaos. Just like an emperor sitting on his throne, he was fiddling with the exam smartwatches he had stolen.

Joo Yeohoon stared at the man blankly.

“You’re here.”

The man was the first to speak. His deep voice resounded imposingly.

He placed the smartwatches to the side, then threw a tree branch at Joo Yeohoon. Like an arrow, the tree branch shot past Joo Yeohoon’s face and dug into a tree behind him. Joo Yeohoon swallowed hard. He knew very well how dangerous this man was. With a trembling voice, he called the man’s name.

“...Shin Jonghak.”

Joo Yeohoon had a relationship with Shin Jonghak since the Agent Military Academy,

a bad relationship. Part of the reason he contracted a devil was Shin Jonghak. However, Joo Yeohoon couldn't do anything about the current situation. Not only was he unconfident in winning in a one on one battle, he could see some of the strongest cadets standing behind Shin Jonghak. The newest star in martial arts, Kim Horak, the wavebreaker swordsman, Jin Hanjun, archer Oh Jihoon...

"Looks like the trash can talk."

Shin Jonghak sneered as he held up his spear. Then, his expression contorted to a fearsome frown.

"If you got held back, you should've stayed in the trashcan where you belong. Why try to overstep your position?"

Joo Yeohoon couldn't understand what was happening. He glanced at the tree branch Shin Jonghak threw at him. Written on its side was a coordinate of his group's base and a provocative sentence. Joo Yeohoon clicked his tongue.

"I'm not the one who sent this. It's someone else..."

"I know."

"...What?"

Shin Jonghak cut him off. He wasn't stupid. He had already come to the conclusion that someone with a grudge against Joo Yeohoon had sent the tree branch to him. However, what displeased Shin Jonghak was that he was being bothered because a trash did something to earn someone's grudge.

"I don't care."

As though those words were a command or a sign, his lackeys slowly approached Joo Yeohoon.

"I just don't like trash like you. Damn snakes who only know how to flicker their tongues in the shadows."

Shin Jonghak held up his spear.

5 vs 1.

Joo Yeohoon didn't have a choice.

He quickly turned around and began to run. Shin Jonghak immediately sent his spear flying.



On a high ground slightly north of the center of the island stood the Overseer Tower, the place where exam overseers and eliminated cadets rested.

In this exam, overseers not only examined cadets' abilities but also their characters. The rule that cadets could fight other cadets was necessary since Djinnns were the main enemies of Heroes, but cadets would be penalized if they stole points in an inhumane way.

"Hmm..."

On the other hand, Yun Seung-Ah, who was participating in the exam as an overseer, was currently looking out of the Overseer Tower's window.

"Are eight drones not enough? You're looking out the window too?"

Then, a Latino man named Vieri approached her.

"Who are you thinking about?"

He looked like he would speak Spanish, but his sweet Korean accent showed that he lived in Korea for a long time. Yun Seung-Ah glanced at Vieri, then spoke.

"...Kim Hajin."

"Mm? Who's that? Weren't you a fan of Kim Suho?"

Yun Seung-Ah smiled. Kim Suho was, of course, her number one priority. This was an unquestionable fact, and up until now, Yun Seung-Ah had only watched Kim Suho. She had even revealed herself to him to let him know that she was watching.

However, information that everyone knew couldn't be called information. For now, she planned to focus on finding hidden talents.

“I received an interesting piece of information.”

“Information? What is it?”

“How can I tell you? It’s top secret.”

The Korean Peninsula was a tiny piece of land, but numerous guilds were concentrated in it.

To survive, not fall behind, and surpass other guilds, a fierce battle of information and politics went on between them.

The same matter applied to a guild’s internal affairs, especially to a guild like Essence of the Strait with divided factions.

Using this power struggle inside Essence of the Strait, Yun Seung-Ah managed to steal an interesting piece of information.

“That makes me more curious. Can’t you just tell me? We’re in the same guild after all.”

“Who can trust your big mouth?”

Two days, Yun Seung-Ah obtained a top-secret document called Yoo Yeonha Report. In this report, Yoo Yeonha evaluated Kim Hajin higher than Kim Suho.

...Of course, if a normal person said something like that, he would be treated as a madman. However, the writer of this report was special.

Yoo Yeonha. Although she was young, she was more clever than a fox, and she was one of the closest people to Kim Hajin. While she might be inexperienced, she wouldn’t have submitted such a report without thorough research.

“So? Are you going to go check him out?”

“Mmm... I will later when I have time.”

Of course, it could be that this information was fake. However, Yun Seung-Ah had already discovered something strange about Kim Hajin, the magic power of light.

Kim Hajin had already awakened the magic power of light. For a cadet like that, she was willing to risk her time.

“So, what are you going to do?”

Vieri asked. Yun Seung-Ah pointed at the nametag on her chest.

[Rank 307 Yun Seung-Ah]

This rank wasn't the cadet rank, but the world rank. Even this rank didn't take into account her accomplishments from last year, so once the updated ranking came in on July, she predicted it would be about 50 ranks higher.

"This is worth 200 points, right?"

"Ha, you're going to use that as bait? I doubt anyone will fall for it. They'll just run."

"...Really? Then I guess I'll just have to hide and watch."

Yun Seung-Ah smirked without denying the matter.



Because of the darkness blanketing the island, it was hard to tell whether it was day or night.

Rachel, who volunteered to be the night watch, glanced at the huge tent next to her. She couldn't see inside of it, but this also meant she wasn't visible to whoever was inside.

She rummaged through her pocket and took out a bullet. Under the thick darkness, the tiny platinum bullet sparkled from the moonlight.

She still couldn't believe that such a tiny thing protected her.

Placing the bullet in her pocket, she fell into thought. She was convinced that it was Kim Hajin who saved her. After all, he was the only cadet who used a gun.

