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The Novel's Extra

- 소설 속 엑스트라 -

- Volume 4 -

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[FudgeNouget (Wuxiaworld)]

Goo Yeonha



Chae Nayun



Rachel



Chapter 98

Past

“...Wow.”

Milano, Italy.

Inside Colaion family’s Leolen Mansion, Vanessa and Paolo were watching the CCTV footage of Friday’s assassination incident.

“Perfection as expected.”

Jeronimo’s workmanship was flawless. Siemens was instantly killed, and the assassin disappeared as though he never existed. He had escaped from Torino, which was deep inside Colaion family’s sphere of influence, without leaving behind a trace.

“But what killed him?”

Paolo asked. Vanessa rested her chin on her hand and replayed the tape. However, the CCTV’s low quality footage couldn’t capture exactly what happened.

“I’m not sure.”

“I... think it was a bullet.”

“No way.”

Guns were indispensable weapons even in the current era.

Although they were called well-assembled toys compared to artifacts, in terms of market size, the firearm market was the same as the artifact market.

This was because cold weapon artifacts were mostly traded between two guilds, two individuals, or between a guild and an individual. Alternatively, they were traded in auction houses or special markets like the Violet Banquet.

On the other hand, guns were usable by even ordinary civilians, and high-class masterpiece guns were even capable of killing low-intermediate rank monsters.

In other words, the firearm trade was much more active and frequent than artifact trade.

“There shouldn’t be anyone in Jeronimo Mercenary who uses a gun.”

But that was the extent of guns. A tool for self-defense used by ordinary people against weak monsters.

There was no reason for the powerful to use guns.

“But it looks like a bullet no matter how I look at it...”

“How would a magic bullet pierce through the barrier? Anyways...”

Vanessa’s expression stiffened intimidatingly.

“You better keep quiet about the whole thing. Don’t open your mouth no matter what happens. We know nothing of what happened, got it?”

This matter was a secret they had to carry to their graves.

Godfather Colaion cared the most about the safety of his family. He would surely be enraged by Siemens’ death. No matter how much of a fool Siemens was, it was Godfather Colaion’s unbreakable creed that the punishment of a family member be carried out openly.

“...Of course, I know.”

Paolo nodded as if to ask why she would mention such an obvious thing.

“.....”

However, Vanessa was worried. In movies, it was always someone like him who slipped up...

Unable to trust her own brother’s words, Vanessa even took out a ‘magic contract’.



[Sunshine Haven]

The retirement center that Fernin Jesus stayed in was located in the outskirts of Seoul.

However, its name and appearance made it seem more like a comfy resting place than a retirement center.

I carefully walked up to the entrance and knocked on the door.

Soon, the door opened, and a middle-aged woman, who was likely a caregiver, appeared. She looked at me and smiled. Just when I was about to smile back and introduce myself, she spoke.

“Wow, it’s been a while, Hajin!”

“...Yes?”

Caught off guard, my head stiffened. A short silence descended as I felt like a hammer hit the back of the head. However, I quickly regained my composure.

Kim Hajin, or rather, Kim Chundong.

Chundong wasn’t a rock, but a person. It was entirely possible that he moved around and did things on his own accord.

Thinking about it now, this place was only 10 minutes away from Chundong’s original house.

“Ah... yes, nice to meet you. It’s been a while.”

That’s what I said.

Thankfully, it must not have been too out of character, as the caregiver reacted normally.

“You must be busy with Hero training lately. What brings you here? Ah, come in.”

The caregiver invited me inside, and I followed her in.

“.....”

I took a full look around. The place was bigger than it seemed from the outside. In the living room were six people talking to each other as they played Go and Shogi. Then, they noticed me and laughed heartily.

“It’s been almost a year! How has it been?”

At that moment, the caregiver asked.

“Ah, you see...”

I hesitated to speak. I didn't know how to bring up this topic.

“Yeah?”

“...Um, it's about Agus ajusshi.”

“Agus... Oh, that South-American man?”

I nodded.

It seemed Chundong had some sort of a relationship with Agus Benjamin. I wasn't too surprised since Chundong's past was completely in the hands of the co-author. He must have done something to make things difficult once again. But as far as I was concerned, this situation wasn't too bad. The co-author probably didn't expect me to arrive here so soon.

“Yes, I was wondering if there was anything he left behind.”

“Let me think... I don't think he specifically asked us to take care of it, but there was something.”

“A letter?”

“Huh? Oh, yes, a letter. How did you know?”

My eyes opened wide.

A letter.

Thankfully, it seemed the plot device I put in was left unchanged.

“Where is that letter?”

“It's in the memorial along with his ashes. Why?”

“Ah, well...”

I needed to think about how to answer this question. I knew nothing about Chundong's personality, but from the caregiver's soft gaze and the smiles of other

retirees... I could surmise that he was amiable.

“He and I had a promise.”

“Oh, did you? Right, you did like introducing yourself to retirees and listening to their stories... I think his ashes are kept inside Seoho Memorial.”

“Ah, thank you.”

I bowed.

After exchanging a few words of pleasantries, I left to the memorial the caregiver told me about.

[Seoho Memorial]

“...Hm.”

It was also my first time coming to a memorial. Like going to foreign countries, I was experiencing many new things in this world.

I scratched my neck and walked inside.

There were thousands of urns stored inside the memorial, but my Thousand-Mile Eyes could quickly locate the name I was looking for.

Agus Benjamin, written in Korean.

His urn was placed inside a drawer along with a letter.

“Letter...”

Just like the caregiver said, there was an old letter placed next to his urn.

I walked up to the drawer. However, I withdrew my hand before I opened it.

I already knew what was inside the letter. It shouldn't be me, but his daughter who opens it.

...But what if the content was different?

Because of this worry, I opened the drawer and took out the letter. It was written in squiggly letters that I couldn't read. After translating it with my smartwatch, I saw that it was the same as what I created in my setting.

Feeling relieved, I placed the letter back and turned around.

Then, I entered Violet Banquet.

In this situation, the Truth Agency could only tell its client one thing.

[We have located Fernin Jesus.]

[The price for the information will be 300 million won.]

[If you'd like to hear the answer, please complete the payment.]



Same time, Cube's penthouse.

While Kim Hajin was reading Agus Benjamin's letter at the memorial, Yoo Yeonha received a report from Team 3 of the Falling Blossom.

"...Volunteer work?"

Team 3 reverse-traced Kim Hajin's past, and Yoo Yeonha managed to discover a new piece of information.

—Yes, from when he was 11 to when he entered Cube, he seemed to have volunteered often in orphanages, retirement centers, and nursing homes.

"Volunteer work..."

Yoo Yeonha pondered.

Being born an orphan, but realizing his talent and entering Agent Military Academy. It was a beautiful rags-to-riches story.

If it was her, she would have thrown her shabby and ragged past into the trash.

However, Kim Hajin didn't forget his past. In fact, he continued his volunteer work in order to not forget.

Yoo Yeonha remembered seeing someone like him. Of course, not in real life, but in a movie.

"...Hm."

She finally understood a few things. Kim Hajin was a cadet, but he often liked to leave Cube. Because of this, bad rumors about him had spread, but the truth couldn't have been more dazzling.

"...Amazing."

Yoo Yeonha exclaimed in awe.

Not forgetting his past and trying to find it.

Not viewing his strength as a mean of gaining fame, but using it only when necessary. His way of life, which was faithful to his beliefs and principles, was something Yoo Yeonha couldn't help but admire, even if it differed from her own values.

“Rather than that, isn't there anything more? Like about his birth.”

—We're looking into it as much as we can, but we're at a complete standstill. There is no other trace of his past left.

“Dig deeper.”

Although she was somewhat unhappy, she let it go.

“And next?”

—An incident broke out in Torino at the Colaion family's mansion.

“Colaion?”

Yoo Yeonha raised her eyebrows.

Yoo Yeonha was planning on forming a partnership with the Colaion family.

Her goal was to smuggle artifacts.

The Italian Mafia had many 'black artifacts', which were artifacts that haven't been reported to the central government. This was because artifacts dug up by the Mafia were prohibited from being exported, so that Italy's government and numerous guilds could buy them for a cheap price.

What Yoo Yeonha wanted were such artifacts.

“What incident?”

—One of their executives was assassinated. But because they think the assassin came from Korea, they are asking us to search for the assassin.

“...Search, you say.”

Yoo Yeonha pondered. Considering Team 3's full force, finding a mere assassin wasn't

a difficult task.

“What do you think? Can you do it?”

—It’s not impossible.

“Oh? And why is that?”

—We just hired a rather useful recruit.

Yoo Yeonha frowned. Because of her deeply suspicious personality, she didn’t trust people who she didn’t handpick.

“...Is that so?”

—Yes, I will send you his profile now.

Then, Yoo Yeonha opened the profile with an unsatisfactory look.

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[Kim Hosup]

—17 years old, 168 cm, 78kg

—Agent Military Academy graduate

—Gift: [Superhigh Speed Network]

□Connects his brain with a computer, showing incredible ability in information searching and tracking.

□Search speed increases with higher computer specs and internet speed.

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◇◇◇

Late night, Tuesday. I left my room and came outside Dorm 1.

“Ah! Kim Hajin! Over here~!”

The person who called me outside shouted as she waved her hand.

When I stopped near her, Chae Nayun ran up to me, smiling.

“Ah, is this it? The study guide?”

“Yeah, so stop texting me.”

I gave her a study guide she had been pestering me about. I wasn't the one who wrote it, as I just copied what I found by hacking Yoo Yeonha's personal database. Yoo Yeonha had a habit of saving everything she wrote.

“Ah~ Thank you so much. I'll pay you back for this favor for sure.”

“You don't need to. Just study harder.”

I stared fixedly at Chae Nayun. Lately, Chae Nayun has been looking more and more pitiful. I just felt like helping her. I didn't even know what was right anymore.

In the past, I wasn't able to look straight at her face when I thought about the 'day' that would inevitably come. But now... I just had to not be found out. Just like how I assassinated that Mafioso, I just had to kill him and escape unnoticed. But because of this thought, I kept...

“Okay! But again, thank you sooo much! I'll go study immediately!”

Chae Nayun smacked my arm, then ran off to her dorm, hugging the notebook I gave her.

“...That hurt.”

I rubbed my arm as I watched her leave.
Why did she always hit me so hard?



Because Cube was so empty during the written exam week, time seemed to fly by. Before I noticed, Friday came around.

“Hey~”

1:30 P.M. after the end of the final written exam.

Chae Nayun appeared in front of me with a bright face.

She was practically living in the library for the past couple days. It seemed everything

went well.

“Thanks, I survived because of you.”

“...Really?”

“Yeah, I must have gotten at least five problems I wouldn’t have gotten otherwise. That’s a big difference, right?”

“I guess so.”

Next week was the combat exam week. Naturally, I was a bit nervous. My goal was to bring my ranking up to about 200.

But what was more important was what came afterwards.

The ‘incident’ that would happen after the combat exam.

“Oh right, do you want to go there after the combat exam? It’ll be on me.”

“...Where?”

“Han Jung Gak. It’s a really famous Korean restaurant in Ganghwa Island. You’ve heard of it, right? It’s just as famous as the restaurant you took me to in Paris. Kim Suho and you...”

Han Jung Gak. It was the highest class restaurant I had in my setting. I was curious what the food there tasted like. It would undoubtedly be the pinnacle of Korean food. However...

“I’m not going.”

“What, why?”

“I don’t have the time. You can go with Kim Suho.”

“...What, are you jealous?”

Jealous? That was a word I couldn’t just gloss over. Naturally, I frowned. I glared at Chae Nayun and snapped back.

“Are you crazy?”

“Uh, fine, if you don’t want to come, don’t. I just wanted to pay you back for treating me in Paris...”

“I’m not going.”

After cutting her off resolutely, I headed back inside.

“Ah, wait! Just the two of us can’t go even if I wanted to! My dad will get mad if he finds out~!”

Chae Nayun kept talking nonsense until the end.



The weekend flew by and Monday came around.
The combat exam week had begun.

The first combat exam was a team challenge.
It had similar rules to the first semester’s duels, but was done between two teams.

“Team Rachel will be on offense, Team Yohei will be on defense!”

Team Rachel was in the first battle of the day.
Our opponent was Team Yohei^[1]. Team Yohei’s leader was Miyamoto Yohei, a top-class warrior from Cultivation class. Apparently, Yohei’s ancestor was that famous Miyamoto Musashi.
For the record, this wasn’t a part of my setting.

“Ready!”

There were many spectators watching the battle. Of course, it was practically empty compared to the previous midterm exam, but many cadets still came by to watch. It was to be expected as Rachel’s team and Yohei’s team were participating.

“Get into formation.”

Rachel spoke. We got into a formation we prepared for beforehand. The two warriors,

Rachel and Jin Hoseung, stood in the front, and the supporter, Yi Bokgyu, stood in a protective position between me and Tomer.

I raised my cadet handgun and spoke to Yi Bokgyu.

“You don’t need to protect me. Focus on protecting Jamer.”

“What? Why?”

“I’m gonna go take their magician’s head.”

It was about time for me to display my strength.

And just as always, my strength operated by the principle of Strong Against Weak, Weak Against Strong.

Now that I had Curve Shot, a magician hiding in the backline was nothing but a prey.

“Wait, shouldn’t you...”

While Yi Bokgyu was worrying, the judge shouted loudly.

“DUEL, BEGIN!”

1. Yohei was mentioned once in Chapter 42 as the rank 8 cadet.

Chapter 99

Ghost (1)

The team duel arena was completely different from the first semester's one-on-one duel arena.

Unlike the first semester's Colosseum-like circular arena, the team duel took place in a rectangular arena that was 130 meters in width and 250 meters in length.

As soon as the judge signaled the start of the duel, the arena transformed into a mountainous ground with rocks and shrubbery. They served as obstacles separating the two teams, but they helped me more than they hindered me.

"Jin Hoseung-ssi and I will charge forward. Everyone else can slowly chase after us while supporting us from the back."

Rachel spoke.

However, I jumped up to a nearby tree.

"Um, Hajin-ssi?"

Rachel's confused voice rang out from below. I smiled and gestured.

"Go ahead. I'll support everyone from above."

Claiming high ground was the job of sharpshooters.

As Rachel also knew this, she nodded and entrusted me with the job.

Then, Rachel and Jin Hoseung charged forward. I chased after them, jumping from tree to tree.

"...!"

Suddenly, a sharp arrow cut through the air and shot towards me. I quickly bent my waist like a bow, and as the arrow shot past me with a narrow margin, time seemed to slow down.

"Wow."

At my current light-bodied state, this level of dodging was easy to do. Because of my new Physique, my speed stat was around 6.3 points. I was practically a ninja for now.

I turned to the direction the arrow came from. The opposing team's archer shot a second magic arrow. This time, I struck down his arrow with a bullet. Although the bullet disintegrated the moment it touched the arrow, it still managed to twist the arrow's path. The archer frowned.

It seemed he didn't want to fight me.

"Daeyun! Handle their sharpshooter!"

He shouted at a teammate behind him, then aimed his bow forward, where Rachel and Jin Hoseung were charging in.

I also glanced at the battlefield. Immediately, I felt like I could hear a clear background music of freedom.

"...The heck."

Yohei looked like he came straight out of a manhwa.

Standing in the middle of the battlefield, he was biting on a tiny branch with his eyes closed. He looked comfortable and at ease, even with Rachel and Jin Hoseung charging straight towards him. In fact, he still had his katana in its sheath.

"Ronin, be free and wild like the wind."

By the time Rachel and Jin Hoseung got in range, Yohei blurted out some incomprehensible words and opened his eyes.

When Rachel's rapier and Jin Hoseung's saber were about to cut down Yohei... the katana sleeping inside his sheath flashed with a cold light.

A quick-draw.

A katana soared up in response to a rapier and saber. Yohei parried the two attacks like lightning and counterattacked with a beam of light. His sword was lighter than wind, yet fiercer than a storm.

I watched the clashing of three warriors in a daze.

Currently, Yohei was fighting two cadets on his own, with Rachel being one of them. Still, they were evenly matched. It was thanks to all sorts of buff magic and the extra magic power he was being supplied with by his teammate.

It was then that I understood their team's formation.

Yohei was standing in the frontline, a sharpshooter was positioned in the middle, and a supporter and a warrior were protecting their magician in the back.

It was the so-called four-protect-one.

Their strategy was to throw everything they had onto Yohei.

Their sharpshooter was positioned in the middle to support both the frontline and the backline, while the magician was pouring buffs and magic power to Yohei.

It was an efficient strategy for a defensive team.

As long as the magician didn't die.

And as long as there wasn't a hyena like me lurking around.

I made a detour and looped around to the magician, who was being protected by two people.

It seemed I wasn't talented in moving stealthily as their warrior discovered me.