The question she had was why he denied it and how he knew that she was in trouble.

Was it because of the cold wind? Or was it because of the pale moonlight?

Rachel ended up recalling a memory from a long time ago. The image of a man smiling gently surfaced in her head. This wasn't in Korea but in England.

—No matter what happens, I will protect you, princess. Of course, I'm sure there are many more who wish to protect you.

However, the man returned to her as the most fearsome assassin.

Lancaster. Every time she thought about him, a part of her heart trembled as though it was freezing.

Today's ambush was likely his doing as well.

“...”

Distressed, Rachel buried her face between her knees.

‘Should I have died with them back then?’ Sorrowful emotions resurfaced in her heart.



I woke up on my tent's bed. There was no sunlight shining through. The outside was just as dark as before I went to bed.

Was it going to be dark for all five days?

I yawned as I left the tent.

Rachel, who volunteered to be the night watch, was sitting modestly by the table, waiting for morning.

Was it because I was half-asleep? She looked like an elf. For a moment, I stared at her in a daze.

Rachel tilted her head as if she found my gaze strange, then spoke.

“...What's today's menu?”

At those words, I snapped back to reality. What was I thinking about a character I created?

“Ah, um, let me wash my face first.”

I trudged to the river, then washed my face. Next, I dried my face with a towel and walked back.

I had overprepared for the exam, so I was overflowing with food.

Since we had to hunt monsters today, I went with beef. To make sure Rachel was fine with it, I turned towards her.

But before I could open my mouth to ask her what she thought, I saw her staring at me fixedly and was taken aback. No, to be exact, she was staring at my magic pouch, which contained the food.

It seemed she really was hungry.

“How's the beef?”

“Great.”

She replied instantly.

I took out two pieces of sirloin steak I had marinated beforehand.

After heating up the pan, I placed the two thick pieces on it. As I said before, my aunt used to own a BBQ place. I lived by myself for 4 years, and although it wasn't something to brag about, I worked as a cook in the army.

In other words, I was quite an experienced cook.

After adding sliced onions and paprika to the pan, I added a special sauce, which immediately emanated a delicious fragrance.

“Perfect.”

I plated the steak, then gave it to Rachel. Rachel stared at the steak with her eyes sparkling.

“Would you like some rice as well?”

Rachel smiled brightly and nodded.

I took her plate and put some rice on it before giving it back to her. After taking the plate, she waited patiently with a knife and fork in each hand. It seemed she wanted me to eat first.

“I'm eating.”

The meal began after I cut a piece of the steak off.

Perhaps because of the circumstance, it tasted especially good. Not only was it juicy, it practically melted when it entered my mouth. I bought the steak out of curiosity because the packaging said ‘grade-1 magic power beef raised in highly dense mana environment—’, but it seemed I made the right choice. It was worth its high price.

Our breakfast ended in 10 minutes, just like before.

After drinking some water to rinse my mouth, I checked my exam smartwatch.

“...What's this?”

For some reason, I had 4 more points than yesterday.

“A monster came while I was on watch. I know I said we should separate tasks and take points from monsters for ourselves, I thought I should split what I got while you were sleeping.”

“Ah, thank you.”

Thanks to her, I obtained more free points.

“Then let’s split up now. We should go hunting.”

I spoke as I got up. Rachel followed suit.



The third day of the exam went smoothly.

Even without the Desert Eagle, I could hunt monsters to some degree, thanks to my Gift’s increased grade and Aether. Aether adhered to the training handgun without being found out and strengthened its power. Of course, even with that, I had to avoid monsters above low-intermediate rank grade 6.

In any case, I walked along the forest and hunted comfortably. Just like always, I shot from a distance, outside of danger.

“A lake.”

Then, I discovered a dimly lit lake.

Places like this were gold mines.

There should be alligator monsters in it, which should give bonus points as they were ‘ambush monsters’.

It was easy for me to lure them out. I just had to shine a light bright enough to blanket the entire lake. And I happened to learn how to do so not too long ago. Though, strictly speaking, I couldn’t say I *learned* it.

‘Light Sphere’.

It was the magic Yoo Yeonha said no one else could perform.

With Stigma’s magic power, I created a sphere of light radiating brilliantly. The white clump of light floated up, lighting up the surroundings.

As soon as I sent the Light Sphere above the lake, I felt a faint movement behind me.

“Who is it!?”

I yelled loudly, and then the presence disappeared.

Whoever it was, they must have been quite skilled to escape my eyes all this time. But now that I noticed, there was no way to avoid my eyes. I peered through the tall grass, my sight expanding far beyond the level of humans. Then, I caught sight of a person.

...It was Chae Nayun.

She slowly backed off, then came to a stop. It seemed she planned to resume tailing me once the situation died down.

*Tang.*

I shot a bullet at the ground in front of her feet.

Chae Nayun’s short scream rang out in the forest.

# Chapter 64

## Final Exam (6)

*Hiik—!*

Soon after a short scream, Chae Nayun jumped out of the tall grass. With a sour expression, she slowly approached me.

“Why were you following me?”

I asked with my gun still pointing at her.

“...Don’t misunderstand. I wasn’t following you.”

Chae Nayun spoke as she scratched her face.

“Then what?”

“...”

“See, I’m right.”

I put my finger closer to the trigger. Chae Nayun started slightly.

“Well, before that, how did you do that just now?”

Without being intimidated, she asked about the Light Sphere I just created. I see, so my gun wasn’t threatening enough.

“Tell me why you were following me first.”

Chae Nayun furrowed her brows, then finally answered.

“I wasn’t following you, I was following Seung-Ah unni.”

“...Huh?”

I tilted my head. Why did Yun Seung-Ah's name pop out now?