A muscular warrior with a buzz cut threw his axe at me. The axe flew like a boomerang, cutting down on the greenery around me, then returned to the warrior's hand.

When he spotted me and the gun in my hand, he frowned.

"Why is a sharpshooter here alone...?"

Without answering him, I fired a barrage of bullets.

The warrior stabbed his axe into the ground without being flustered. When he imbued magic power into it, the axe grew big, and the supporter standing next to the magician also raised his shield and blocked the barrage of bullets.

Meanwhile, I looked for the blind spots in their defense.

Although their magician was hidden behind the supporter, I felt like I could reach him if I shot from above.

During combat training classes, cadets wore special protectors that absorbed damage to their vital points. Obviously, it was to protect cadets from being severely injured. By design, cadets were instantly eliminated if their neck protectors were hit.

At that moment, their warrior and supporter exchanged glances that seemed to say, 'you protect the magician, I'll get that sharpshooter.'

The warrior charged at me with his axe.

I didn't particularly mind it. In an obstacle-filled environment perfect for utilizing

Parkour, a slow warrior was unable catch up to me.

I hopped from tree to tree and kept my eyes on their magician's position. Their supporter must have felt my gaze as he performed something quite unique.

"—Conjunction."

In an instant, his kite shield multiplied and surrounded them.

However, there were still gaps in their defense.

By design, shields were incapable of forming a perfect protective cover. Tiny gaps inevitably existed between them.

That was where I aimed.

"Huaaap!"

The warrior swung his axe. His axe turned giant and crushed the tree I was standing on. I jumped off at the same time, then made a big turn in the air.

Psssh— Pieces of the tree scattered into the air, and my body turned upside down 10 meters in the air.

At the same time, I activated Bullet Time.

Time slowed down, and I held up my gun. I could see a tiny gap between two kite shields.

Since the speed and trajectory of my bullets were completely within my control, my job was simple.

I twisted the gun slightly to the right and fired.

Whish—

The bullet I fired curved oddly in midair.

I could clearly see the bullet's movement.

The bullet, which logically should have flown straight, suddenly dropped down. Then, almost as if it was a homing missile with a designated target, it dug through the tiny gap between two shields.

"Aak!"

The magician's scream rang out.

Because the magician trusted the shields, he didn't pay attention to his safety. If he had even a single layer of Barrier around him, he wouldn't have died instantly.

However, the magician tried to conserve his magic power, and as a result...

—Team Yohei, magician Yoo Soohwan eliminated.

His neck protector was struck by my bullet.

“Agh, this sly bastard...!”

The enraged warrior and supporter rushed toward me.

“Come on, sly?”

I climbed up a tree. Then, just as a monkey would throw banana peels from a tree, I fired constantly.

“Get down! Get down here!”

Every time the warrior threw his axe, I repeatedly hopped to another tree and continued provoking him.

Meanwhile, the frontline battle was coming to a close.

With the magician’s magic power support cut off, Rachel and Jin Hoseung began to push back Yohei, and the opposing team’s sharpshooter was busy dodging Tomer’s magic attacks.

With the only two people who could help them chasing after me...

This battle was practically over.



10 minutes later, the victor’s waiting room.

As soon as the duel ended, I asked Yoo Yeonha about information on Yohei.

[He has the wind attribute, the rarest attribute among water, wind, earth, and fire. His Gift lets him use his magic power to display wind-like movements.]

[Just like how wind is constant and intangible, he can send several sword strikes simultaneously and dodge his opponents’ attacks fluidly. The name of his Gift is ‘Covenant of Wind’.]

[In summary, his Gift and physical abilities are both excellent. But because he’s lacking in magic power, he is weak in drawn-out fights.]

[It seemed he formed his team to make-up for this weakness. The magician Yoo Soohwan has a magic called ‘Target Chain’, which transmits spells and magic power to

a connected target from a long range.]

[If he survived until the end, this fight would have been more difficult. Yohei's battle sense is said to be second only to Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak.]

Yoo Yeonha's message was thorough like a report. Cadets often kept their Gifts secret, but she was even knowledgeable about that. It seemed asking her was a good idea.

At that moment, the waiting room door opened, and Rachel walked in. With the same expression she always wore, she spoke.

"Good work, everyone."

Although her face didn't show it, her voice was full of joy. Anyone could see that Rachel was currently ecstatic.

"Especially..."

Rachel looked at me and made a thin smile.

"Hajin-ssi. We were able to win thanks to Hajin-ssi eliminating their magician."

"...I shouldn't be praised. I went off on my own."

"If you failed, we would have called you a troll. But since you succeeded, you're a hero. I was shocked. I thought you were Guan Yu^[1] when you suddenly said you were going to take their magician's head."

Yi Bokgyu said with a smile. Rachel continued looking at me for a while, then nodded warmly.

"Yes, well done."

"By the way, where's Jamer?"

Jin Hoseung then asked as he looked around the room.

"Jamer?"

"Oh right, Jamer's not here. She did well too."

When I tilted my head, Yi Bokgyu added.

“Jamer... Ah.”

I kept getting confused.

Jamer and Tomer.

Tomer was her real name and Jamer was her fake name.

Anyways, why hasn't Tomer responded to the message I sent her about having found Fernin Jesus? Violet Banquet had a trustworthy system. Although I asked her for 300 million won, she shouldn't be worrying about being scammed.

...Did she not have the money?

“Let me go find her.”

I stealthily left the waiting room.

I walked down the hallway and searched for Tomer.

She wasn't in the bathroom and she wasn't in a different waiting room.

Soon, I found her in an alley near a vending machine.

Tomer was hiding and calling someone.

I eavesdropped on her call as I walked towards her.

—Um, if you could loan me some money...

Just like I thought, Tomer didn't have the money to pay for the information.

At Tomer's careful question, the caller responded.

—Is that all you're going to say? How long are you going to drag out what should only take two weeks to do?

He was clearly irritated.

—... Sorry.

—If you can't close it out by the end of the week, prepare to receive punishment. Oh right, didn't you also lose the item team leader sent you?

—Ah, about that... I'm really sorry, but I'm pressed on money, so...

—Are you out of your mind? You sold it because you needed money!?

—No, no, I didn't sell it. I just lost it...

—Yeah, I'm proud of you.

Tomer hung up the call dejectedly after being yelled at for a long time.

“Haa.”

She let out a deep sigh and turned around.

I was standing in front of her.

“...Hiik!”

She immediately froze.

However, nothing from the call would have indicated that she was a Djinn. She seemed to have realized it too as she breathed out a sigh of relief.

I asked her as I put coins into the vending machine.

“What happened? You're short on money?”

“.....”

Tomer walked past me silently.

“Want me to lend you some?”

But what I said carelessly seemed to have drawn her attention as she turned her head and looked at me.

“...You don't know how much I need.”

“Well, you're a magician. I can loan you as much as you want if you're willing to write a promissory note.”

Magicians could rake in money if they wanted.

Clunk, clunk—

A bottle of Sprite rolled down from the vending machine.

“I might not look like it, but I’m quite rich.”



I left the duel arena, carrying my exhausted body along.
Our team’s second duel was at 3 P.M.

“There are only two duels left, so cheer up, Kim Hajin!”

“Hey, Kim Hajin!”

When I was encouraging myself, a familiar voice rang out behind me. I turned around and saw Chae Nayun walking up to me.

“Kim Suho wanted me to tell you he liked your match.”

“Kim Suho did?”

“Yeah, he went straight into his own match. By the way, how did you do that?”

“Do what?”

“Your bullet curved. What trickery is that?”

Chae Nayun asked with a furtive voice. I retorted simply.

“My Gift.”

“...What a boring explanation... Huaam~”

Chae Nayun suddenly yawned and interlocked her fingers together behind her neck.

“Ah~ I want to fight too. My matches don’t start until after noon.”

“...I see.”

I tried to ignore her and go on my way, but I stopped because I saw someone in front of me.

Shin Jonghak and Yoo Yeonha were only about ten steps away.
Shin Jonghak's dry and cold gaze fell on me. It felt like he was looking at me in disdain because of the emotionlessness in his eyes.
It was almost like I was in a haunted house.
He was handsome, but scary.

"....."

Shin Jonghak quietly looked back and forth between me and Chae Nayun. After receiving his gaze for a moment, Chae Nayun frowned and shot back.

"What do you want?"

"...Haha."

Shin Jonghak's laughter flowed out from the crevice between his teeth. Shin Jonghak liked this side of Chae Nayun, although Yoo Yeonha who was standing next to him didn't seem to understand why.

Shin Jonghak sauntered toward us.

Almost as if to switch places with him, I walked past him.

"Are you leaving?"

Yoo Yeonha asked. Her eyes were still fixed on Shin Jonghak.

"Yeah. What about you? Are you going to your match?"

"Yes, it's at 11 A.M."

"...I see."

As I walked past her, I suddenly remembered something.

"Oh right, hey."

"...Yes?"

Only then did Yoo Yeonha turn to face me.
I spoke briefly and simply.

“Bullets. 5.56 mm.”

“...You want me to get you some?”

“Yeah, but a lot of them.”

“It’s possible... but what do you need assault rifle bullets for?”

“I think I’ll need them in the future.”

“Hmm, hold on.”

Yoo Yeonha immediately turned on her smartwatch.

“How many?”

“About... six hundred?”

“Six... what?”

“Six hundred.”

“...You know that high rank 5.56 mm magic bullets are at least 200,000 won per bullet, right?”

“So in total it’ll be 120 million. Is it too much?”

I gave her a look of disappointment. After looking at me in a daze, Yoo Yeonha suddenly put on the smile of a queen.

“...Pft. I can do something like that with my eyes closed, so don’t try to scratch my pride needlessly. So, do you also need a weapon to go with it?”

“No, the bullets are all I need.”

I was about to place my hand on Yoo Yeonha’s shoulder out of habit, but I realized it half-way through and stopped.

Kuhum. I let out a dry cough, then put my hands in my pocket. Yoo Yeonha hated

people touching her.

“I’m leaving now.”

“Yes... Ah, wait.”

This time, Yoo Yeonha grabbed me.

“It’s about that ginseng.”

“What about it?”

“We’ll be able to make medicine with it in two weeks. So I was wondering...”

“Are you asking if I have any more?”

“...Yes. It’s looking like it’ll take a long time for us to look for proper traders.”

I rubbed my chin and pondered.

Ginseng.

To be honest, I felt like I could obtain one by hiking a few times.

“I can’t say for sure that I’ll be able to, but if I do, I’ll trade it for your company’s shares. How about it?”

“That’s fine.”

While we were talking, I could hear Shin Jonghak’s voice from the back.

—Chae Nayun, why are you staying close with someone like him?

—What? What are you spouting so suddenly?

—... You didn’t forget about what happened before, right? You were the one who said he was weird and told me to squash him.

—Eh? Ah, no, um... I misunderstood him at the time...

‘Someone like him’.

It was a bit unpleasant to hear, but that's just how Shin Jonghak was. He had strong pride in his bloodline and status. Even in reality, they were something to be proud of. Although the nobleness of his bloodline couldn't compare to a royalty's, Shin Jonghak's ancestor was a prime minister who served a king, and Shin Jonghak's grandfather, Shin Myungchul, was a true noble who saved starving Koreans after Outcall.

"...Just ignore him. Jonghak doesn't know much about you."

Yoo Yeonha said so as she studied my face.

"I don't really mind."

I walked past them and trudged to the lounge area.



7 P.M.

All my team duels ended, and I returned home exhausted.

"Hajin! Hajin!"

As soon as I opened the door, Evandel scurried up to me with a sullen face.

"Hajin! Hayang scratched me!"

She put her right arm out with teary eyes. I looked at her arm and saw a very light scratch mark.

Haa.

I swallowed my sigh.

One of the rules of childcare: never look bothered by your child.

"...How?"

"I don't know. Hayang is a meanie! Hayang, you meanie!"

Evandel turned to Hayang and shouted.

I also looked at Hayang. She was on the couch yawning and acting self-important.

“She scratched you even though you didn’t do anything?”

“Un! I didn’t do anything wrong...”

Would a cat scratch someone for no reason?

I looked around the room. Cat treats were sprawled around the floor. The treat was called Churu, and it was delicious even for humans.

I told Evandel to give it Hayang only once per day... but I was somewhat doubtful. But even if Evandel was curious and liked eating...

“Evandel, you didn’t do something like touching Hayang’s treat, right?”

“.....”

Evandel flinched.

“...You did?”

“N-No... I just wanted to know how yummy it was because Hayang liked it so much... I only wanted a taste...”

Evandel made excuses, and I watched her slightly dumbstruck.

Then suddenly, my smartwatch rang.

It was a message from Rachel.

[Hajin-ssi! Happy birthday~~ ^—^!]

[This is my gift. Good job on the duels today.]

[Let’s go to a karaoke once exams end ~.~]

“...Birthday?”

I tilted my head.

Then, I remembered that today was September 8th. It was indeed my birthday.

I turned on my smartwatch, wondering how Rachel knew.

I quickly found out as I had a party hat saying ‘Happy Birthday’ on my messenger profile.

1. A famous general from the Three Kingdoms era; known as the God of War.

Chapter 100

Ghost (2)

9 P.M., end of the first exam.

Chae Nayun was looking at social media while lazing around. With one exam over with, cadets became more active on social media.

[Uyeonha]

[It was difficult, but I'm glad that the result was great. Good work everyone. #Cube #Exam #OurTeam]

After ending the day with three wins, Yoo Yeonha seemed to have gone to a café with her team to celebrate as she uploaded a group picture of her team eating together. Chae Nayun was a bit jealous, especially because of her team's gloomy atmosphere.

"...Uuun."

Since the last time they fought, Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha hadn't talked to each other. Chae Nayun wanted to make up with her since she knew she was the one who started it, but it wasn't as easy as it sounded.

Ding.

[♡]

[NYChae and 4593 others liked this post.]

Chae Nayun left a subtle apology by clicking 'like', then scrolled down. Below Yoo Yeonha's post was Shin Jonghak's.

[jonghak2]

[3 wins 0 losses #Cube #ShinJonghak #Jonghak #Exam #Hero #OverwhelmingVictory]

Shin Jonghak also left a group photo, but it carried a different atmosphere than Yoo Yeonha's. Shin Jonghak looked like a ruler surrounded by his lackeys.

"I wonder when this guy will be cured of his eighth-grade syndrome."

Chae Nayun snickered and continued scrolling through social media.

“...Huh?”

At that moment, she found a rather interesting photo.
It was from Kim Suho , who had over 20,000 followers.

[With Master Sharpshooter Hajin, Cube’s sole gunner]

“Is this guy... kind or evil?”

The photo seemed to have been taken after the archery competition, but the difference between their faces was too severe.

[leonidas357: it’s nice to see you smiling.]

[Yunseung_A: I also monitored this year’s Class Competitions ^^ Hajin-ssi and Suho-ssi were both amazing.]

“Haha, what is this unni doing here?”

Yun Seung-Ah’s comment clearly showed her ulterior motive.
After making fun of her a little bit, Chae Nayun left the social media app and entered her messenger.

“Huh?”

While she was scrolling down thoughtlessly, she discovered something. Kim Hajin had a party hat emoticon on his profile.

“...So today is his birthday.”

Chae Nayun murmured thoughtlessly. At first, she was going to continue scrolling down, but she entered a gifticon shop^[1]
She wondered if there was anything she could gift him, but nothing really caught her attention.

“I guess a cake will do... or no, maybe I should give something to him in real life rather than online... no, why would I? I’m not crazy... just a text message is enough.”

Chae Nayun quickly fixed up a message to send him.

[Kim Hajin ㅋㅋ it's your birthday today? ㅋㅋ]

But even after waiting 5 minutes, Kim Hajin didn't reply. Without a choice, Chae Nayun added another line.

[Happy birthday ㅋㅋㅋ Why aren't you responding ㅋㅋ?]

This time, he responded almost immediately.

[Thanks]

"...Why's he so cold?"

Chae Nayun pouted and put down her smartwatch.



Thursday.

Midterm exams came to an end.

I took a total of four exams. Two of them were done in teams and the other two were done individually.

Although I didn't do so well in the individual exams, because I did so well in team exams, I obtained enough points to enter the top 200.

Next year, I should be able to get a bigger dorm room.

The current problem wasn't something trivial like my grades.

"...Will this be enough?"

I purchased a pinnacle-grade magic bag. It looked like a normal duffel bag, but it was magically enchanted to carry items up to 200 kilograms in weight. It cost 40 million won, and I stuffed it full with all sorts of items.

An ice box, tent, cooking wares, ramen, porkchops, etc...

Woong—

My smartwatch rang.

[Cube will be on break next week.]

[Cadets will receive a 70% discount on foreign travels when using cadet cards.]

It was a notification of classes being canceled next week.