“Seung-Ah? The same Yun Seung-Ah that I know?”

“Yeah, but you should really address her more politely.”

“...”

I turned around, pretending to fall into thought while taking out the laptop and checking the drone footage.

There were four drones in this area. From one, I could see Yun Seung-Ah sitting on a tree like a cat, looking down at us.

“Yun Seung-Ah...”

“Hey, can you stop addressing her with just her name?”

I knew that she was here as an overseer and knew who she would be observing. The first two days should be Kim Suho, then the third and fourth day should be other potential talents.

If things went according to the original story, she should be watching Jayden by now... Could it be that I was on her list of potential talents?

“Hey, now tell me how you made that Light Sphere.”

“Yeah, I'm the one who made it. Anyways, since you're here, let's hunt these together.”

“No~! I know you made it, I'm asking how...”

Chae Nayun couldn't continue her sentence. Like squids lured to the surface by light, alligator monsters began to emerge from the lake's depths.

Wizard Alligators, low-intermediate rank grade 5~7 monsters.

These strange alligators with blue skin had the ability to condense magic power in their mouth and shoot it out. This attack was threatening when used in an ambush underwater, but after surfacing like they did now, their danger level was halved.

I pointed at the alligators and made an offer,

“Half-half?”

Wizard Alligators had tough skin, so it would be difficult for me to kill them with a training handgun. I originally planned to use my Desert Eagle, but I couldn't now that an overseer was observing me.

"First, tell me how you did— Ah, damn it."

At that moment, an alligator fired a manaball at Chae Nayun.

Mm.

I was satisfied.

My luck even helped me with such trivial matters.



Yun Seung-Ah looked down on the ground from a tree.

'...I was almost discovered.'

When Kim Hajin created a Light Sphere, Yun Seung-Ah was shaken up. If it wasn't for Chae Nayun, she would have been found out. Of course, Light Sphere was a magic most Heroes could easily use.

But the intensity of the light and the time it was being used were problems. Condensing magic power externally then maintain it, though it sounded easy, it was a fairly difficult technique that even Yun Seung-Ah only mastered on the second term of her first year.

'I knew that kid wouldn't write a baseless report.'

Seeing that Kim Hajin had created a Light Sphere of such scale so effortlessly, Yun Seung-Ah smiled in satisfaction.

'Kim Hajin. I'll have to add a star above his name.'



The alligator's mouth opened wide, and I blasted bullets into it. Wadadada. I emptied an entire magazine, a total of 20 bullets, in one second, an incredible speed.

The alligator writhed in pain. However, the injury wasn't fatal. My attack wasn't meant to kill, only injure. The real attack came next.

A flash of magic power drawing a line.

A terrifying magic power towering above a sword blade severed the alligator's mouth. With its body and mouth separated, the alligator slumped down helplessly.

That was Chae Nayun's sword strike. No alligator could withstand over a single sword strike from her. It was quite literally 'cutting in two with one stroke of the sword'[1], a truly awe-inspiring power.

"Did you start using a sword?"

"..."

Chae Nayun put away her sword silently. At the same time, her hands were trembling noticeably. Seeing this, I closed my mouth. Currently, the unpleasant sensation of cutting through flesh should remain on her hands.

I didn't know what that felt like. Not knowing it made me afraid of it more.

"...Since there's four, we'll each scan two. I'll take this one and that one."

I scanned two alligators with the exam smartwatch. Out of conscience, I chose the two smaller ones.

Chae Nayun then scanned the two alligators, and then the hunt ended.

Now, there was no reason for us to be together.

"Since we're done here, you should go."

"...You really don't want to tell me, huh. Is it so hard to tell me how you made that Light Sphere?"

Chae Nayun pouted and grumbled.

With a small smile, I answered her.

"You'll get hurt if you find out."

"What?"

Chae Nayun frowned.

That was the truth. If I wanted to explain Stigma's magic power, I had to explain that

this world was a world within a novel.

“...What nonsense is that?”

“Just go. I came here first, so you go that way.”

I pointed to a direction, then started walking the other way.

Chae Nayun seemed to glare at my back, then finally began to walk... no, stomp away.

\*

After splitting up from Chae Nayun, I moved busily.

Using the Thousand-Mile Eyes fully, I searched for low-intermediate rank grade 7~9 monsters, then killed them. Wolf, deer, octopus... In just two hours, I obtained 15 points.

And now.

“...”

I stopped, feeling a presence from the tall grass behind me.

It wasn't that I noticed her presence. The person who was tailing me this entire time revealed her presence on purpose. It seemed she finally wanted to show herself.

She must have finished observing me.

I patiently waited.

Soon, she flew through the trees like a butterfly, then landed about 50 meters in front of me.

“Hello.”

Yun Seung-Ah spoke with a bright smile.

“This is the first time since you turned me down, right?”

As a greeting, she brought up what happened at our last meeting. I had cold-heartedly(?) rejected her business card.

“...Right, but what is it so suddenly?”

“Ah, I’m sorry. It really is a bit sudden, isn’t it?”

Yun Seung-Ah nodded in understanding, then continued.

“You see, I’ve been going around to different cadets, giving them a special event. You know, to also test their skill.”

“What? Event?”

“Yes.”

Yun Seung-Ah pointed at the nametag on her chest.

“Would you like to try taking it?”

“...Yes?”

Although she might not have meant it, her words and the positioning of her finger was perfect for bringing up a misunderstanding.

Unaware of my thoughts, Yun Seung-Ah continued.

“The event is simple. I’ll stay here, only using my left hand. If you can make me move even a single step, or if you land an attack other than on my left hand, I’ll give you this nametag.”

“...Nametag?”

“Yes, I’ll bet my guild on this promise.”

If she was betting her guild, that was more of a vow than a promise.

Thus, I rubbed my chin and pondered.

That nametag was worth 200 points, and that should undoubtedly place me in the first place.

In that case, what could I gain from getting first place on the final exam?

First, I would gain quite a bit of SP as guilds and Djinnns would take notice of me.

Furthermore, Kim Suho, who was supposed to get the first place, might be encouraged to try harder... No, no no no.

I was forgetting the most important thing, and that was how to take Yun Seung-Ah’s nametag in the first place.

“I’ll stay here. Make your decision. You can challenge me, or you can turn back.”

Yun Seung-Ah added as though she read my thoughts.

“It’s quite an unexpected event.”

As I said that, I fired at her without warning. But Yun Seung-Ah instantly struck down the bullets, using just her left hand as she promised. It almost looked like the bullets were plastic straws.

“...That was pretty prickly, far more powerful than what a training handgun should be capable of. Looks like your Gift really is related to guns.”

In that previous exchange, Yun Seung-Ah didn’t coat her hand with magic power. Right, she had struck down the bullets purely with her physical ability. Most likely, she wanted to confirm the bullets’ power.

For the record, the reason the bullets were stronger wasn’t my Gift, but because of the invisible Aether. By adhering to the training handgun, Aether had strengthened its power.

“Try more.”

At Yun Seung-Ah’s words, I pulled the trigger ten more times. Ten bullets flew at her almost simultaneously at different parts of her body. However, Yun Seung-Ah struck them all down without moving a single step. She didn’t use her magic power either.

“That was fast. I thought they were coming at me simultaneously.”

Yun Seung-Ah muttered leisurely.

This... I might actually have a chance. The handicap she put on herself was that critical. Since I also had two knives, perhaps I could try a feint.

With that in mind, I took out the two knives hanging by my waist, then stuck Stigma’s magic power around their handles.

“Oh~ right. You used a sword before you switched to a gun. Using a gun and sword at the same time, that’s smart.”

Bothered by her commentary, I threw the knives at her. One towards her chest, and the other towards her face. Then, I fired. Two knives and twenty bullets, I wondered how Yun Seung-Ah would deal with it.

*Clang!*

Yun Seung-Ah first struck down the two knives, then took the bullets with her body by mitigating the bullets' impact. At that moment, however, the two knives sprung back up.

Hurriedly repositioning themselves after being flung away, the knives flew towards her heels.

She said she would only use her left hand, and her heels were too far for her hands to reach...

However, to my astonishment, she released magic power with her left hand and completely shattered the knives.

"...Wow."

My attack ended in vain.

However, Yun Seung-Ah's expression was that of excitement.

"Interesting. You used magic power to change the knives' trajectory. What technique is that?"

You're like an onion, Hajin-ssi—!

I ignored the last bit of compliment and scratched my neck.

There was nothing I could do.

Unless a lightning bolt or a meteor suddenly fell on Yun Seung-Ah, this event was impossible to accomplish. Even luck couldn't cover an absurd difference in skill.

I put my gun back in my holster. But Yun Seung-Ah seemed to have misunderstood my intention as the magic power on her left hand became even sharper.

"What mysterious technique are you trying to show this time~?"

With her hand-blade held out, she smiled.

Yun Seung-Ah was still hungry, still unsatisfied. Her desire to collect talent was truly admirable.

However, I planned to mercilessly betray her hopes.

After collecting the shattered remains of my knives, I turned back without regret. Then, I began to walk back the way I came from. Once I took about five steps, Yun Seung-Ah's dazed voice rang out.

"...Hello?"

I continued to walk away, and then she took a step forward.

"Where are you going...?"

At that moment!  
I turned around.

"...You said you'd only use your left hand."

"...Eh?"

I pointed at her right foot, then spoke.

"But you just used your right foot."

"..."

Immediately, Yun Seung-Ah's face became frozen cold.

"I'm kidding, hahaha."

I chuckled and turned back.

In truth, I was only half-joking and planned to argue with her, but because Yun Seung-Ah's eyes were too glaringly intimidating, I just gave up.

'...Let's just go back to the tent and eat with Rachel.'



The fourth day.

“Rachel-ssi, stay with me for today.”

During breakfast, I told Rachel.

“?”

Rachel tilted her head in the middle of eating.

“The test will end soon.”

Today was ‘that’ day.

It was something she should have naturally faced with Kim Suho, but because Rachel was teamed up with me, I had to bring her there.

This was a very important event as this was where Rachel would obtain a clue to her enlightenment.

“Everyone’s pretty crazed. It’ll be too dangerous alone.”

In reality, today was the last day as the exam would end at 9 A.M. tomorrow.

“You have to protect me, Rachel-ssi.”

I spoke again. Rachel was about to nod when she suddenly paused, then tilted her head again.

“...Yes?”

“You didn’t hear wrong.”

I grinned and got up.

Butterfly Seedling. It was dangerous for me to even get near it. If I accidentally let its root touch me... although I wouldn’t instantly die thanks to Aether, I would undoubtedly lose one or two organs.

“I need you to protect me.”

---

1. A proverb that usually means being extremely decisive, but used in the literal sense here

# Chapter 65

## Hatching (1)

The Butterfly Seedling was an elemental type monster.

After slowly growing strength in the World Tree's roots, it would pop out today and cause a mess. I didn't write a detailed reason, but if over a thousand people suddenly barged into my home, I would be mad as well.

In the original story, Kim Suho, Chae Nayun, and Rachel cooperated to kill the Butterfly Seedling, which would then leave two presents. It would give Rachel a hint for her enlightenment, and the Butterfly Seedling Dust for Kim Suho.

"Come here."

I glanced behind me constantly, worried that Rachel might run away.

Because we were walking around the World Tree, we only managed to kill four monsters. Split between the two of us, we only received 6 points each. I wouldn't blame her if she made me faint and took my points.