This was likely because of an external investigation. Although investigators wouldn't be able to find anything special, Djinnns would have to lay low during this time.

[There will be a field trip sponsored by Jinsung Foundation next Thursday. First years will be allowed to join on a first-come-first-serve basis.]

This was an important event.

During this field trip, the main cast would encounter a ghost. The most wicked of all ghosts, the 'ghost of the past'.

This ghost would transport the cast to the year 1970, soon after the onset of Outcall. Of course, to be precise, it wasn't the real past.

This was a necessary event for the cast to go through. Not only Kim Suho, but Shin Jonghak and Yoo Yeonha would also...

"Aaaaang!"

At that moment, Evandel's shouting interrupted my thought.

When I turned to her startled, Evandel was staring at Hayang with a shocked face. I followed her line of sight.

In Hayang's mouth was the boneless chicken Evandel was eating before.

"Hayang... Hayang you... put that down now!"

When Evandel tried to run, Hayang quickly bit down on the chicken. Evandel stopped immediately at the sight of it.

"Ah! O-Okay! Okay, Hayang. Let's calm down. Calm down..."

Huu, huu.

Almost like she was trying to appease a hostage situation, she held her hands up and tried to calm Hayang.

“Right, calm down... that’s not something a cat can eat...”

However...

Chomp.

Hayang chewed the chicken, ignoring Evandel’s persuasion. Immediately, Evandel’s expression crumbled down.

I glanced at Evandel’s plate. It was completely empty. It seemed Hayang ate the last piece of chicken.

“Iiiiiing! H-Hayang, you...!”

Evandel chased Hayang. However, Hayang was quick and Evandel was slow. Unable to catch up to her, Evandel ran into my arms and began to sob.

“Hajin! Hajin! Hayang ate my chicken...”

“Don’t worry, she won’t die.”

Hayang wasn’t a normal cat.

She had a noble bloodline with a grade-4 rating on mana affinity. Animals with higher mana affinity had higher recovery rates, longer lives, and higher intelligence.

Such animals were called ‘mystical animals’.

“No, not that! She stole my food!”

“...Oh, that’s the problem?”



After calming down Evandel, I left my dorm and walked to Cube’s park.

I had a few appointments to tend to this evening.

“...Over here~”

Yoo Yeonha waved her hand from a remote area of the park. Even though it was dusk, she was wearing sunglasses.

My first appointment was with Yoo Yeonha. I could see a suitcase next to her.

When I approached her, Yoo Yeonha spoke as she handed me the suitcase.

“Here are the bullets you asked for. Because each magazine carries 45 bullets, there are 900 bullets in here.”

“Great, thanks!”

“Ah, wait, there’s something else.”

Yoo Yeonha then handed me some sort of a protector.

“...What’s this?”

When I tilted my head, Yoo Yeonha grinned.

“A wrist protector. Monday was your birthday, right? It’s quite expensive, so use it well. I planned to give it to you on Monday, but as you know, everyone was busy because of the exams.”

“...Ah, um, thank you.”

I took the wrist protector and put it on.

“Oh, it’s great.”

It stuck tightly to my skin, and I could feel that it was protecting it. Yoo Yeonha looked at me in satisfaction, then turned back.

“Then I’ll be leaving now.”

“...Yeah, thanks again.”

I waved my hand at her as she left.

Next up was karaoke.

Cube had an entertainment district for cadets’ mental health. It had a karaoke, LAN café, bowling alley, pool hall, and other arcade facilities. Most cadets gathered here after exams.

When I arrived, my teammates were waiting for me.

“Yo~ Kim Hajin~”

Jin Hoseung waved his hand.

Everyone was wearing casual clothes, and I was the only one wearing a cadet uniform. Rachel's outfit was especially eye-catching. Her pink sweater and blue jeans suited her beautifully.

"The main character always shows up late, eh?"

"Ah, sorry, I had an appointment before this."

Because we were going to karaoke, my shoulders went up in pride. I still had my singing Gift with me.

"Now that Hajin-ssi is here... let, let's go."

Rachel pointed at the karaoke bar hesitantly.

"Yeah, let's go in."

Jin Hoseung took the lead.

The karaoke bar was loud, and many cadets were already inside singing in different rooms.

"....."

Rachel peeked through the windows and observed them. She looked a bit mystified by the whole scene.

Jin Hoseung went to the counter and showed his cadet card.

"For six people."

"Thank you. You can go into room 17."

Rachel, who overheard this, began to march forward as she murmured, 'room 17, room 17...'

Room 17 wasn't far away.

Rachel went in first. When I was about to enter, the door to room 16 opened.

"Eh?"

The person who came out of room 16 looked at me and widened her eyes. I reacted the same way.

“Kim Hajin? You’re also here?”

“Yeah... you too?”

“I’m here with my friends. What about...”

Chae Nayun peeked through the half-opened door of room 17 and saw Rachel. She then nodded with a somewhat disapproving look.

“Well, have fun...”

“Ah, wait, Chae Nayun. You’re going to Jinsung Foundation’s field trip, right?”

“Huh? Um, yeah, I am. Why? Are you also going?”

“I have nothing better to do, so I applied.”

At that moment, while I was talking with Chae Nayun, someone pulled on my sleeve. It wasn’t Rachel, but Tomer.

“...What?”

“.....”

Tomer was speaking with her eyes.

“Ah, okay. Hey, Chae Nayun, I’m going in now.”

“Yeah, bye.”

Chae Nayun shooed me away.

Next, I had a short talk with Tomer. When we went into room 17 afterwards, Jin Hoseung was looking to reserve a song with a remote, while Rachel for some reason had two tambourines in her hands.

“Alright, I’ll be the first one to sing as we discussed in our group chat. Rachel-ssi is

next, right?"

Rachel's shoulders shook.

Trrr. The tambourines in her hands also shook.

Jin Hoseung's song began.

"Horse~ Let's run~"

His shoulders jumped up and down as he sang an exciting rock song.

However, he stopped after the first verse.

As Rachel was up next, Jin Hoseung made a mischievous smile as he handed her the remote.

Rachel pondered for a while with a nervous face, then picked a song.

The accompaniment rang out, and we held our breaths as we waited for her to sing.

"Th, this- bru-shing wi-nd"

"....."

Her voice was pretty.

But that was it.

She ignored the beat and tune, and sang as though she was reading a book...

Pft.

I heard someone's mocking laugh.

Outside the door, Chae Nayun was laughing with her hands on her belly.

"Huu... I'll also stop after the first verse."

Her singing finally ended. Thankfully, she only sang the first verse.

Rachel wiped off the sweat on her forehead and handed me the remote with a look of satisfaction.

Did she think she sang well?

"Here."

"Ah... yes."

I took the remote.

When I put the remote down after entering my song, Rachel stealthily took the remote

again. She seemed to have gained confidence with her previous singing and was planning on reserving another one...

That day, Rachel sang a total of six songs and caused quite a bit of pain for me and our other teammates.



Next Thursday.

It was finally D-day.

A field trip organized by the Jinsung Foundation, the turning point of the main story. The participants of the field trip were unchanged other than me being included.

“...What good weather.”

A clear autumn sunlight glared down. I barely managed to arrive at Seoul Portal Station on time.

“Ah, Kim Hajin’s here.”

The five people who were already here pointed at me.
I ran up to them.

“You’re two minutes late.”

Shin Jonghak spoke as he pointed at his watch. I also checked the time. He was right. Currently, it was 6:02 A.M.
I cusped my hands and apologized sincerely.

“Sorry.”

“.....”

Shin Jonghak waved his hand silently. I could see that a limousine was already here waiting for us.

The six of us went inside one by one.

The interior of the limousine Shin Jonghak prepared was spacious and luxurious. It had a high ceiling like the limousines I saw in movies, and had a long seat that stretched from one end to the other.

I sat down on a random seat.

“Hajin, do you want some?”

Kim Suho sat down next to me and offered me a jelly.

“No, I’m fine...”

“Then give it to me.”

Chae Nayun snatched the jelly away. As she nibbled on the bear-shaped jelly, she asked Shin Jonghak.

“Hey, what are we doing there?”

“Lots of things. Wind Mountain is Jinsung group’s property. We’ll meditate on the mountain peak and also spar a bit.”

Our destination today was Wind Mountain, a mountain on the outskirts of Seoul that was 800 meters above sea level.

Wind Mountain was a named mountain that was famous even in Korea. It was created after the magic power explosion 50 years ago and had a high concentration of mana.

“Ooh, that sounds fun.”

I didn’t know how fun it would be, but I knew it would be quite a spectacle.

I slowly looked around the limousine.

Kim Suho, Chae Nayun, Yoo Yeonha, Shin Jonghak, Yi Yeonghan.

They were all looking out the window like they were going on a picnic.

In the original story, they suffered greatly from lack of drinking water and food. They better thank me later.

“Kuhum.”

I let out a dry cough as I crossed my legs. The duffel bag behind me couldn’t feel more reliable.

“...What are you doing?”

Yoo Yeonha met my eyes and asked with a quizzical look. I grinned at her and even crossed my arms. Immediately, Yoo Yeonha put on a huge frown.



[Seoul Outskirts, Wind Mountain Entrance]

A black limousine stopped at the foot of a mountain. The limousine carried a completely different atmosphere than the mountain. Soon, the limousine's driver seat door opened, and the driver got off first.

When he opened the back seat door, five good-looking men and women got off, along with one average-looking man.

“Huaa~”

Chae Nayun, who was the first one to get off, breathed in the mountain air as she stretched her arms out.

“Doesn't it feel like we're going on a picnic?”

Then she hit the shoulder of Kim Hajin, who was quietly yawning next to her.

“...Yeah.”

Kim Hajin's reaction was dry. Rather than dry, he seemed somewhat arrogant as he scanned the mountain with proud eyes.

“...Pft, what, did you catch Shin Jonghak's illness?”

“Huh? No, no way.”

When Chae Nayun remarked on it, he quickly returned to his usual self.

At that moment, Shin Jonghak's secretary finished talking to Shin Jonghak and stood in front of the cadets.

“There is a cabin prepared in the mountain. The master Jinsung Foundation invited will be coming later tonight.”

“Ooh~ A master? Who?”

At Chae Nayun question, Shin Jonghak replied with a grin.

“You’ll be surprised when you meet him. For now, let’s climb the mountain. We have to get to the peak at 3.

The hike began without much of a thought.

The six cadets climbed the mountain in the following order:

Yi Yeonghan, Yoo Yeonha — Shin Jonghak, Chae Nayun, Kim Suho — Kim Hajin

Rustle, rustle. They climbed the mountain as they stepped on leaves blanketing the ground. Although the mountain was a bit steep, it posed no problems for the cadets, and their laughter and talking continued throughout the hike.

“Ah, the air is great. So this is why it’s nice to be in a high-mana-concentration area. It feels like magic power is being pumped into my lungs.”

“Kuhum, well you know, Chae Nayun, if you’re with me, you can enjoy better places than this whenever you want...”

“Oh! A dragonfly!”

About 90 minutes went by.

They should be reaching the summit at any time, but the hike seemed nowhere close to ending.

“...The mountain’s pretty tall, huh. Or did we take a wrong turn somewhere?”

“I don’t know. Let’s just keep walking.”

They felt that something was off, but they continued walking.

The joyous atmosphere of the hike disappeared, and they continued to climb the mountain for 30 minutes.

A strange sensation coiled around them.

“...Hey, doesn’t it feel eerie?”

Chae Nayun muttered, unable to endure the atmosphere any longer. Yoo Yeonha who was walking ahead slowed down and joined up with the rest of the group. Her arms were already wrought with goosebumps.

Yoo Yeonha asked with a quivering voice.

“Jo... Jonghak, does it normally take this long?”

“I don’t know... but I don’t think we took the wrong path.”

Shin Jonghak looked around.

Chwaaa— A cold wind blew and brushed against the leaves. Yoo Yeonha trembled at the sharp sound.

Strange.

Something was strange.

Kim Suho then explained the strangeness they were feeling in a low voice.

“...We’ve been walking on flat ground for the past 30 minutes.”

Immediately, everyone came to a stop and held their breaths. The uncomfortable feeling they were having materialized into uneasiness that caressed their bodies.

They realized that Kim Suho was right.

Although they were climbing a mountain, they were walking on flat ground.

Furthermore, no one noticed until Kim Suho mentioned it.

“...Don’t worry, Wind Mountain is a mana-rich mountain, so a natural spell might have—”

“Wait.”

Kim Suho interrupted Shin Jonghak.

He quickly looked around and said with a scary face.

“Hajin, where’s Hajin?”

“...Huh?”

The rest of the group also turned back and forth, looking around.

However, Kim Hajin was nowhere to be found.

“What... he... he really disappeared.”

Yoo Yeonha muttered quietly with a pale face.

“Hey! Stop messing with us and come out!”

Chae Nayun shouted, but her voice didn't echo even though they were in a mountain. A heavy silence descended.

“.....”

One of the six disappeared.

The remaining five stood blankly and stopped moving.

1. A way to send a real present to your friend using instant messenger and mobile data service. Popular in Korea.

Chapter 101

Ghost (3)

The five cadets remained still for a long time, only looking around themselves intermittently. Their bodies and consciousness seemingly frozen.

The mountain suddenly became flat.

And Kim Hajin disappeared.

To make things worse, another strange thing occurred. Almost as though time was being wound backwards, the scenery around them began to change rapidly.

The sun that was hanging in the middle of the sky disappeared as though it was falling down. Then, darkness was cast over them like a shadow. Such incomprehensible supernatural phenomenon evoked fear and panic, and the five cadets could only crowd together nervously.

“...Hiik.”

Yoo Yeonha was especially in a poor state. Her eyes were wet with tears. As she was someone who couldn't even look at a poster of a horror movie, she was unable to endure such a frightening phenomenon.

“Let's... stay calm.”

Kim Suho snapped out first, and Shin Jonghak then stepped up as though he was afraid of losing.

“Calm down. Since that Kim Hajon is a bit dull, he might have just gotten lost. Or maybe, he found something and sneaked away to claim it for himself. After all, we're on Wind Mountain.”

“It's Kim Hajin, not Kim Hajon.”

Wind Mountain was private property of the Jinsung group. Without their permission, no one was allowed to enter it, meaning it was likely that precious herbs were growing on it. Shin Jonghak theorized that Kim Hajin came across one by luck and sneaked away to take it.

“What? Then how do you explain this? Not only did the mountain suddenly become flat, the sun disappeared from the sky!”

Chae Nayun raised her hands and pointed around her. They were surrounded by dense darkness and thick, overgrown weeds that seemed to be at least 80 centimeters tall.

“That’s...”

When Shin Jonghak was at a loss for words...

Psss—

The sound of an animal moving through grass rang out.

Yoo Yeonha shrunk back like a frightened rabbit, while Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak pointed their weapons in that direction.

Ssss— Ssss—

Something was approaching them rustling through the leaves.

Gulp.

For three minutes, they waited nervously.

What finally appeared from the thick grass was...

“I thought it was a mountain beast. Who would have thought it was a bunch of kids?”

A man who seemed to be in his mid-forties.

He was wearing dark blue pants and a baggy dress shirt. To put it to words, he looked like a typical salaryman from the 70’s and 80’s.

“What are you kids doing here?”

He spoke with somewhat of an old accent. The cadets examined him silently. The man also scrutinized them back, especially the female cadets.

“...Eh? Why aren’t you talking?”

When the middle-aged man urged them, Shin Jonghak stepped up.

“Oy, you. Where is—”

Kim Suho quickly stopped Shin Jonghak’s ill-mannered talking.

“Um, sir, where are we?”

“...Huh?”

The man stared at Kim Suho with an incredulous look, then suddenly smirked.

“What do you mean? We’re in Gwangmyeong. This is a danger zone. We don’t know when magic power will explode again.”

“...Magic power explosion?”

Kim Suho murmured quietly.

Magic power explosion was a word he was familiar with.

[A phenomenon where unstable mana explodes. For three years after Outcall, the world’s unstable mana frequently exploded.]

That was what he recalled reading from the textbook.

“That’s right. You’ll die if you stay here, so follow me.”

“.....”

The man was talking about a phenomenon that was extinct in the modern world like it was still happening.

Kim Suho fell into thought.

Magic power explosion.

A mountain that turned into flat ground.

The man’s old-fashioned clothes...

“Let’s follow him for now.”

To understand the current situation, it was necessary to follow this man. All five cadets seemed to be thinking this as they nodded somewhat reluctantly.

Shin Jonghak then said to the man.

“Lead the way.”

“...Eh?”

Kim Suho quickly pushed Shin Jonghak to the side and corrected him.

“Ahaha, this is our first time here, so we’ll have to ask you to guide us.”

“What, Kim Suho, you’re gonna provoke me even in this situation?”

“Shut up...”

“Just stay quiet and follow along.”