"..."

Rachel followed me with an unhappy face. I tried to find as many monsters as possible, but there really weren't many around.

I looked at the time.

[1:13 P.M.]

The problem was that I couldn't remember when exactly the Butterfly Seedling appeared. Do I have to keep walking around the World Tree until it appears?

"...I think monsters will be on the outskirts of the island."

In the end, Rachel opened her mouth. She was right. All the cadets were near the outskirts as well.

“No, I don’t think so. “

But I rejected her notion. Rachel pouted, and I continued to walk. Soon, I found Rachel trying to escape to the side path.

“Where are you going?”

“...Just checking if there’s anything nearby.”

After making a dry excuse, she began to follow me again. Then, after 30 minutes of wandering around the World Tree,...

*Wooong—*

I finally felt an unusual vibration similar to an earthquake. I looked towards the direction of the epicenter. From the World Tree’s giant root, a seedling resembling a butterfly emerged. Chae Nayun and Kim Suho were also nearby.

“Follow me.”

Making a serious face, I guided Rachel.



Kim Suho was walking through the forest with Chae Nayun. There wasn’t a big reason behind it, just that Chae Nayun kept getting lost.

“Hey, what do you think about Kim Hajin?”

The forest was still dark. When they were bored, unable to find any monster, Chae Nayun suddenly asked Kim Suho.

“Kim Hajin?”

Kim Suho tilted his head as he stared at Chae Nayun.

“Why? Is he on your mind?”

“No, just that... don’t you think he’s hiding many secrets?”

The Light Sphere, archery duel, and what happened in Paris. Chae Nayun thought there was more to Kim Hajin than meets the eye.

“...I guess you’re right.”

Kim Suho gave a somewhat meaningful reply.

“What is that reaction?”

“What? You said he is hiding secrets, and I answered.”

Kim Suho gave an evasive answer with a smile.

In truth, he was half-sure that Kim Hajin liked Chae Nayun. The conversation he had with him in Paris was definite proof.

“So what is he hiding?”

—I’ve been thinking about her for far longer than you, and I’ve been watching over her all this time. So I know far more about her than you.

How much did someone need to like someone else to say something like that? Kim Suho didn’t know because he didn’t have such a person.

“Hey, tell me.”

“Why ask me? You should find out for yourself.”

With a blooming smile, Kim Suho teased Chae Nayun.

“You...”

At that moment,

*Woong*—

An unusual vibration rang out.

Kim Suho and Chae Nayun stared at each other. Without having to exchange any words, they both began to run to the source of the vibration.

The epicenter was an open field under the World Tree.

When they arrived, they saw a strange butterfly flying around.

“What’s that?”

It looked like a butterfly. It had wings that flapped, and more importantly, it was flying. However, its appearance was far from a butterfly.

Its wings were weaved with tree roots, and leaves grew on its face and body. Rather than a living creature, it looked like it was created by a craftsman.

“...It’s an elemental monster.”

Kim Suho was quick to notice. A spiritual existence that absorbed the World Tree’s vitality to form a body. Kim Suho held up his sword, while Chae Nayun pondered whether she should use her sword or bow.

“Is it strong?”

“Looks like it.”

In the end, Chae Nayun chose the sword. Then, the Butterfly Seedling moved. Its chilling eyes peered down at them, causing Kim Suho and Chae Nayun to flinch.

“It looks super strong.”

“...”

Suddenly...

*Koooong—!*

A large tendril-like root tore through the ground and shot up. Then, several roots followed until the number reached a dozen. Spread out in all directions, they wriggled threateningly, then struck down at Chae Nayun and Kim Suho.

The two of them jumped back, dodging the roots.

*Koong— Koong— Koong— Koong—*

The roots endlessly shot down.

“Hey! I think we need to cut them off!”

Chae Nayun shouted as she dodged, and Kim Suho nodded. The two of them swung

their sword against the flying roots.

Kim Suho's blade easily severed a root.

But the problem was Chae Nayun. Not only were the giant roots harder than gold, they each carried magic power that strengthened them. For the current Chae Nayun, they were difficult opponents.

When Chae Nayun was struggling, a streak of red shot through the darkness, striking the root Chae Nayun was fighting.

It was a bullet.

There was no physical damage, but fire ignited from the point of contact, burning up the root's surface. Then, Chae Nayun swung her sword at the weakened root, easily cutting it apart.

Next, a crescent moon-shaped sword qi flew at the Butterfly Seedling's main body, and the Butterfly Seedling barely dodged it by lowering its flight height.

Chae Nayun turned to the direction of the two attacks.

"Eh?"

The strange combination of an average-looking man and a princess out of a fairy tale was Kim Hajin and Rachel.

Koong!

Soon, more roots shot up from the ground near them. Kim Hajin quickly ran outside their range, while Rachel gracefully dodged the attacking roots.

"When did you guys come?"

"Attack the main body!"

Kim Hajin shouted, hiding behind a bush.

"What?"

"The main body! Not the roots! Use your bow for today!"

"What are you doing hiding back there..."

A root struck down again, whereupon Chae Nayun shouted as she hurriedly blocked them with her sword.

“Hey! Support me like before!”

However, it was Rachel, not Kim Hajin, who sent a blade of wind in support, striking the root and making it fall back. Chae Nayun then made her sword surge with magic power, striking down at the root. With an honest diagonal slash, the root split in half.

“Oho.”

Chae Nayun liked the sensation she got, especially when compared to cutting down a living creature. With this, she felt she could do better...

She tightened her grip.

Magic power surged on her blade, extending the blade to 4 meters. Then, Chae Nayun swung the longsword of magic power with full strength.



“Argh.”

Chae Nayun was going wild with her sword when a bow was more suited for the situation.

Without a choice, I fired my gun, hoping to at least slow down the Butterfly Seedling’s movements.

In a single instant, twenty bullets, an entire magazine, shot out. Each time the bullet hit, a part of the Butterfly Seedling’s wings tore off. Although my attacks weren’t powerful enough to detach the wings, the Butterfly Seedling seemingly didn’t like it.

A root shot up from its back, which swept through the surface of the ground and shot towards me. I couldn’t close my eyes, its movement clearly entering my eyes.

Then, the viciously flying root was stopped right in front of me.

A single sword had blocked its advance.

The bearer of the sword was Rachel, who appeared like a Hero.

“...”

Rachel looked back at me silently. I immediately jumped back to a distance out of reach of the root.

At the same time, more roots began to pop up. Although Rachel managed to dodge them with her nimble movements, the roots eventually multiplied until Rachel was completely surrounded.

Eventually, a root struck Rachel's stomach, sending her flying like a toy hit by a baseball bat. Rachel crashed into a tree some distance away, then fell down.

She coughed up blood. I watched the scene play out objectively and note that it wasn't a fatal blow thanks to her qi reinforcement. Still, she wasn't in a good state.

*Tong!*

When I was wondering whether I should take out the Desert Eagle, Evandel's Seed jumped out of my pocket. Then, it bounced towards Rachel like a hopping rabbit, then adhered to her wounded stomach. Because Rachel was writhing in pain, she didn't notice the seed.

I reluctantly let the seed be. Now wasn't the time to scold it.

"That damned butterfly."

I glared at the Butterfly Seedling flying about in the distance.

If I could just break those wings, Kim Suho should be able to handle the rest... but I couldn't just take out my Desert Eagle...

"Huu."

I had no other choice.

I took in a deep breath, then imbued Stigma's magic power into the training gun's magazine, refining the bullets with fire attribute magic power. I could only refine three bullets, and this was with the training gun, not the Desert Eagle.

Were three bullets enough?

That was a worry I could think about after I fired.

Carefully aiming at the Butterfly Seedling, I pulled the trigger.

A bullet flew out, striking the Butterfly Seedling's wing. Immediately, an explosion erupted.

"...Huh?"

I muttered in a daze. Worried that I was seeing things, I rubbed my eyes and saw again.

"...What?"

I wasn't going crazy. The Butterfly Seedling lost its wings and was now falling to the ground. Its wings weren't torn. With a single bullet, the Butterfly Seedling's wings had completely burned down.

I was confused. My magic power couldn't possibly have such power.

I observed my surroundings carefully. There had to be a reason unrelated to me...

Sure enough, I could see a woman hiding in the bushes. With an expressionless face, she was holding onto a bead-like object, eyeing the Butterfly Seedling with a greedy look.

It was Seo Ijin.

“Ah.”

It wasn't my attack that shot down the Butterfly Seedling, but hers. It wasn't a coincidence. She had made it look like I was the one who shot it down so that she could remain in hiding. Her goal was undoubtedly to take the Butterfly Seedling Dust.

At that moment, Kim Suho charged at the fallen Butterfly Seedling, easily cutting it in half with his sword.

Then, a golden dust suddenly rose up, lighting up the sky like a firework.

However, this wasn't the Butterfly Seedling Dust.

It was a sleeping powder that Seo Ijin threw out. I blocked my nose and mouth, then looked around. Kim Suho could resist status effects to a certain degree, but he was currently in a daze from the beautiful sight. On the other hand, Chae Nayun was seemingly half-drunk.

Meanwhile, Seo Ijin made her move.

I tried to stop her... but a giant light suddenly erupted, grabbing my attention.

My jaws dropped automatically.



Under the golden dust sparkling in the sky, Rachel felt herself becoming drowsy. She felt sluggish and sleepier than ever before. It seemed it was an elemental's power. Knowing that the monster was dealt with, she closed her eyes.

Although she couldn't believe it, the Butterfly Seedling was blown up by a single bullet from Kim Hajin. Since they killed such a power monster, she felt safe in taking a break.

'If first place is too much to ask for, please let me take third place at least...'

But suddenly, a giant light pricked at her eyes. The light was so intense that she could feel it even with her eyes closed. As a result, she opened her eyes narrowly.

A golden clump of light was shining on her stomach. The light glimmered brilliantly, then began to form a human shape.

Rachel stared at the light embracing her:

No, it wasn't a light.

It was a child, perhaps about 3 years old.

For some reason, Rachel felt a familiarity from the child's face.

Soon, she found out why. The child looked like her younger self.

The girl embracing her gave her warmth. It felt like the injury on her stomach was being healed. Rachel subconsciously stroked the child's hair, and the child smiled in response. It was a clear, innocent smile.

Rachel smiled back.

However, when the child opened her mouth, Rachel's face stiffened.

She wanted to ask the child to repeat what she just said. But before she could do so, golden dust fell on her head.

Her mouth refused to move, and the drowsiness she felt became heavier.

She slowly closed her eyes.

The child had said a single word, 'Mommy'.

# Chapter 66

## Hatching (2)

I was caught off guard at the seed's sudden hatching, but then quickly snapped back to reality.

Currently, a densely packed golden dust blocked everyone's vision. No overseers or drones could capture what was happening, and Rachel had also fallen asleep. As long as I remained calm, I could deal with everything easily.

First, I took Evandel off of Rachel.

"Come here."

"Ah, aaang."

Evandel struggled to stay with Rachel but widened her eyes when she saw my face.

"That's right, I'm the one who raised you."

Consoling her, I held her in my embrace. She looked just like a 3-year-old child, but she was as light as a feather. Hugging me tightly, Evandel muttered.

"Daddy."