Just like that, they followed the middle-aged man.

Walking through tall grass and passing by occasional strange howls, they eventually reached what seemed like a city.

“This is...”

At that moment, the cadets halted.

They stared in front of them blankly.

Collapsed buildings and barricades made up of scrap cars and iron bars... smoke and flames were rising from the city.

“Yo, Myungjong, have you been doing a good job?”

“Of course, Ajusshi. But um... who are they?”

“Haha.”

The middle-aged man greeted a young man guarding the entrance. The young man glanced at the cadets and made a blooming smile.

The middle-aged man turned back to the cadets and spoke.

“What’s up? Come in.”

“...Um, first, where is this?”

Hearing Kim Suho’s serious tone, the middle-aged man grinned.

“It’s the safest place around, Gwangmyeong City Hall.”

Gwangmyeong City Hall.

They had driven by it earlier in the day in a limousine. However, the Gwangmyeong City Hall they saw wasn’t a dilapidated place like this.

It was then that Kim Suho began to understand the situation.

The man’s clothes.

Magic power explosion.

“Can you tell me today’s date?”

“Date?”

Kim Suho asked in a stiff voice. The man rubbed his chin at the sudden question, then shook his head side to side.

“Don’t know. Who has the time to count nowadays? I guess it’s about 72 now.”

Hearing this, the cadets fell in a daze once again.

Ding— Their heads seemed to be ringing.

“72 as in... 1972?”

“Well it sure isn’t 1872.”

This time, the young man guarding the entrance walked up.

Then, several men appeared from on top of the barricades. Their eyes flickered coldly as they looked down at the cadets.

“Come in. It’s dangerous to stay outside at this time.”

The young man grabbed Chae Nayun’s wrist as he said so.

“Hey, let her go.”

Kim Suho quickly pushed him away and pulled out the branch he brought just in case.

“...A branch?”

“Hey kiddo, put that down. We’re not bad people.”

“.....”

Kim Suho tried to unleash his magic power to intimidate them.

Right, he *tried*.

Unfortunately, he couldn’t bring out his magic power.

“Hey, Kim Suho, I can’t use my magic power!”

Chae Nayun seemed to be experiencing the same thing as her flustered voice rang out. Meanwhile, the men standing on top of the barricades jumped down and surrounded them.

Even at a glance, there were at least twenty of them.

To make things worse, they imbued magic power into the iron bars they brought.

“These pieces of trash dare to...”

When the enraged Shin Jonghak was about to curse at them... a neon light flashed from the distance.

Everyone’s attention fell on the light. There... they saw a man wearing a helmet and riding on a high-tech bike.

“A-Ah! That son of a bitch is back! Run back inside guys!”

The middle-aged man quickly urged his friends.

“Hurry! He’s a man-eating monster! Stop dilly-dallying! Alert Asura-nim... aak!”

Then suddenly, a white flashed erupted and something penetrated the man’s shoulder in the blink of an eye.

The attack didn’t end there.

Several streaks of light shot forward, lighting up the darkness.

Yoo Yeonha could easily identify the streaks of light flying past them.

“Bullets...?”

“Uuk—”

The continued barrage of bullets dissolved the encirclement, and Kim Suho and others quickly ran back.

Once they reached a certain distance away from the city, they stopped and turned to the man sitting on a bike.

In this moment where it was hard to distinguish friend or foe... the mysterious man raised his hands and slowly took off his helmet.

Soon, his face was revealed.

“Huh?”

The man’s long hair was tied up neatly and he had a scruffy beard that covered his chin.

Although his facial hair made him look like someone from a Western movie, they were all able to identify his face.

Kim Suho murmured in a daze.

“...Kim Hajin?”



I was severely mistaken. I thought I would be sent back to the past with them just because we were walking in the same place at the same time. I was being too naive.

About forty days ago, or what should have been a few minutes ago to Kim Suho and the others, I was dragged into the past while I was climbing Wind Mountain with my guard down. Since the other five were transported to the same time period in the original story, it was a much more natural story progression when I thought about it.

At first, I panicked. However, I soon realized that the situation wasn’t as bad as I thought. Just like I expected, the Djinn trying to rule over this place was stronger than in the original story. Being sent back before the others gave me more time to make preparations.

I got busy from the first day.

First, I looked for a place to stay.

Gwangmyeong City Hall was ruled by a Djinn, so I had to pick a place that was far away from them but still gave me the ability to observe them.

Next, I observed the movements of the Djinn ruling this place and attacked his

subordinates to hinder their growth.

Just like that, I ate alone, attacked alone, ran away alone for 40 days...

Today, I finally reunited with the rest.

“Then this is really...”

On our way to my base, Kim Suho who was quietly listening to my story stopped and faced me.

“That’s right, we’re in Gwangmyeong of 1972. Outcall happened only 15 months ago, so this place is still hell.”

The party went stiff like a rock. Even Shin Jonghak had a grave look on his face.

“Then how long have you been here?”

Yoo Yeonha asked.

“I don’t know...”

Although my hair and beard grew a lot for having stayed for only 40 days, that was only because of this place’s high mana concentration. Plus, Energy Conversion seemed to also make my facial hair grow faster.

“Maybe one year?”

I said that as a joke. However, a heavy silence filled the air. The movement of the moonlight touched me. In an otherwise pitch-black darkness, I was lit up by the sole source of light.

The others stared at me with faces I couldn’t understand.

I was satisfied with this. I laughed and corrected myself.

“I’m just kidding. I’ve only been here for about five weeks.”

“.....”

However, they were still silent.

“R-Really. Plus, it wasn’t a bad experience.”

In fact, it was a 'necessary' experience. For two months, I fought people, not monsters. The atmosphere became awkward, but Shin Jonghak asked without caring much for it.

"So did you find out what caused this phenomenon?"

"Yeah, more or less."

"Really?"

Yoo Yeonha's eyes widened.

"I'll explain it later. For now, let's get to the base."



I arrived at my base with the others. The base I chose was an abandoned building buried in a nearby forest. As there was only one entrance into it, it served as a good temporary shelter.

"Not even my horse would be willing to live here."

"...Hajin, you spent a year here? With nothing around?"

Shin Jonghak shook his head in disapproval and Kim Suho asked with a look of pity.

"It hasn't been a year. Really, believe me!"

I emphasized once again. If I knew they would pity me like this, I never would have made that joke.

"But there really is... nothing."

"Yeah, I'm surprised you lived here for so long. You have my respect."

Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun grimaced. I couldn't blame them. This was probably their first time seeing such a dilapidated home, where only rocks and cockroaches were lying around.

But that was only for now.

“Just wait. There’s going to be a lot more to see.”

I took out the duffel bag I kept on my motorbike. I rummaged through the bag and took out two one-touch magic tents. By putting in a little bit of Stigma’s magic power in them... tada!

They’d instantly puff up and rise.

“Whoa! What’s this?”

Now, there were two proper homes.

Chae Nayun’s eyes shone as she approached the tents.

“Oh, before I explain what’s going on, aren’t you guys hungry?”

Everyone other than Shin Jonghak looked at me with sparkling eyes.

I took out a grill, an icebox, and several cooking equipment from my duffel bag.

“Oh, but we’ll need to butcher it.”

I already ate most of the food I brought, other than some spam and ten bags of ramen I left as an emergency supply.

As a result, we had to hunt wild animals and butcher them to get their meat.

“Butcher?”

“Yeah.”

I opened the icebox. There was a torso of a pig wrapped in two halves.

I caught this one two days ago. I cut off its head and limbs and only left behind its body split into two.

For the record, I vomited twice during this entire process.

“We have to butcher this...”

I looked at Kim Suho. He grinned and raised his hand.

“I’ll do it. I’m good at stuff like this.”

“Yi Yeonghan, you help Kim Suho too.”

“Okay~”

“Butchering... it suits you. Kim Suho the Butcher, that can be your title.”

Shin Jonghak taunted Kim Suho from the side. I handed him four empty water buckets.

“And you, go get water. There’s a stream to the right of this place.”

“...What?”

Shin Jonghak made a terrifying frown. I have never seen such an angry expression. He seemed to be saying something like, ‘how dare you order me around!’

However, I already knew the magical words to control him.

“Hey, Chae Nayun, go with him.”

“Hm? Me~?”

Chae Nayun, who was looking around inside the tent, scurried out.

“...Hm.”

Shin Jonghak took the canteens silently. Then, he coughed a few times and gave two of the buckets to Chae Nayun.

“Let’s go.”

“Are we going to go get water?”

“Yeah.”

“Great, I was getting thirsty.”

Chae Nayun and Shin Jonghak walked together to the stream.

“Hmph, why is it Chae Nayun?”

Yoo Yeonha grumbled as she watched them leave. When I glanced at her, she turned away sulking.

I murmured to myself.

“Let’s make some ramen when they come back with water.”

“...Ramen?”

Yoo Yeonha’s grumpy face instantly disappeared. I took out a few bags of ramen from the duffel bag and spoke.

“Yeah. Why, you don’t like them? You’re not going to pretend to be a chaebol in this situation, right?”

Yoo Yeonha smacked her lips and shook her head.

“No, *ssp*. I guess there’s, *ssp*, no choice. It’s better, *ssp*, than starving to death, *ssp*.”

...She must have been hungry as she loudly swallowed her saliva.

Chapter 102

Ghost (4)

While Chae Nayun and Shin Jonghak left to get water and Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan were busy cutting up the pig, Yoo Yeonha asked if I had a broom.

I gave her the one that came with my camping set, and she began to sweep the nearby floor.

Thanks to her, the shelter that was once full of spiderwebs, dirt, and rocks became a decent camping ground.

“Not bad.”

Yoo Yeonha looked around the place and made a satisfied smile.

Meanwhile, I took out a burner and grill, then sat down on a camping chair.

“Huaam~ oh right, um, there’s something I’ve been wanting to ask. Why can’t I use magic power? It took 30 minutes to clean this place when it should have only taken 3.”

Yoo Yeonha asked as she stretched.

“You can’t use magic power that you brought from the present. Usable magic power starts accumulating inside you after two days, but you’ll have to wait at least a week to get used to it.”

It was the same in the original story.

The post-Outcall mana of the past was vastly different from the more stable mana of the present. While the former was more rich and dense, it was more stubborn and difficult to wield.

Everyone would have to suffer for at least a week until they get used to it.

However, this would become a valuable experience for the future.

“Ah~ so that’s why.”

This voice wasn’t Yoo Yeonha’s, but Kim Suho’s.

Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan came back and sat down next to me.

“Are you done?”

“Yep, we have it split into different parts.”

“Yo, we’re back.”

Chae Nayun and Shin Jonghak appeared at the entrance. They put the filled buckets down on the ground.

Yoo Yeonha glanced at the scene and let out a dry cough.

“Kuhum, then should we eat now~?”

Yoo Yeonha sounded happy thanks to being able to eat ramen.

Now it was my turn.

I lit the grill, poured water on the pot, then placed it on the burner.

Today’s menu was pork belly and ramen.

First, I put the pork belly on the heated grill.

Tssss—

The meat made a pleasant sizzling sound.

When the water began to boil, I put several bags of ramen inside.

“Hehe...”

Yoo Yeonha looked back and forth between the pork belly and ramen with the happiest face in the world.

Four minutes later, we sat around the food and shared a friendly talk.

Pork belly and ramen.

Although Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan were used to eating them, this wasn’t the case for the other three who grew up in luxury.

Shin Jonghak and Chae Nayun only stared at the food even though they were hungry.

Yoo Yeonha was clearly holding back because of them.

“Your mana will be replenished quicker if you eat. Animals around here have high mana content.”

When I said that, Shin Jonghak finally picked up his chopstick. Seeing Shin Jonghak begin to eat, Yoo Yeonha sighed and filled her bowl with ramen.

She carefully slurped up a few strands of noodles.

I also filled my bowl with ramen and ate it with the pork belly.

“...Hm?”

Yoo Yeonha, who was watching me, also picked up a pork belly and put it in her bowl. Then, she ate it with ramen like I did.

Nom, nom.

Her small mouth moved busily, and then her head drooped down. Her clenched fists trembled.

Was it that delicious? She sure made it seem so.

“Ah, I’m going to feel queasy if I eat this...”

With Shin Jonghak and Yoo Yeonha eating, Chae Nayun also slowly challenged a pork belly.

A greasy piece of meat entered her mouth.

“...Eh? Why is it so tasty?”

But after chewing on it a few times, she murmured with a surprised face.

I explained with a small smile.

“It’s a pig that grew up by eating mana.”

“What?”

“This pig lived in an area where the concentration of mana is higher than Baekdu Mountain.”

Animals that grew up in high-mana-concentration area were much more delicious than ordinary livestock. But because such areas were mostly private properties, such animals were precious and expensive. In other words, this place’s pig was ‘high-class’, even for Chae Nayun’s taste.

“Wow, really? That’s amazing!”

Chae Nayun began to move her chopsticks energetically.

Feeling threatened by her speed, Yoo Yeonha also quickened her pace.

We ate for the next thirty minutes without talking.

Around the time the meal was over, Chae Nayun pointed at me with her chopsticks.

“By the way, that surprisingly looks good on you.”

“Hm? What does?”

“That hair and beard. You look like someone from a historical drama. You know, like one of those warriors who act cool.”

Kim Suho, who was listening in from next to me, also chimed in.

“She’s right. Hajin, your beard grows like a Westerner.”

“...Like a Western model?”

“No, not a model.”

A Western model... I shrugged proudly without speaking. It may not look like it, but I actually spent some time styling my facial hair.

But at that moment, Yoo Yeonha muttered in a small voice.

“...Yeah, I guess you look better the more your face is covered.”

“What? Care to repeat that?”

“W-Where’s the water~?”

She seemed to have said it subconsciously as she averted my gaze.

“By the way, are you taking baths? You look really dirty.”

“I do. At least once every two days at a stream nearby.”

“What!? Hey, is the water we just drank...”

“It’s a different stream. Plus, we boiled it.”

“But still...”

Chae Nayun still sounded a bit displeased.

“Beard...”

Meanwhile, Shin Jonghak was rubbing his chin next to Chae Nayun. After a week or so, I felt like I could see Shin Jonghak with a beard.

Anyways, this was enough playing around.

I clapped my hands.

“Gather up. I’ll explain the current situation.”



This time travel was caused by a ghost. But no matter how strong the soul of a ghost was, it would normally never be able to send humans back to the past. This was because time travel was a mystical phenomenon that had never been observed before. It was nothing short of a ‘miracle’.

However, this ghost was able to produce a part of this miracle.

“It used a Tower Remnant.”

I took out a purple crystal from my pocket.

Then, I asked Shin Jonghak.

“Tower of Time was inside Wind Mountain, right?”

“...Yeah. My grandfather conquered it more than 20 years ago.”

Miracle. Only a Tower’s reward could come close to performing such a feat.

When a Tower was conquered, it would condense into an unimaginably grand lump of magic power and be left behind in the world. These so-called ‘Tower Crystals’ had different functions depending on the Towers they came from. The buoyancy stone used to keep Clancy Islet afloat was also a Tower Crystal, as was the ocean stone and the information stone.^[1]

“When the Tower of Time condensed into a Tower Crystal, some of its magic power was left out. Over a long time, they came together and formed this remnant.”

I showed them a fingernail-sized purple crystal. This small thing was a Tower

Remnant.

“So the ghost borrowed this crystal’s power and pulled us into a recorded world.”

A recorded world.

According to my settings, it was conceptually similar to a parallel world, but a little bit different.

Yoo Yeonha seemed to vaguely understand what I was saying, but Kim Suho seemed confused as he tilted his head and asked.

“A recorded world?”

“Yeah. It’s a form of magical space that reproduces the past. It’s not that different from the real world since it operates with the same laws of physics. But, it can’t affect the real world in any way.”

“Oh...”

I continued my explanation.

The next topic was on the enemy we had to defeat.

“And in this place, there is a Djinn who goes by the name Asura. Just like us, he was pulled into this world by the ghost. By the way, he’s not the real Asura, so don’t worry too much.”

Asura.

I was flabbergasted when I first found out. I even gave him a pretty name like Cheonhwa^[2] I didn’t know why he changed it to Asura. What if the real Asura found out!?

“He’s using ‘mana crystals’ to grow stronger.”

Mana crystals were naturally created when mana condensed into a solid state.

“Um, I have a question.”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha raised her hand.

“How can he grow stronger using mana crystals? It wasn’t until the 2000’s that

scientists found out how to use them.”

“By eating them.”

“...Eh?”

Most people would instantly die upon consuming mana crystals. Even if they managed to survive, they would suffer huge internal injuries as the magic power in their bodies fought the crystal’s condensed mana.

However, this Djinn was different.

“It looks like he gained a special power by uniting with the ghost. He can swallow and digest mana crystals without any repercussions.”

“Then...”

The kids’ expressions turned serious.

Asura was a bit stronger than in the original story.

However, it wasn’t to a worrying degree.

I couldn’t say the same about other antagonists, but I was the perfect counter for this self-proclaimed Asura.

“So this Asura is our only enemy?”

Shin Jonghak asked, and I shook my head.

“No, there’s more. But before I talk about that, I need to explain how we can get back to the present.”

I placed the purple crystal on my palm.

“Like I said before, this Tower Remnant is what’s holding this world of the past together. Asura has these crystals placed around this world. Without them, he can’t materialize the past.”

“So we have to steal them?”

“Right.”

I opened a map I made.

“There’s one in Gwangmyeong City Hall, one in a water tower to the northeast, one in an armory to the west, one in a steel tower to the south...”

There were six crystals we needed to steal.

Once we had them, we just had to gather them in the same place and crush them at the same time. The past would then crumble, and we would be able to return to the present.

Of course, Asura would use Gwangmyeong City Hall’s 5000 residents to try to stop us.

“Asura has five subordinates guarding each of the locations other than Gwangmyeong City Hall.”

Asura’s five subordinates.

To be completely honest, I wouldn’t be able to win against them no matter what trick I pulled.

It was a matter of suitability.

Interestingly, I could beat their leader, but I couldn’t beat his lackeys.

“So... it’s clear what we need to do.”

Those were Kim Suho’s words.

I nodded as I yawned.

Currently, it was 1 A.M. It was time to sleep.

“It’s late. We’re going to rest for five hours. It’ll help you replenish your mana. First... let’s start with choosing who’s going to be on night watch.”



Dawn. I opened my eyes, feeling the cold morning wind.

Staying here for 40 days, I developed a short sleep habit.

During the six weeks that I was here alone, I divided up my sleep into one hour time frames not knowing when enemies would arrive. There was even a time where I spent the entire day sitting on a tree because they were patrolling the area.

“Hmm.”

But perhaps because I was feeling well, the morning air felt refreshing.

I went out of the tent for a morning stretch.

When I went out to the entrance of the partially destroyed abandoned building, I saw Chae Nayun standing watch. The twilight's blue hue shone down on her thinly. She seemed to have felt my presence as she turned toward me slightly.

"...You're up?"

When she saw me, she smiled lightly.

"Yeah. I see that you're on night watch."

"It's a piece of cake."

"Is it?"

Noticing that my shoulder-length hair was down, I tied it back up. Meanwhile, Chae Nayun was looking at me with eyes full of curiosity.

"Hey, isn't it uncomfortable having long hair? Yours is almost as long as mine."

"It is. But I can't cut it because I might get cursed by a curse magician."

"...They even have a curse magician?"

"Yeah. He's walking around with a voodoo doll."

I trudged up to Chae Nayun. Then, I shooed her away as she was sitting on my bike.

"...Tsk."

Chae Nayun clicked her tongue and moved over to the night watch chair.

Sitting down, she looked forward. I followed her line of sight.

A world of dawn was spread over the horizon. The sky was shining with stars and the earth was filled with lush vegetation.

I suddenly grew curious what Chae Nayun was thinking about looking at this scene of the past.

"What are you thinking about?"

“Huh? Mm... I was wondering why the ghost couldn’t have brought me to 2000 instead of 1972.”

“.....”

I wasn’t so dense as to not know what she meant.
2000 was when Chae Nayun’s mother was at the prime of her life.
I silently looked out into the forest.
But suddenly, Chae Nayun said something I couldn’t understand.

“Well, I’m sure you thought about it too.”

“...?”

I turned to Chae Nayun. She spoke quietly, still facing the forest.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t complain in front of you. Just ignore it.”

Hearing her, I suddenly remembered my parents. However, I didn’t continue thinking about it for long as it was too painful.

Chae Nayun, who was sneaking peeks at me, suddenly spoke in a cheerful voice.

“Oh, by the way, my mom was born in 1972.”

“So she had you when she was fairly old.”

“That’s just how it was back then. She was super busy. I’m sure she didn’t have the time and ease of mind to make a child when she was young.”

Chae Nayun muttered as she stared at my bike.
Then, she repeated what she said before.

“...My mom was born in 1972. In Sungmo Hospital.”

Sungmo Hospital.
It was only thirty minutes away from here on a motorbike.
If this was the real world, that is.

“We can’t go into central Seoul. This world is restricted to this area only.”

“...Oh~ I see.”

Hiding her disappointment with a silent sigh, Chae Nayun smiled brightly.

“How unfortunate~”

-
1. Buoyancy stone was mentioned in chapter 71, and the ocean stone was mentioned in chapter 7. Information stone is a newly mentioned “Tower Crystal”.
 2. The author didn’t provide the Hanja for this name, but it most likely means Thousand Flowers.

Chapter 103

Ghost (5)

For a week, the party focused on training.

Starting from normal workouts to sparring, they moved their bodies and exhausted magic power as much as possible. Just like in the original story, Yoo Yeonha led the training to get accustomed to the past.

“...Huup!”

A crescent-shaped sword strike flew through the air, along with a clenched shout.

Clang!

A sharp, metallic sound rang out when two swords clashed.

Chae Nayun felt like her hands were going to explode, but she didn't lose her focus. However, Kim Suho followed immediately with a crossway slash.

“Uk!”

Then, he stabbed forward like flowing water. Chae Nayun was thrown back, unable to receive his attack.

“Auu... I lost.”

Chae Nayun raised her hand from the ground.

Yoo Yeonha, who was spectating the match, jotted something down on her notebook.

“Kim Suho 12, Chae Nayun 0.”

“...Do you really need to keep track?”

Chae Nayun got up as she grumbled. She dusted off the dirt on her knees and butt, which Shin Jonghak watched with narrowed eyes. Because the weather was rather hot, Chae Nayun had cut up her long jeans, turning it into hot pants.

Feeling grumpy, Yoo Yeonha shouted loudly.

“Shin Jonghak 4, Kim Suho 8!”

“What? No, it’s 4 wins, 4 losses, and 4 draws.”

“I’m the referee. Kim Suho won those by my decision.”

Woong—

At that moment, the sound of a bike engine rang out. Kim Suho, who was drinking water, muttered.

“Looks like Hajin is back.”

“Yeah, ssp, looks like our chef is back.”

Even since being pulled into the past, Kim Hajin was in charge of food supply. Yoo Yeonha began to detest herself for drooling whenever she heard the sound of his bike’s engine. Because he always brought back something delicious, it was as though she was trained to react subconsciously...

“Hey, Kim Hajin! What did you bring back today!?”

Chae Nayun shouted. A bike appeared at the entrance of the abandoned building. On top of it was a trustworthy icebox.

Kim Hajin parked next to a wall and took off his helmet. By now, everyone had gotten used to his long hair and beard. Chae Nayun scurried up to him like a puppy that was waiting for her owner to come back home, then brought back the icebox from his bike.

“...Kuhum.”

Yoo Yeonha and Shin Jonghak also got up and followed Chae Nayun. Inside the icebox were pig, chicken, drinks, and even snacks.

“Is this Coke?”

“C-Coke?”

When Yoo Yeonha spotted the brownish liquid inside a smooth glass bottle, dark greed emerged in her eyes.

“Korea had Coke in the 70’s...?”

Shin Jonghak murmured as he rubbed the beard he grew. When Chae Nayun glanced at him, he raised his chin and emphasized his beard.

Seeing him intently for a moment, Chae Nayun blurted out a single sentence.

“Why does your beard grow like a goat?”



Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan handled cooking. I had all kinds of spices and seasonings in my magic bag, and Kim Suho created a delicious braised spicy chicken and pork belly.

In the 1970s, even ordinary stream water had higher concentration of spirit energy and mana than Baekdu Mountain’s so-called heaven-and-earth water. As a result, food that was cooked with it was even more delicious and nutritious. Just by eating and sleeping in this place for six months, one’s magic power capacity would increase by 10%.

Of course, they would have to move around after eating to accumulate the effect.

“Ah, I almost don’t want to go back. How am I going to go back to eating the food back home?”

Chae Nayun muttered as she stared at the empty pot in front of her.

“Rather than that, you should get up and spar.”

“...But my body hurts every time I use magic power. I’m not kidding. It feels like someone’s squeezing my heart.”

“That’s because magic power clumps together in your heart. You have to use magic power to alleviate it.”

I lightly ignored her complaints. Chae Nayun grumbled with a pout.

“...Then why aren’t you sparring?”

“Because I don’t need to.”

“Oh yeah?”

Training was one thing, but I didn’t need to spar.
The alerts I was getting on my smartwatch was proof of it.

[Your Magic Dysfunction Physique permanently absorbs accumulated magic power!
Your strength increases by 0.0002 points.]
[Your Magic Dysfunction Physique permanently...]

Because of this place’s high concentration of mana, I gained 0.25 stat points during the past 50 days. I didn’t even have to put in any effort.
Moreover, because this place was isolated from present time, we weren’t chased on time. Even if we stayed here for a year, only an hour would have passed in the real world.
However, that didn’t mean we could stay here for long.
In the original story, the party stayed here for about four weeks. From then, the past would slowly erode.

“Alright guys, listen up.”

I clapped and drew their attention.

“We’re going to start poking them four days later. After all, we can’t stay here forever. So I made a plan.”

The plan was only slightly different than what it was in the original story.
We would start with their weakest point and take two of the crystals.

“Northeast water tower’s Kim Mingyo and south steel tower’s Joo Parang. We’ll split into two groups and ambush them at night...”



Four days later, late night.
It was the day of action.

We split into two teams.

Shin Jonghak and I were in one team, and the other four were in the other. Of course, Shin Jonghak vehemently opposed it, but I insisted. I felt more comfortable teaming up with Shin Jonghak.

“We’ll go first. If you can’t clear the mission in two hours, just escape and return to the base.”

I got on my bike as I said that. Shin Jonghak hopped on behind me awkwardly. But when he was trying to find something to hold on to, his hands touched my butt. Immediately, he shuddered.

“Shit, what am I supposed to hold on to?”

“Next to you.”

“.....”

Only then did Shin Jonghak look at the side of the seat, which had two protruding handles.

“I want to try riding it too...”

While Chae Nayun watched with somewhat of an envious look, I stepped on the accelerator.

Even on a mountain path, my bike could go from 0 to 100 in less than a second. As a result, Shin Jonghak and I reached our destination in lightning speed.

“Get off. We’ll walk from here.”

I stopped in a forest near our target and transformed the bike back to its suitcase form. Then, while we were sneaking up to our target, Shin Jonghak suddenly asked.

“Oy, is there a reason you and I had to go together?”

“Well...”

The reason was simple.

Kim Suho wouldn’t try to kill people, even though the people in this world weren’t real.

“So?”

“Sh. Look.”

A water tower could be seen in the distance.

There were only about twenty people guarding the water tower. Furthermore, people of the past had poor mana controlling technique. Out of all the people there, Kim Mingyo was the only person I couldn't beat. However, Kim Mingyo was only as strong as a low-intermediate rank Hero, so Shin Jonghak could defeat him alone.

“Kim Mingyo should be inside the water tower. I'll deal with the small fries outside, so you go inside and get Kim Mingyo. I'll support you from the back.”

“I don't need your support.”

Shin Jonghak took out his spear.

Whish—

He needlessly spun it in the air and caused a cloud of dirt to rise up.

“Ptui. Hey, you're getting dirt in my mouth.”

“Shut it.”

“I saw it entering your mouth too.”

“...Cut the crap.”

Although that was what he said, he licked his teeth and spat on the ground.

It was then.

A deep voice rang out from below the mountain.

“Who is it?”

We both turned to the direction of the voice.

There, we saw a young man with a well-built body. From the way he suspiciously shined a flashlight over us, we could guess that he was a lackey on patrol.

“This place is Asura-nim's land. Outsiders aren't allowed in, so turn back.”

In response, Shin Jonghak stepped up sneering.

“And if I refuse?”

“...Ha, then you’ll have to be beaten and chased away.”

The young man pulled out the nunchucks hanging on his waist, intimidating magic power flickering around them.

Whoosh— whoosh— whoosh—

He began to brandish the nunchucks.

“Can you see the movement of the wind?”

Top, bottom, left, right. The nunchucks covered all sides and threatened us with a fierce gale.

I took a step back, thinking it would hurt to hit. Then, the young man burst into laughter.

“Ahahaha! Scared!?”

Click.

I transformed the Desert Eagle into shotgun mode and pulled the trigger.

“This is... huaak—!”

He flew back after being shot.

“...What a funny guy.”

“You wait here, Shin Jonghak.”

In preparation for this event, I brought 100 handgun, shotgun, and sniper bullets, and 900 5.56mm bullets.

“Who are you to tell me where to go and not go?”

“It’ll be easier for two captains to fight once the lackeys are taken care of, right?”

“...I guess you’re right.”

I climbed a nearby tree and transformed the Desert Eagle into sniper mode.
First, I targeted the ones patrolling the area or dozing off.
My bullets would fly silently and put them to sleep eternally.
I didn't need to hesitate or feel guilty.
This place was a reproduced past.
These people weren't real. They were only 'records' that would disappear soon...
Clenching my teeth, I pulled the trigger.
A bullet hit an enemy, whose body fell down silently. I didn't watch him die and immediately aimed at another target.

"...Haa."

By the time I sent five people to their deaths, I was drenched in cold sweat.
Even killing fake people took a toll on my mind. I closed my eyes and took a brief rest.



On the other hand, Kim Suho's team was also infiltrating the south steel tower.

"Hmm..."

Looking above at the steel tower, Yoo Yeonha fell into thought.
There was a purple crystal shining at the peak of the steel tower. However, it was encased in a magic cylinder, so it was impossible to snatch it away with her whip.

"...What's our plan?"

Yi Yeonghan asked.

Yoo Yeonha looked down and scanned the enemy's forces.

There were about forty people, a fairly large number.

If they were all at the level of Cube's cadets, it would be difficult to take them on with just four people.

In the world of Heroes, being a certain rank meant that you were able to take on ten others who were one full rank below you. In other words, an intermediate rank grade 1 Hero needed to be able to suppress ten low-intermediate rank grade 1 Heroes simultaneously.

However, Yoo Yeonha didn't think the four of them were at such a level.

Only Kim Suho was the exception.

Yoo Yeonha looked at Kim Suho and spoke.

“Kim Suho, you need to draw their attention as much as possible. Most of them will chase after you, but they’ll keep a small number back to defend. The three of us will then suppress them, and we’ll slowly lower their count.”

“What? Isn’t that too dangerous?”

Chae Nayun seemed a bit hesitant, but Kim Suho agreed wholeheartedly.

“No, I think that’s for the best.”

Kim Suho smiled lightly.

“Then I’ll get going.”

He condensed magic power around his legs and ran forward explosively. A sonic boom seemed to scatter behind him as he shot to the battlefield like a bullet and struck down a patrolling guard with his branch.

“Uuk!”

The man collapsed with a pained scream, and everyone’s attention became focused on Kim Suho.

“E-Enemy ambush!”

Hearing this shout, most of the guards ran toward Kim Suho, while Yoo Yeonha, Chae Nayun, and Yi Yeonghan rushed at the ten or so guards left behind.

“W-What!?”

“Aak!”

Yi Yeonghan headlocked them with his monstrous strength, Chae Nayun smacked them with the magic power surrounding her sword, and Yoo Yeonha suppressed them with her whip.

“Uu, uuu...”

A man brandishing a sword fainted after being choked by Yoo Yeonha's whip.

"Hmph."

Yoo Yeonha poked the collapsed man with her foot. Seeing that he didn't react, Yoo Yeonha turned back leisurely. But at that moment, a sharp sword shot toward her. Although she quickly ducked out of the way, the blade cut parts of her hair.

"Y-You!"

Enraged, Yoo Yeonha swung her whip and strangled the man who attacked her.

"...Do you have any idea how much effort I put into growing it!?"

Her whip strangled him tightly, and the man's face slowly turned purple. Yoo Yeonha stared at the hair on the ground and fiddled with her shortened hair. Realizing the severity of the cut, her eyes burned in anger once again.

"Uk, uk..."

However, Yoo Yeonha took mercy and let go before she strangled the man to death. Although Kim Hajin said they weren't real people, she felt like killing them would leave a bad aftertaste.

"Hey, Yi Yeonghan! You handle the steel tower! Yeonha and I will go help Kim Suho!"

"Okay!"

At that moment, Chae Nayun's shout rang out.

Yoo Yeonha also turned her gaze toward Kim Suho. Although he was being chased, he didn't seem to be disadvantaged. In fact, the thirty people that chased after him had now become five.

...It was then.

"Uwuk, hey! Help me, not Kim Suho! Joo Parang is here!"

Yi Yeonghan's desperate shout rang out from the steel tower.