"Huh? No, I'm not. Anyways, can you change back to a seed, Evandel?"

"Seed?"

"Yep. Small and circular. You have to hide."

"What about Mommy?"

Evandel spoke as she glanced at Rachel. I was a bit perplexed at Evandel calling Rachel Mommy.

"Rachel... um, Mommy is really busy. So..."

“Huaam. I’m sleepy.”

Evandel yawned as her eyes narrowed. It seemed Boss’ golden dust was also affecting Evandel. I was feeling a bit panicked. If Evandel fell asleep now, there wouldn’t be a way to hide her...

But thankfully, Evandel listened to my request.

With a golden light, Evandel transformed into a giant seed that floated down on my palm.

“Whew.”

After breathing a sigh of relief, I looked around.

The field was full of the mysterious golden dust. Kim Suho, who was resisting the drowsiness fairly well, had now fallen asleep. The few overseers who were watching us from nearby trees also fell down, unable to withstand the dust’s power.

However, I was fine. It was thanks to Aether’s ‘owner defense function’. I could feel that Aether had formed something like a filter for my nostrils and throat.

Although breathing was a bit difficult, I could remain unaffected by the sleeping powder. With my mind clear, I approached Seo Ijin.



Butterfly Seedling Dust.

Byproducts of elementals generally fetched a hefty price. Boss didn’t know what function this dust had as it was her first time seeing such an elemental.

However, she was quite a greedy woman.

She kneeled in front of the Butterfly Seedling’s corpse, and from the huge gaping wound on its body, she could see a clump of blue, glowing dust. Her eyes flickered with greed, and she carefully picked it up.

“Put it down.”

At that moment, the deep voice of a man stopped her. She slowly raised her head. There, she saw Kim Hajin.

“...Hello.”

“That’s not something you can take.”

Kim Hajin’s face distorted viciously.

She stared at his face, then looked around.

The surrounding air was filled with her sleeping powder, but for some reason, Kim Hajin was unaffected. The golden dust was something no cadet should be able to endure, yet Kim Hajin was doing so with nothing but his bare body.

“..”

It was strange. There was too much about this man that she didn’t understand. At this moment, she felt a powerful urge to observe him.

From under her feet, black magic power shot up fiercely. The magic power formed a spherical shape that swallowed her and Kim Hajin, forming a sealed space of sorts. Even though Kim Hajin was trapped in what should be an unexpected sealed space, he showed no signs of being unrest... No, his hands were trembling.

She revealed her real face to Kim Hajin, whereupon his body shook greatly.

“You know me.”

Kim Hajin retorted concisely.

“Li Xiaopeng-ssi.”

“..”

‘Who was Li Xiaopeng?’ Boss pondered momentarily. Then, realizing it was one of her fake identities, she nodded.

“Right. Then why would I be here?”

“To serve as an overseer, I assume.”

“Hmm.”

Kim Hajin seemed to have a strange misunderstanding, but Boss didn’t go out of her way to correct it.

“...When did you find out I was Li Xiaopeng?”

“Just now—”

“If you lie, I’ll kill... no, hit you.”

Kim Hajin let out a dry cough.

“...When I took your watch, I was looking at you from close range. It was then that I realized something was off.”

“How?”

Jain’s Gift couldn’t be seen through so easily. It was close to impossible to notice anything just by ‘looking’.

“I have great eyes, you see...”

So what Kim Hajin was saying didn’t make sense.

Kim Hajin had not only seen through Jain’s Gift, but also her necklace. It couldn’t be explained with him just having good eyes...

Countless thoughts raced through her brain. Repeatedly considering all possibilities and selecting the most logical choice, she came up with a hypothesis.

“The attribute of his magic power is itself anti-magic?”

If the attribute of Kim Hajin’s magic power was anti-magic; in other words, if his physique made it so that all magic power he took into his body received the property of anti-magic, he could indeed see through Jain’s Gift just with his eyes. He would only have to concentrate magic power in his optic nerves.

In other words, this wasn’t a matter of his Gift, but his ‘physique’.

Of course, this was pure speculation, one that was extremely unlikely because of the absurdity of the matter. To confirm this, she would need to observe and measure his power carefully.

However, if he really had such a physique, Kim Hajin was a resource that she couldn’t lose.

“...”

Boss silently kneeled down, then grabbed the clump of dust lying in the Butterfly Seedling's body. Kim Hajin swallowed hard, but to his surprise, Boss handed him the Butterfly Seedling Dust.

“I will give this to you, but in exchange...”

She paused.

Her silence continued for a long time. It was because she couldn't think of what to say next.

—Don't say strange things, Boss.

Jain's voice rang out in her ears. It seemed she was properly observing the situation this time.

—If you don't know what to say, just ask him for a way to contact him. Don't rush it and take it slow.

Jain's voice was solemn, which was a rare occurrence.

Although the Chameleon Troupe already knew all of the ways to contact him, Boss took Jain's advice.

“...Give me your number.”



The uproarious fourth day went by, and the morning of the fifth day arrived.

The laborious final exam came to an end at last.

The Butterfly Seedling was a monster that overseers didn't expect to see, causing a small disturbance, and in the end, they agreed to give the four cadets who defeated it 20 points each.

Cadets then turned in their exam smartwatches before getting on the ship back to Cube. The eliminated cadets had already left last night, so only about 700 cadets remained.

The ship cut through a blue sea. Leaned against the guardrail on the ship's bow, I

admired the beautiful waves before taking out my smartwatch. The Chameleon Troupe, or Li Xiaopeng, had yet to contact me. But why was Boss interested in me?

“Hey.”

While I was in thought, Chae Nayun approached me.

“What.”

“...How did it end?”

“How did what end?”

“The fight. I don’t have any memory of what happened after the middle.”