2 hours later.

Just like in the original story, both teams retrieved the purple crystals without much problem.

To celebrate, we roasted a whole pig.

I didn't have much of an appetite, but Chae Nayun and Kim Suho ate voraciously.

I watched them until they finished eating, then spoke when their plates were empty.

"Good job today. Now, the north and southeast areas will become inactive."

We just had to take it slow, just like today.

"...Kek."

But Yoo Yeonha suddenly grabbed her neck. As though she was choking, she smacked her chest and gulped down water. Her face was pale white.

"What's wrong, Yeonha?"

Chae Nayun asked worriedly.

"Nothing. I just can't... digest food well."

I frowned.

"There's no way you shouldn't be able to digest food."

"W-What do you mean? It's not like I'm a pig. I can get sick too."

No, that wasn't the problem. There was no way she shouldn't be able to digest such a soft meat. I narrowed my eyes and scanned Yoo Yeonha for injuries.

...She wasn't injured.

But I noticed her hair.

It was asymmetrical.

In other words, someone had cut it.

"What's that?"

“Yes?”

Yoo Yeonha tilted her head.
I pointed at her hair.

“Your hair. What happened?”

“Oh, this? It was cut during the last battle...”

“...Damn it.”

Like I said before, Kim Suho’s team would have ‘suppressed’ them only. The ones that survived would have returned with traces of the ones who attacked them. For example, hair.

“Argh, why does my chest feel so heavy...?”

Yoo Yeonha kept thumping her chest.

If my thoughts were correct... this was a curse. Depending on the curse magician’s ability, even a single strand of hair could be enough to drive one to the brink of death. Gwangmyeong City Hall indeed had a voodoo curse magician who could use this curse of weakening.

...Things were a bit more complicated now.

“Why are you looking at me like that? I’m not *that* sick.”

Yoo Yeonha furrowed her brows and asked sharply.
Chae Nayun also chimed in, grinning.

“Look how worried he is. Maybe he likes you.”

“Then I’ll have to decline. Sorry.”

“Listen you two...”

Power of curses were amplified in high mana concentration areas. Not knowing this, the two girls were snickering to themselves.

But well, it was partially my fault for not warning them about it.

I sighed inwardly and slowly opened my mouth.

Chapter 104

Ghost (6)

I explained what would happen if Yoo Yeonha's hair ended up in the curse magician's hands. I didn't exaggerate or downplay anything. A curse of weakening could only be canceled by killing the curse magician, and although the curse couldn't directly kill, in an environment like this without any medical facilities, it could lead to the absolute worst situation.

When I finished explaining, the atmosphere of the group had turned grave.

"Oh right, you mentioned it before... I forgot about it... dammit."

Chae Nayun blamed herself as she clenched her fists. However, I couldn't blame her for not remembering. I had only briefly mentioned it a week ago, when she was sleepy from being on night watch.

Perhaps my fault was the biggest, since I didn't tell them about all the dangers properly. If I did, they wouldn't have forgotten to bring back Yoo Yeonha's lost hair.

We fell silent for a moment.

This anxious yet calm silence was broken by the cheery voice of the person of concern.

"Why are your faces so serious?"

Yoo Yeonha continued with a bright expression.

"We're not sure yet if it is a curse. Plus, I have some anti-magic power. I can beat something like a curse easily... ah."

Shin Jonghak's hand fell on her head. Looking at the startled Yoo Yeonha, he spoke.

"...Tell me if it hurts."

Yoo Yeonha's cheeks turned faintly red. Was this the bad boy's charm? While I was having idle thoughts, Yoo Yeonha nodded energetically.

“Un, but I don’t think it’s going to hurt much.”

“...Don’t lie, tsk.”

Suddenly, Shin Jonghak got up with his spear, catching our attention. Seemingly enraged, Shin Jonghak blurted out with a heated voice.

“They should be busy organizing themselves after being ambushed. So let’s barge in and crush them before the sun comes up.”

Currently, it was 3 in the morning. There was still some time before sunrise.

If Yoo Yeonha really was cursed, there was no time to waste. We had to defeat them as soon as possible.

We got up following Shin Jonghak. With stiff expressions, everyone began to check their equipment.

“L-Let me go too. I’m still okay...”

“You stay put.”

Shin Jonghak stopped Yoo Yeonha who was trying to force herself up.

We left Yoo Yeonha behind and set out.

This time, the battle only took an hour.

The enraged Shin Jonghak swept through the north tower and retrieved the purple crystal.

Shin Jonghak’s Physique, ‘Intermittent Explosive Disorder’, had been triggered.

For the record... the Intermittent Explosive Disorder Physique was a strange Physique that amplified one’s physical stats by up to 130 percent depending on one’s anger.



Gwangmyeong City Hall.

Asura sat on a throne as he received his subordinate’s report that three crystals were stolen in one night.

Although he was enraged at first, he soon calmed down.

It was thanks to Yi Yohan, the curse magician he kept with him.

Yi Yohan was a quite a skilled curse magician, and he had received a lock of the attackers' hair.

"M-My apologies, Boss!"

"It's fine. Don't overreact so much."

Asura had already sent out monsters and confirmed the attackers' numbers and base. They looked young and friendly. Such children wouldn't just watch one of their friends die.

Asura pitied them. As far as he was concerned, they were weak because they cared for useless emotions like loyalty, love, and friendship.

"Bring all the crystals back here."

"...Yes? Ah, understood!"

There were still three crystals left. Although bringing them back would weaken some of his men, he knew this was the best choice, as they would come to him, unable to watch their friend die.

"Kim Suho and Shin Jonghak..."

Furthermore, Asura knew who two of them were. Cube's greatest rising stars. He had already warned his subordinates to be on guard against the two handsome kids.

"Looks like my future is bright."

So long as he could obtain their heads, he had confidence that he would walk a royal road to becoming Destruction's executive.



Day one. Yoo Yeonha became emaciated, and we were late to notice that Asura had retrieved all the crystals.

Day two. Yoo Yeonha's pupils withered up.

Day three. Yoo Yeonha could barely stand up straight.

Frustrated, we went out and observed Gwangmyeong City Hall from a distance, but

there was no movement. They didn't come to us or even come out to patrol. They just stayed holed up in their base.

Time went by, and we fruitlessly watched over Gwangmyeong City Hall. Every day, Yoo Yeonha's condition got worse until all she could do was lay in bed.

Suffering from a high temperature, chills, and nausea, she kept getting weaker and weaker.

Seeing her like this, everyone thought the same thing.

That she could die if things continued this way.

"Yeonha, can you eat this...?"

"....."

Yi Yeonghan and Chae Nayun made porridge with painstaking care, but Yoo Yeonha had trouble eating. She could only raise her head slightly before taking a spoonful and lying back down.

I gave it a try, but even Stigma's magic power was unable to undo this curse. It was because curses weren't spells, which were cast using magic power, but Gifts.

"No movements today either. It looks like they'll just stay cooped up in the city hall."

Kim Suho came back from patrol and spoke with a frustrated face.

Asura made a different choice than in the original story.

Since he knew that one of us was dying, he retrieved all the crystals and was simply waiting.

Clearly, he knew we had to come to him.

"...We have no choice. We'll have to do what those trash want."

Growing impatient, Shin Jonghak shouted with a reddened face.

Yi Yeonghan retorted.

"Wait, wait, you want the four of us to fight 5000 people?"

I replied instead.

"When the crystals are gathered in one place, the past becomes unstable. It's the same for the people of the past, so only 100 to 200 people should be able to participate in

battle. Among them, we only have to pay attention to ten, including Asura.”

People of the past were weakened if the power of the crystals weren't distributed evenly.

Kim Suho and Chae Nayun. Shin Jonghak and Yi Yeonghan.

With me included, it should be enough to defeat them.

However, the problem was Yoo Yeonha. We couldn't just leave her alone. Bringing her with us to the battlefield would be insane, so one of us had to stay behind with her before we killed the curse magician.

...Wait a minute.

I looked at the purple crystals inside my leather pocket.

There were three finger-sized crystals and one fingernail-sized crystal.

If I was alone with these, wouldn't Asura come find me?

“Sounds good with me. 200 vs 5. I feel like I can kill them all.”

Chae Nayun asserted aggressively. Feeling the direction the conversation was going, Yi Yeonghan argued as he anxiously bit on his fingernails.

“W-What if he sends one of his lackeys to kidnap Yoo Yeonha?”

“I'll protect her.”

I raised my hand.

“These purple crystals and Yoo Yeonha, I'll protect them both. In the worst case scenario, I can just take her and escape on my bike.”

In a way, it was a trap.

If Asura came alone, I had the confidence to take him on by myself. If he brought others with him, I had the confidence to escape on my bike.

“...Okay.”

After ruminating over the matter with his eyes closed, Kim Suho also admitted that we had no other choice but to do as they wanted.

“It looks like this is the only thing we can do.”

“Damn it... fine, but don’t say I didn’t warn you if anything goes wrong.”

Yi Yeonghan stretched and loosened his body even as he grumbled. His thick muscles bulged up intimidatingly.

Shin Jonghak also roused his magic power fiercely.

“...Just you wait, Asura. I’ll tear you apart tonight.”

Just like the main character of a movie would say, Shin Jonghak prophesized Asura’s death.



A night of the full moon.

Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, Chae Nayun, and Yi Yeonghan were walking along a path they planned out. With Asura having taken away the crystals, the surrounding scenery had turned rather bleak. Grass lacked color and trees were withered.

After silently walking along this bleakness for some time, they began to see Gwangmyeong City Hall.

The place was modified to look like a fortress... but no one was protecting the barricade surrounding it.

It was clearly a trap.

However, there wasn’t much they could do about it.

They clad themselves with qi reinforcement and walked toward Gwangmyeong City Hall amidst a deathly silence.

Then suddenly, a man appeared on the roof of a broken-down bus in the middle of the road. He had a well-built body and was carrying a long steel pipe on his shoulder.

From his tall height and bandit-like appearance, the party could guess that he was Yoo Dongsuk, one of Asura’s subordinates that Kim Hajin mentioned.

“Ahem, this place is off-limits to kids.”

At the same time, several men carrying weapons appeared. Shin Jonghak asked, perfectly calm.

“You’re Yoo Dongsuk?”

“Haha, a kid shouldn’t talk to adults like that.”

With a smirk, Shin Jonghak pointed his spear at Yoo Dongsuk.

“Lackeys can screw off. Where’s Asura?”

“Asura-nim isn’t here.”

“...I won’t ask a second time.”

Shin Jonghak’s magic power flowed into his spear, igniting it with black magic power. Yoo Dongsuk’s eyes widened.

“W-What? What’s up with the color of your magic power?”

“Bring Asura, bring Asura here...!”

Shin Jonghak spun his spear 180 degrees. It was the most basic spear technique – Crescent Moon Slash. Shin Jonghak’s black magic power shot out in an arc, exploding when it reached Yoo Dongsuk. Not only did it destroy the bus he was standing on, it also continued flying forward and cut one of the watchtowers in half.

“Wow~ scary.”

Yoo Dongsuk chuckled as he leaped down from the bus.

“But kids, I’m not lying. Asura-nim really isn’t here.”

“Then where is—”

At that moment, an ominous thought flashed in Shin Jonghak’s head. He gripped his spear tighter.

“Y-You bastards...”

“Haha, what were you thinking, leaving the crystals behind with your injured friend?”

Stealing from an empty house.

It wasn’t that they didn’t expect it at all.

They just didn't expect that the boss would go.

Shin Jonghak, Chae Nayun, and Yi Yeonghan quickly turned back, but they were surrounded on all sides.

Immediately, their faces stiffened.

"...Pft."

However, only one person remained calm.

Kim Suho.

In fact, he even burst into laughter.

"Hahaha."

Chae Nayun and the others looked at him as though he was mad. Chae Nayun even felt fear, wondering if she was really looking at Kim Suho.

"...What are you laughing about, brat?"

Yoo Dongsuk felt anxious seeing Kim Suho's laughter.

"No, it's just... did your boss go there alone?"

"....."

Yoo Dongsuk didn't answer Kim Suho's question. However, his silence was more than enough of an answer.

"Then we have nothing to worry about."

Kim Suho turned back to his comrades.

Then, he said with a smile.

"Hajin is stronger than me."



Tak, tak.

Ominous footsteps rang out.

I slowly raised my head and turned to the direction of the sound.

A man appeared at the entrance of the abandoned building. His red eyes flickered under his black robe.

I closed my eyes and smiled.

As expected, he chose the easy route.

Leaving his subordinates to fight the four attackers and ambushing our base himself. The ghost must have told him that all the crystals were here, along with the patient we had to protect.

“...Human, pitiful human. This is why I gave up being a human. Because I didn’t want to be tied down to useless emotions like you...”

“Shut it.”

I lightly ignored the crap he was spouting and studied his surroundings.

“You’re alone?”

“I’m not alone. I have my army with—”

“You’re alone.”

He amplified his magic power capacity by consuming mana crystals, but he didn’t know how to best utilize this new improvement. Furthermore, Asura was especially inept in using his magic power to attack directly.

In the first place, he was only a low rank Djinn.

There was only one thing he knew how to do.

—Ssss.

Breathing oddly, he unleashed his magic power, forming a giant pathway which began to spew out strange creatures.

These creatures came in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Some resembled a wolf, some resembled an orc, some resembled a pig.

However, their numbers were overwhelming.

One, two, four, eight, sixteen... I stopped counting once I reached sixty four.

There were at least 2000, if not more.

I stood facing what seemed to be an overwhelming army.

This was Asura's Gift – 'Hail of Demonic Beasts'.

This ability used magic power to summon creatures from the Demon Realm. They should be around the level of low-intermediate grade 1 to 7 monsters. It was quite a cost-effective Gift.

Kim Suho might have had trouble dealing with them. After all, swinging a sword expended quite a bit of stamina. I couldn't even imagine myself swinging a sword 2000 times.

However, I wasn't Kim Suho.

And I was thankful that he came to me.

Of course, even if he didn't come to me, I planned to find and go to him using the Thousand-Mile Eyes.

"Um..."

"Hm?"

When I tried to stand up, Yoo Yeonha grabbed my sleeve. She was breathing heavily as though she was about to die.

"Leave me... and run..."

I stared into Yoo Yeonha's eyes as she spoke with a hoarse voice. Guilt, worry, and concern undulated in her eyes.

Seeing this side of her, I said with a cheerful smile.

"Don't worry about it and sleep. It'll be over by the time you wake up."

Yoo Yeonha seemed to fall in a daze.

I closed her eyes and took out the Desert Eagle, which began to transform with the help of Aether.

This time, it was neither a shotgun nor a sniper rifle.

A standard weapon in the modern world that enables one person to fight against many – assault rifle.

Although it wasn't used as much in this world because of the cost of bullets and comparatively low power, neither of those disadvantages applied to me.

Attack power enhanced by Aether.

Desert Eagle's internal attack power amplification.

And one more.

I murmured silently.

'Scan.'

44%, the best possible outcome.

“.....”

A smile bloomed on my face.

As always, I operated under the principle of Strong Against Weak, Weak Against Strong. In other words, I countered his Gift perfectly. He could summon as many small fries as he wanted. In front of my assault rifle, they stood no chance.

Furthermore, I didn't use up stamina or magic power.

All I needed were bullets and a finger to pull the trigger with.

My only worry... was the slightly disadvantageous terrain.

“I'll have to use this a little.”

I took out a finger-sized crystal from my pocket. By pouring in some of Stigma's magic power, I modified the terrain to what I desired.

Bzzzz—

The earth rumbled as it began to transform.

The circular arena Asura created was shaved in half, leaving behind a fan-shaped slice. With this, it was impossible for me to get surrounded.

The army of summoned beasts could now only attack me from head on. I only need to kill two or three of them with each bullet.

“You know how to use the crystal of the past...? But what difference does it make?”

Asura chuckled.

I retorted with a calm, expressionless face.

“It changes a lot of things.”

Chapter 105

Ghost (7)

Yoo Yeonha glimpsed at the endless sea of monsters in her foggy vision.

One, two, three...

Again, one, two, three...

She couldn't continue counting for long, as everything felt like a distant dream to her groggy consciousness.

However, there was one thing she was sure of. That was that she wouldn't survive against this army of bloodthirsty monsters.

Beast-like creatures growled, baring their black teeth. She hallucinated one of them biting off her neck as her consciousness faded away...

Soon, when she opened her eyes, she saw a man standing in front of her.

Beyond him lied an army of monsters.

He looked small, like a praying mantis standing in front of a colossal building.

He alone shouldn't be able to withstand that dark sea. But he alone should be able to escape.

She forced her unmoving arm to move and grabbed onto his sleeve. Then, she spoke faintly.

—Leave me... and run...

However, the man didn't listen to her, and returned a warm look.

—Don't worry about it and sleep.

His deep voice rang out softly along with his warm smile.

—It'll be over by the time you wake up.

His hand reached out and closed her eyes.

Her vision went black.

Within her closed eyelids, she began to see a world of her dreams.

It was the same dream she always had.

She had achieved success, and several people were bowing to her. People who ignored and disdained her, people who mocked her clan as being a hunting dog... they were all kneeling in front of her.

This was her earnest wish, one that she would have to achieve alone.

This was her dream, one that she couldn't give up on.

Slowly, she opened her eyes.

As darkness faded away and light entered her eyes, she saw his back.

She... couldn't remember his name.

In his hands lied an assault rifle, a mass-produced weapon that couldn't shoot out magic powered spears like spear artifacts or shoot out sword strikes like sword artifacts.

An unstoppable army stood in front of this shabby gun.

Because of her groggy consciousness, time seemed to flow slowly.

The sea of monsters rushed toward him.

Beasts running on four legs, orcs charging on two legs, spiders scuttling on eight legs, snakes crawling without legs, birds flapping their wings, one-eyed cyclops shooting out magic.

All these demonic beasts formed a single tidal wave, rushing forward, ready to devour and tear apart everything.

Against this raging wave, the man raised his gun.

Immediately, a flash of light erupted against the black hail. White brilliance began to rage fiercely, his bullets turned the world white as it pushed back against the black wave.

The foreheads of beasts.

The hearts of orcs.

The abdomens of spiders.

The mouths of snakes.

The eyes of cyclops.

His bullets pierced through their vital points meticulously, and the fearsome wave continued to be pushed back.

The barrage of bullets never stopped.

An endless rain of bullets tore the limbs of monsters apart. Slowly, corpses stacked up, forming a mountain.

His perfect marksmanship didn't allow a single attack or a single monster to approach him.

He was decimating the army of monsters alone.

Yoo Yeonha felt an incomprehensible coziness.

She realized how relaxing it was to be protected by someone.

Just like he said, she calmed down.

Then, she slowly closed her eyes.

Kim Hajin.

Before she even noticed, his name had entered her mind once again.

She hoped that when she opened her eyes again... she would be even more relaxed.



Kim Suho swung his branch. In that instant, his magic power formed a crescent-shaped arc that stormed forward. Yoo Dongsuk managed to block it with his steel pipe, but his subordinates were sent flying far behind him.

With no one left to interfere, Kim Suho charged toward Yoo Dongsuk.

Yoo Dongsuk asked as he swung down his steel pipe.

“...Is it true?”

After lightly parrying the steel pipe, Kim Suho replied.

“What is?”

“That the person left behind is stronger than you.”

Kim Suho smiled, finding it funny that this was his question.

“...I don't like lying.”

Of course, Kim Suho couldn't be sure as he had only sparred with Kim Hajin once. However, he believed.

He believed that Hajin would succeed.

“That's not good for—”

“Kuaaaa!”

Suddenly, a horrible shriek rang out.

Kim Suho and Yoo Dongsuk both glanced sideways.

Shin Jonghak was brandishing his spear, causing a mess. Although he looked a bit ridiculous, the result was outstanding. He freely mixed stabs and slashes, fluidly and viciously attacking his enemies. In a way, he looked like an ancient warlord.

Seeing his subordinates getting sent flying, Yoo Dongsuk asked.

“...Is he as strong as you?”

Kim Suho simply smiled in response.

Although he didn't speak, silence served as an answer.

Yoo Dongsuk also laughed heartily as he swung his steel pipe.

KWANG!

His steel pipe clashed with Kim Suho's branch, both sides pushing against each other without hesitation. Their tug-of-war continued, forming somewhat of a balance between them.

“...Well, it looks like our strategy failed.”

“It's not too late to turn back. There's no reason for us to fight.”

Amidst the fierce battle, the two men stared into each other's eyes and spoke.

“The one you're calling Boss isn't human, but a Djinn... uh, he's an evil person who's using the power of a ghost.”

The concept of Djinn didn't exist at this point in history. According to the textbooks, the rise of Djinn only happened in the late 1990s.

“...Huup!”

Yoo Dongsuk pushed Kim Suho back without replying.

Kim Suho sighed somewhat reluctantly as he enveloped his sword with magic power. The sword's blue glow transformed into a brilliant gold.

“You were hiding a rather interesting power, eh?”

However, the same applied to Yoo Dongsuk. His body suddenly glowed red, and suddenly grew several times bigger.

Kim Suho put on a serious expression as he fixed his stance.



At first, it was only laughable. Seeing the young man's overgrown hair and beard, Asura felt nothing but pity.

But as time went by and his army dwindled in number, Asura began to feel fear. He could feel a chilling killing intent from the young man's eyes, and the outpouring bullets seemed to overwhelm him.

Even now, Asura's army was rushing toward him nonstop. He also didn't forget to sneak in long ranged attacks.

However, the demonic beasts' venom and teeth were blocked by the magic power reinforcement of his mysterious bracelet, and monsters that specialized in long ranged attacks only became first-priority targets for his bullets to kill.

Asura couldn't understand what was going on.

When he saw the young man take out an assault rifle, he thought he would only have to wait until his magazine emptied once.

However, the unloading, loading, and refiring process took him less than a second to perform. There wasn't a single exploitable opening.

But what Asura couldn't understand the most was his bullets' destructive power. The instantaneous wind pressure created from the moment of firing scattered magic power, and Asura's demonic beasts disappeared the moment they were hit. A single bullet often killed two demonic beasts, and there were several instances where a single bullet killed three.

Asura's demonic beasts were being slaughtered by the young man's bullets. Not even a single claw of his army could reach the gunman.

"Impossible..."

As Asura watched this incomprehensible battle in a daze, the once countless number of beasts became countable.

Asura stopped his remaining forces from advancing and took a step back. He wanted to assess the situation more carefully.

When the army stopped, Kim Hajin also stopped firing. Then, he murmured tiredly.

“Since you can summon so many of them... you must have merged with the ghost. What did he want? Revenge? Wealth? Honor?”

Kim Hajin stared at Asura, who remained silent.
He aimed his gun at Asura.

“You don’t really have to answer that.”

Click.

Kim Hajin pulled the trigger. Asura unleashed his magic power, forming a barrier. At the same time, dozens of demonic beasts moved to block Kim Hajin’s line of fire. However, no bullets came out.

Click. Click. Click.

Kim Hajin pulled the trigger a few more times.
However, the result was the same.

“.....”

“.....”

Whish.

A brief wind blew. Asura and Kim Hajin stared at each other for a moment. Kim Hajin rummaged through his pocket, but he was out of ammo. He then spoke graciously with a calm expression.

“...But Asura, I don’t really hate you for it. In fact, I kind of understand where you’re coming from.”

A character with no background story, a stepping stone for the main characters and the supporting cast. An extra, rather than a villain.

Asura, or rather Cheonhwa, became a Djinn for a simple reason.

“That’s how I created you.”

That was why Kim Hajin felt sorry. Even if he truly didn’t feel sorry, he needed to feel sorry at the moment.

“You probably had no other choice to become strong. By merging with the ghost, you probably thought you could become a Djinn who would enjoy wealth and honor,

leaving your name behind in the world..."

Kim Hajin sounded sentimental all of a sudden.
Asura responded with just one sentence.

"...You're out of bullets."

"I'm not."

Kim Hajin took out a single magazine from his pocket. He slowly reloaded his gun and asked.

"I want to know. What kind of a life have you lived?"

A smile emerged on Asura's face.

"...It's empty."

"What? Can't you see this?"

Kim Hajin tapped on the magazine loaded into his gun, but Asura retorted leisurely.

"Then shoot."

"...Tsk."

The moment he clicked his tongue, the assault rifle transformed into a handgun.

Tang, tang, tang, tang, tang—!

Then, Kim Hajin quickly pulled the trigger.

A whole magazine was used up in less than a second, and the monsters protecting Asura were reduced to dust.

Asura flinched in shock.

"See? I'm not lying. Plus, this story already ended on a cliché."

He pointed behind Asura.

Kim Suho and the others were standing there.

Asura's subordinates were also standing there, giving Asura complicated looks.

“.....”

Asura looked around with a blank look.

He had wasted too much time dealing with a single person.

It was clear that there was no chance of victory.

Now, he only had about a hundred demonic beasts, along with a partner that resided in his heart.

“...Uk!”

Suddenly, his heart beat violently.

The ghost of the past was telling him something.

Asura shook his head.

However, in the next moment, his body twisted strangely, and the ghost shot out of his heart.

Then, Asura’s body disappeared from the world, removed by the ghost.

—...

A black ghost floated in the air, making intimidating gestures with eerie howls. However, a formless being couldn’t pose any threat.

Kim Suho brought Misteltein up to the ghost’s body, and the ghost was instantly sucked into the divine-grade weapon. Misteltein grew stronger by absorbing spirits. The ghost of the past would now continue to stay inside Misteltein for eternity.

A short silence descended.

Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, Chae Nayun, and Yi Yeonghan stared at the scenery spread out in front of them.

Kim Hajin was standing alone, amidst a desolate battlefield with a mountain of corpses.

Soon, his clear voice rang out.

“Welcome back.”

Kim Hajin smiled at the four of them, who came back before it was too late.

Everyone’s gazes became focused on him. Kim Suho’s eyes carried trust, while other eyes carried shock.

“...W-What?”

Kim Hajin couldn't understand the meaning of the looks he received at first, but he soon realized.

The cause was the mountain of corpses in front of him.

“Oh... this? T-These will disappear soon.”

Since the magic power connection was cut off, the corpses would disappear in about two minutes.

However, the onlookers' shocked expressions didn't disappear for a while.



I didn't ask Kim Suho how he convinced the people of the past. Although the story took a different direction than the original story's, the result was more or less similar.

That was enough for me.

I sat down on the ground, feeling exhausted and dizzy.

I wasn't physically fatigued, even after using all 900 bullets. However, I was mentally taxed.

I turned on my smartwatch, looking to see messages that would alleviate my exhaustion.

[You massacred a large number of enemies! You receive a huge experience boost in Master Sharpshooter!]

[You pierced the vital points of countless enemies! Master Sharpshooter evolves to grade 5!]

[Luck applies! By decimating thousands of darkness attribute demonic beasts, understanding of the darkness attribute has been added to Aether!]

[You obtain 330 SP!]

“Wow.”

There were several new alerts.

Master Sharpshooter leveled up to grade 5, but the best gain was Aether's understanding of the darkness attribute.

Understanding of an attribute was a great reward, especially when it came to Aether. When Aether fuses with the Desert Eagle, Aether's understanding of an attribute would also apply to the Desert Eagle. That was also why my bullets let out white flashes.

Of course, attribute bullets created with SP were much more powerful than ordinary bullets used with Aether's understanding of an attribute.

"...What?"

I couldn't think properly because of my surroundings. Chae Nayun, Shin Jonghak, and Yi Yeonghan kept giving me suspicious looks.

"I mean, it doesn't make sense."

"What doesn't make sense?"

I shrugged in response to Chae Nayun's question.

"...Stop kidding around."

However, Chae Nayun was serious. She looked somewhat wronged.

I grinned, then took out the Desert Eagle transformed into the assault rifle form. Chae Nayun's eyes, as well as Shin Jonghak's and Yi Yeonghan's eyes, widened. They were clearly wondering where I got such a weapon.

"I told you. I have a gun-related Gift. I was just a good match for Asura."

"Good match?"

"Yeah. Against a large number of weaker opponents, pulling the trigger 2000 times is easier than swinging a spear or a sword 2000 times."

After giving a brief explanation, I turned to Kim Suho, who was resting nearby, and asked.

"Did you bring the crystals?"

"Ah, yeah."

Kim Suho handed me three crystals.

"Are we going back now?"

I shook my head in response.

“No, we’re going to return these crystals where they belong.”

“...Huh?”

“This is the greatest training area you could ask for, so we’re going to stay here for the next two weeks. It would be a shame to leave before we milk it dry.”

In a way, this place was an inferior version of the Hyperbolic Time Chamber. We should be able to grow stronger here.

“We have plenty of people to spar.”

I pointed at Asura’s past subordinates, who were standing behind us awkwardly.

Chapter 106

Return

I returned the crystals to where they belonged, then headed to Gwangmyeong City Hall.

There, we surprisingly received a warm welcome. It seemed Asura was quite the tyrant, as the residents rejoiced in finally getting freed.

When I talked to them about it, they told me Asura led many to their deaths because of his obsession with mana crystals.

In any case, on the night that Asura disappeared, everyone gathered at the abandoned building and held a party.

Gwangmyeong City Hall's residents brought rice and meat, and we sat around a campfire, eating and talking happily.

Of course, I left as soon as I was done eating.

I just didn't feel like I belonged.

"...Here, Kim Hajin, take it."

But Yi Yeonghan handed me a bowl of porridge.

"What's this?"

"For Yoo Yeonha."

Although the curse was lifted, Yoo Yeonha had yet to recover completely. Currently, she was sleeping in the tent.

"...Why are you giving it to me?"

"The other guys are busy talking."

Yi Yeonghan pointed at the campfire, where Kim Suho and Chae Nayun were talking with Asura's past subordinates. The topic must have been funny, as even Shin Jonghak was laughing as he listened in.

“Ai, we’ve heard the news from Seoul. Currently, Seoul is split into several factions. Gangnam is divided up between Shin Myungchul and Chae Joochul, while Gangbuk is...”

“How is Shin Myungchul’s reputation?”

Shin Jonghak asked.

“He’s a great person who brought peace to the Gwanak region.”

“Haha, I see.”

It seemed he enjoyed hearing them praising his grandfather. Hearing this, Chae Nayun also asked brightly.

“Then what about Chae Joochul?”

Chae Joochul the Immortal. He was Chae Nayun’s grandfather and one of the strongest people in this world.

But contrary to Chae Nayun’s expectations, she received a negative response.

“He’s not trustworthy at all. I stayed in Seoul for a bit, so I know. He’s... sly, like a snake. He’s surely going to do something huge in the future.”

“.....”

Chae Nayun’s expression stiffened.

Indeed, Chae Joochul wasn’t a strictly kind person by my setting.

I took the porridge and went into the tent.

“Hey, I brought food.”

Yoo Yeonha, who was lying still on the bed, raised her upper body as she groaned. She looked a bit disappointed when she saw that it was me, but she tried to not let it show.

“You’re pretending to be sick, right?”

“Yes? Ah, no, I’m still enervated... uup.”

I shoved a spoonful of porridge into her mouth. Yoo Yeonha nibbled on the porridge with a confused look.

She really ate like a kid. After chewing about ten times, she looked at me and frowned.

“What is it?”

“What.”

“...Why are you doing this all of a sudden?”

Yoo Yeonha looked sullen.

“Didn’t you say you could barely lift up your hands? So I’m feeding you.”

“But that was...”

It was probably a ploy to attract Shin Jonghak. I grinned and took another spoonful of porridge.

—Kyahaha.

At that moment, Chae Nayun’s laughter rang out from outside the tent. I turned around, startled by the sudden noise.

“Ah, wait, wait! Ah!”

When I turned back around after hearing Yoo Yeonha’s indignant shouting, I saw her porridge pasted around her mouth.

Oh, she didn’t have it opened.

“Open your mouth, would you?”

“What? You’re saying this is *my* fault?”

“.....”

I scratched off the porridge smeared around her mouth with the spoon, then returned it to her mouth. However, Yoo Yeonha kept her mouth shut tightly and glared at me.

“You don’t want to eat? You’ll starve to death, you know.”

“No, it’s just that... it’s not very tasty. Don’t you have something other than porridge?”

“I have one ramen left.”

Immediately, Yoo Yeonha swallowed hard. But soon, she put on an unenthusiastic look and pretended like she would eat it reluctantly.

“...Then I’ll take that. This is too bland.”

“I’ll make it for you if you finish this.”

Then, Yoo Yeonha opened her mouth and started eating again.

“Instead of staying cooped up in here, why don’t you come out and talk?”

“I don’t have the energy to~”

Yoo Yeonha fell back down on her back and pulled the blanket over herself. Since it looked like she didn’t want to go out, I got up to leave her alone. But at that moment, her soft voice rang out.

“Um...”

“Yeah?”

“...Thank you.”

She whispered carefully and sincerely.
I simply nodded in response.

“It’s good that you know.”

“You always end up helping me out.”

“Right? When are you going to pay me back?”

Yoo Yeonha smiled and replied softly.

“Hey, don’t you think we can become good allies?”

Allies...

Becoming Yoo Yeonha’s ally was an easy way of living a comfortable life. She would become a top-tier CEO in the future, who would own prominent corporations in fields such as magic engineering, pharmaceuticals, guilds, auctions, and weapons.

“I can help you hit it off with Nayun.”

“...What? I don’t need something like that.”