Chae Nayun scratched her cheek with her eyes on the sea.

“Kim Suho said your bullet destroyed the monster’s wings... he’s lying, right?”

“Obviously, how could anyone destroy that monster’s wings using a gun?”

I spoke honestly since it really wasn’t me who did it.

“...Right? That’s what I thought too.”

Seeing Chae Nayun looking relieved for some reason, I asked.

“Why did you use a sword instead of a bow?”

“What? You’re the one who told me to switch. How can you be so back and forth? Do you have an illness or something?”

“I mean, you have to be flexible. It’s dangerous if you use a weapon you haven’t practiced much with in real combat.”

If Chae Nayun was gravely hurt, half of the responsibility would have been mine. After all, I was the one who made her switch to a sword.

“I’m not so weak that you have to worry about me.”

Chae Nayun spoke with a sidelong scowl. I nodded without arguing with her.

“So, how did using a sword feel like?”

“It wasn’t anything spe—”

“You’re still scared, right?”

“...What? W-What are you talking about? Why would I be scared?”

...She really wasn’t good at hiding her feelings. I looked into her eyes, then grinned. When she lied, her eyes shook like they were having miniature earthquakes. This was one of the unique settings I gave her, and it had remained the same in this world.

“You’ll get better if you keep at it. You’re a born swordsman.”



The exams were completely over.

While other cadets spent their weekend enjoying the feeling of liberation, Rachel used the time to contemplate on life. The mystical experience she had on the island had given her much to think about.

Because it didn’t seem like a problem she could solve on her own, she even called the English Royal Court’s Department of Analysis.

—A tree elemental?

“Yes, I saw something in the pollen. No, I felt it. I think it may have been the power of an elemental. What do you think, Raymond-ssi?”

Of course, it might have just been a hallucination. However, the memory from that day was too vivid and distinct. Not only did she remember the child’s face and voice, the warmth she felt when the child embraced her remained in her heart.

—Mm... that might be possible, but there’s no way to be sure. The power of elementals is something that still remains a mystery. In the first place, we aren’t sure if what Princess saw was an elemental or a fairy.

Rachel nodded, then asked the analyst with a tinge of nervousness.

“Then, do you think an elemental could show the future? Even if it’s not the future itself, something like a portion of a future...”

—Ah, something similar has been reported to the academia. It caused quite a stir.

At that moment, Rachel felt her heart drop.

“...Really? What was it?”

—Mm, it was a plant type elemental as well. Someone became covered in mushroom spores, then said he saw a portion of his future.

“Huk!”

Rachel let out a short scream. The analyst laughed briefly.

—Judging by that reaction, Princess must have seen something too.

“Yes, I saw a child.”

—...

For a moment, silence descended. The analyst stayed speechless for three whole minutes.

—... Child?

Then, the analyst barely managed to eek out a word.

“Yes.”

—Mm~ well, it could have been any child...

“She called me Mommy.”

—Yes?

This time, the analyst let out a short scream.  
Rachel's cheeks flushed red as though she was embarrassed.

"And... she looked just like me. She looked just like when I was young."

—Uh...

"Raymond-ssi, don't you think that I saw my future?"

With that, Rachel smiled bashfully.

It was a precious experience. Rachel engraved the child's warmth and smile in her head. She felt like she could smile every time she thought of her.

If what she saw was, in fact, her future, if she would someday come to have that child... she felt like she could finally stop rejecting her life.

At that moment, she realized that the analyst was quiet.

"Um, Raymond-ssi?"

—Ah, sorry. The chances of it being Princess' future is... very small, but... I just couldn't ima... imagine it... Did you perhaps see the father as well?

As the analyst asked, his fists were shaking. A child to a 17-year-old princess. As a loyal servant of the English Royal Court, that was something he could not accept...

"No, I didn't see anyone like that."

Rachel smiled bashfully, then dodged the analyst's gaze.

"But if I really saw my future, I'm sure he is somewhere."

◇ ◇ ◇

"Daddy!"

"..."

A child about a meter shorter than me shouted with her arms open.

For now, I held her in my embrace. To be completely honest, she was incredibly cute, but I knew I couldn't spoil her. I had to be a good parent.

"...Evandel, you can't call me Daddy, okay?"

"Why?"

Evandel tilted her head and asked.

"Mmm... because people will misunderstand. You should call me Uncle."

"Eeh? Why?"

"Uh..."

But I didn't know how to go about raising her. I had no experience raising a child. I was only thankful that next week was a break.

"Mm... why don't we watch some TV? You know what a TV is, right? You saw it before when you were young."

By young, I meant when she was a seed. Back then, I left the TV on when I went out, just in case the seed got bored.

"Un! I like TV!"

"Good."

I turned on the TV and went to an animation channel, which showed a penguin with glasses and a green dinosaur.

"Woaaaa..."

Evandel quickly turned her attention to the TV, her eyes sparkling, and I sat down in front of the kitchen table alone.

"...What do I do with this?"

I stared at the Butterfly Seedling Dust, glowing brightly on the kitchen table. I

managed to take it, but I wasn't sure what to do with it.

[Butterfly Seedling Dust]

—Attaches to a target with magic power and helps them awaken a part of their hidden potential.

Its description was simple, but upon breaking down the sentence, you could see two keywords – 'target' and 'potential'. That is, the dust could be used to awaken the potential in people, as well as potential in objects.

"...Do I have to give it to Kim Suho?"

The Butterfly Seedling Dust was supposed to give a clue to enlightenment for Rachel, and help with Kim Suho's future second enlightenment. But because of Boss' interference, neither Rachel nor Kim Suho obtained the Butterfly Seedling Dust.

"Hm."

It seemed I needed to think more about how to deal with this dust. For now, I wrapped the dust in a cloth, then put it in my drawer.



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