“Eh? You really changed ship?”

Yoo Yeonha suddenly raised her upper body again.

“Change ship?”

“From Nayun to Rachel.”

“What? No, it’s neither of them. I can’t afford to like someone right now.”

“Come on, don’t lie.”

Yoo Yeonha gave me a mischievous look as though she was saying she knew everything. I stared back at her, then nodded.

“...No ramen for you.”

“Eh? W-Wait!”

I ignored her and left the tent. I then went to Yi Yeonghan.

“She said she doesn’t eat porridge.”

“Huh? Really?”

Yi Yeonghan tilted his head and went into the tent.

—Yoo Yeonha, why aren’t you eating? Don’t have an appetite?

—E-Eh? Ah... well, um... ramen...

—Ramen? Kim Hajin said he'd make you ramen instead? But I thought you didn't like ramen.

—Eh...? Oh... right...

—Then just rest for today. You don't have to eat.

—... I don't like you, Yi Yeonghan. I'm serious.

—W-What? Why?

—Get out. Just get out.

Eavesdropping in on their conversation, I put a pot on the burner and began to boil water.

Yi Yeonghan then came out of the tent and asked.

“Kim Hajin? Why are you boiling water? Yoo Yeonha says she doesn't eat ramen.”

“Did she?”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha peeked her head out of the tent and blurted out angrily.

“Leave him be. He saved my life. It would be rude to decline his offer.”

“...What's up with her?”

In the end, Yi Yeonghan backed down, and I finished the ramen under Yoo Yeonha's watchful eyes.

“Enjoy.”

“Thank you.”

Yoo Yeonha took the ramen into the tent with a happy face.

I glanced around my surroundings, then got on my bike, after which Kim Suho

discovered me.

“Hajin, where are you going?”

“Oh, there’s something I need to bring.”

In this world of the past, there were things I didn’t make use of in the original story. Although I made note of them in my settings book, I didn’t have the chance to utilize them when I was writing the actual chapters.

Since a few of them would come in handy, I planned on bringing them back.



In the past of 1972, we trained and sparred to becoming stronger. Without having to stay in the uncomfortable, abandoned building, we lived with Gwangmyeong City Hall’s residents.

For the two weeks we stayed here, magic power explosions occurred occasionally, and monsters attacked from time to time. However, we worked together with the residents to resolve any troubles.

Of course, some of Asura’s subordinates, who performed all sorts of misdeeds, were chased out through voting. Under Kim Suho’s leadership, evil practices and that hierarchical system were abolished.

In any case, after spending so much time together, Kim Suho and the others grew very close with the people of the past.

Yoo Yeonha was constantly on the lookout for someone who would become the ancestor of someone famous, Chae Nayun played with the kids every day, and Shin Jonghak formed a crew of his own with a crowd that looked quite strong.

As for Kim Suho, he helped the residents to create several facilities and renovated the existing ones.

Everyone spent their time laughing and having fun.

However, I couldn’t enjoy things as much as the others, as some of the people I killed remained dead.

I didn’t know whether the residents were unaware of it or if they were pretending not to know, but they treated me kindly.

“Huu.”

Time passed by in a breeze.

Currently, I was sitting on a barbershop chair, surrounded by many people.

“This is great. My hands were itching every time I saw your hair.”

“Yeah, it was the perfect length two weeks ago, but now it’s way too long.”

That comment was from Chae Nayun.

I smiled and nodded.

I looked around, wondering if it was okay for a barbershop to be in the middle of the road. Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan, Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha, Shin Jonghak who had his arms crossed and glanced at me, and finally, many people of the past.

Quite the crowd had gathered to see my haircut.

“By the way, can you leave a little bit of his beard?”

Chae Nayun asked on her own.

“Hm? Why? I want to shave it entirely.”

I asked as I rubbed my beard. I had the feeling Evandel would be shocked if I went home like this.

“I think you’d look better with some of it left.”

“Nayun.”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha spoke to Chae Nayun with a smile.

“What does it have to do with you?”

“...Eh?”

Chae Nayun fell into a daze. Yoo Yeonha continued with an even bigger smile.

“I’m genuinely curious. Why does it matter how he looks?”

“W-What? I’m just trying to recommend a better path for him.”

“Mm~ is that why you went on a drive with him last week~?”

“...What?”

Shin Jonghak’s eyes suddenly flickered coldly.

“T-That was because we were in charge of getting food! W-What are you trying to say!?”

Unable to endure it any longer, Chae Nayun shouted. Yoo Yeonha backed off as she moved her eyebrows up and down. Meanwhile, the surrounding residents smiled.

“Then I’m starting~”

The barber started to cut my hair. A scissor grazed my head, which became lighter as my shoulder-length hair was cut off.

I slowly enjoyed the moment. The laughter of the residents, the light breeze, the warm sunlight, and...

“He doesn’t look all that bad, eh?”

“Of course! He’s the one who drove away that tyrant, after all.”

“But what did he defeat him with? Not even Dongsuk could do anything against him.”

The view of the past that would soon disappear.

“Alright, done. Now it’s time to shave.”

The barber finished cutting my hair and took out a razor. I was startled as he brought it up to my face without any shaving foam.

Srrrk, srrrk— However, feeling the barber use his magic power in place of a shaving foam, I calmed down and trusted myself to him.

Soon, the shaving ended, and the barber gave me a mirror.

“...Oh?”

When I looked at the mirror, I was surprised.

I wasn't even sure if I was looking at myself, and I was clearly not the only one who felt this way. Chae Nayun, Yoo Yeonha, and even Kim Suho were looking at me in awe.

A clean pomade style hair and a light beard like that of a Western model.

My eyes naturally turned to my smartwatch.

[Buff – Master Barber's Touch]

[Temporarily increases the invariable charm stat by 0.5 points.]

[Duration – 4 weeks]

When I saw this alert, I shot up and asked the barber respectfully.

"...May I ask your name?"

"Haha, do you like it that much? The name is Kim Woosuk."

"Kim Woosuk... Do you perhaps have a son?"

"I do have an eight year old. His name is Kim Hojin."

Kim Hojin. If he was alive in the present world, I would have to visit him when I wanted to cut my hair, as Gifts were often times hereditary.

I grabbed Kim Woosuk's hands and bowed.

Then, I looked around.

A mother waving her hand with a child in her arms, elderly people smiling in delight, and young men and women who were giving me respectful gazes.

I also bowed to all of them.

"Thank you for everything."

Getting my hair cut was the last business of the day. No, of the past.

"No, we should be thanking you instead."

"Goodbye~"

"Will you come by again?"

"These young men and women will do great things in the future. I'm sure we'll be able

to see them in the newspapers.”

We didn't explain much to the people of the past. They didn't know that this was the world of the past, or that they were just records.

“Then...”

I turned to Kim Suho and the others.

Now, it was time to do what we needed to do.

Kim Suho and the rest of the party nodded with a somewhat sad smile.

“We'll go get them.”

“Yeah.”

They each went to retrieve a crystal, and I entered Gwangmyeong City Hall. After slowly climbing the stairs, I sat down on the rooftop floor.

Then, I looked up at the sky.

The sun was halfway down the horizon.

The world was dyed orange by the beautiful sunset.

As I waited for the others to come back, I leisurely watched this beautiful scenery.

Soon, the northeast water tower's purple light disappeared.

I could see Yi Yeonghan climbing the south steel tower.

The fragments of the past were slowly coming together.

After about ten minutes, I felt a presence behind me.

“Take this, Kim Hajin.”

The first person to come back was Shin Jonghak. He threw the crystal at me casually and went back down. There, his lackeys (fan club members) were waiting for him with eyes full of tears.

“Yo~ Kim Hajin!”

A loud voice rang out from below.

Yi Yeonghan threw the crystal up from the ground, which I caught.

“Thanks.”

Next was Yoo Yeonha.

With the clacking sound of her high-heels, she walked up to the rooftop.

“Where did you get those high-heels?”

“They were gifted. I’m quite popular, you see.”

Yoo Yeonha approached me and handed me the crystal.

“Oh, by the way...”

As I received Yoo Yeonha’s crystal, I asked what I was curious about for some time.

“While you were under the influence of the curse... you didn’t enjoy it or anything, right?”

“...What do you mean? Why would I enjoy it?”

“Huh? Oh, um, nevermind. Just ignore what I said.”

In truth, there was a setting I got rid of.

[Yoo Yeonha likes being bullied.]

It was never mentioned in the actual story because it felt too strange and the opportunity never came up, but I was curious if the setting made it in in this world.

“Anyways, I’ll be going now.”

As Yoo Yeonha went down, Kim Suho came up.

“Kim Hajin! Here you... Huh?”

“Come down with me~”

“I want to be with Hajin. Ah, hey, what are you doing?”

Kim Suho was dragged away by Yoo Yeonha as soon as he gave me the crystal. The final crystal arrived three minutes after Kim Suho disappeared.

“I’m here, Kim Hajin.”

Chae Nayun trudged up to me and handed me the crystal.
With this, all six crystals maintaining the past had been gathered.

“Are you going to destroy them now?”

She sat down next to me with her knees together.

“Yeah, get ready.”

“Can I watch?”

“Sure.”

I put the crystals on my palm. Then, I infused Stigma’s magic power into them. In an instant, the tattoo on my upper arm glowed blue, and the crystals infused with magic power fused together, forming a small sphere.

I held the crystal with my thumb and index finger, then lightly squeezed it.

Clang—

A clear, sharp sound rang out, and the crystal disappeared into purple dust.

Change was quick to happen.

The scenery began to disappear.

The sky shattered.

The past broke down.

I calmly watched the recorded world of 1972.

“Hey.”

Chae Nayun suddenly asked. Just like me, she was watching the disappearing sky.

“Is this what it means to forget?”

“...What are you talking about.”

“Nothing. I was just wondering if forgetting meant that the person disappeared from my heart like this.”

She sounded calm. Her eyes were red as she was clearly thinking about her family, but

she didn't cry.

"How would I know? Why are you asking about that all of a sudden?"

"...No matter how much I try to remember, I can't recall Mom's voice anymore. Her scent, the happy days we spent together... I can't remember them well. It's like they disappeared."

I turned my head to the side, as did Chae Nayun.

Since I've never experienced anything like it, I chose my words from a book I once read.

"Don't worry about it too much. You can't smell anything from a flower that doesn't wither."

"...What's that. So cringy."

"It is what it is."

Being worn-down and partially forgotten helped make memories precious.

"Hmm."

...But it seemed I failed to make her empathize.

I took something out from my pocket and gave it to Chae Nayun.

"Here, you can have this."

"...Eh?"

"It's a ticket."

Chae Nayun tilted her head at my explanation.

"A ticket that will help you see flowers for a while."

I felt my fingers curl up at my own words.

In any case, what I gave to Chae Nayun was a time capsule.

It was small box with a lock and an analogue clock marked 01/01/2018.

“What’s this?”

“A time capsule. You know what that is, right?”

“...Do you think I’m stupid? Of course I do.”

This was one of the items I made note of in my settings book and never utilized. It took me a whole day’s worth of Stigma’s magic power to find it using the Book of Truth.

“But what is it for? And why are you giving it to me?”

“You see the number there? You can change it and go back to that time period for a while. More precisely, you’re looking through the memory you have of that time, buried deep inside your subconscious.”

“.....”

Chae Nayun widened her eyes and stared back at me. Then, she blurted out a single word.

“...Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Why aren’t you using it instead?”

When she said that, I felt a tinge of pain in my heart.

In truth, I planned to use this for myself.

One day, perhaps five or six years later when my parents’ voices and appearances were getting faint, I planned to use it to grab onto my fading memories.

But now that I thought about it, bringing an item from this world back to the present would surely cause some sort of a problem. Since that was the case, it was better to let Chae Nayun use this consumable item.

“I don’t even know my parents’ faces, so there’s no point in me using it.”

Without any other choice, I made up a good excuse.

Chae Nayun looked at me intently, then put the time capsule down.

“...Then I won't use it either.”

“What?”

“It's cowardly. Either we both use it, or we both don't. That's honor.”

I was stunned. I even felt a bit angry. I pushed Chae Nayun's temple with my finger.

“...I should really smack you.”

“What? Are you crazy? Fight me then.”

Chae Nayun raised her fists and took on a boxing posture.

“Shut up and just use it. You're going to regret it otherwise.”

“.....”

Chae Nayun pouted and picked up the time capsule. Despite what she said, it seemed she didn't want to give up on it so easily.

“Where do you want to go?”

“...To 2013.”

Chae Nayun changed the numbers of the clock.

“March... 13th.”

“Why then—”

Plop.

Before I could finish asking, Chae Nayun disappeared without leaving behind a trace. Almost like magic, or perhaps a miracle.

“...Hm.”

Suddenly, I was alone. I stretched and turned my gaze.

Other than me, everyone else seemed to have gone back to the present.
Half of the world was dark.
The sky was blurry, but pieces of the setting sun still shone down on me.
Even a crumbling world was beautiful.
Inside the slowly disappearing world, I closed my eyes.
The ringing of the crumbling world seemed to ring my heart as well.
Once I opened my eyes, I should be somewhere back in the present world...

“Hey, Kim Hajin!”

I opened my eyes at the sudden ringing voice.
I quickly looked around my surroundings.
It seemed I was back in the present as I could see the scenery of Wind Mountain.
With my eyes half-closed, I looked up at the person who called my name.

“There you are~”

Green vegetation, clear mountain wind, and gem-like sunlight.
Inside this beautiful scenery, Chae Nayun was smiling brightly.

Chapter 107

Rest

March 13th, 2013.

It was a piece of memory from a long time ago, a childhood story.

I still longed for it, because it was the only birthday I had where everyone was present.

Grandpa, Dad, Oppa, and even Mom. I wanted to see what happened on that day once more. I wanted to engrave it into my head, so that I could remember it for the rest of my life.

[03/13/2013]

Would it work?

I wasn't sure at first, but when I adjusted the time capsule's clock next to Kim Hajin...

Woong—

I was suddenly engulfed by white light.

"...?"

Before I noticed, I had become my younger self and was staring at a familiar garden, where a birthday party was happening. There were balloons anchored to the ground, and on top of a big table was a cake with cartoon characters and all sorts of delicious food.

"Nayun."

At that moment, a large hand touched my shoulder. Startled by the weight of the hand, my body became stiff. Then, the kind voice rang out once again.

"Nayun?"

It was the voice of a man who had yet to pass through puberty.

But I knew all too well whose voice it was. I barely managed to hold back my tears.

Today was a good day. I didn't need to cry.

“...Un, Oppa. You’re here?”

My tongue didn’t move as well as I wanted it to, but I decided to ignore it. Oppa kneeled down and snickered.

“Guess what present I got for you.”

“A scooter.”

“...Eh?”

Oppa made a flustered face.

An electronic car for children.

I knew he spent three months' worth of his allowance to buy it.

“Uh... did someone tell you?”

Taken aback, he smiled wryly. I ran into his embrace.

“Thank you.”

He looked a bit disappointed that I found out about his present, but he smiled and lifted me up.

“I’m the one who should be thankful.”

Then, the front door became noisy.

Still nestled in his arms, I looked past his shoulder. Dad came with Grandpa.

“Aiya, my little babies.”

Grandpa approached us, smiling kindly. Oppa handed me to Grandpa. Grandpa’s chest was harder and heavier than Oppa’s.

“Happy birthday, Nayun.”

“Thank you, Grandpa.”

“Oho?”

Grandpa looked a bit surprised. It was probably because I was scared of him when I was young.

Grandpa stroked my head and put me down.

Standing on the grass, I looked ahead.

My heart trembled and my hands were sweating.

Along with a light breeze... that person finally appeared.

With a white jade-like skin and brown hair that was long and feminine unlike mine...

Mom was walking in from the front door.

“Mom.”

I called her for the first time in a long, long time.

I could feel my face contorting. My lips were probably bulging out unattractively, and my eyes were probably half-distorted. But just calling her name wasn't enough. I ran with all the power I could muster and leaped into her embrace.

A delicate fragrance seeped into my body.

A voice I had long forgotten permeated my ears.

I cried and cried again, so much so that I couldn't open my eyes.

I sat down at the head of the table still in Mom's embrace.

Dad spoke worriedly.

“Nayun, why are you crying? Are you hurt anywhere?”

“Leave her be. She's still a child.”

I barely managed to stop crying after about 5 minutes. That was how long it took me to realize that this wasn't reality.

It was too precious of a time to waste away crying. I wiped away the tears in my eyes and looked at the cake in front of me.

Grandpa waved his hand, lighting the candles on the cake.

Mom laughed.

“Nayun, blow on it and make a wish.”

“...Wish?”

“Yeah. When you close your eyes and make a wish as you blow your birthday cake

candles, your wish will come true.”

I closed my eyes.

I didn’t wish for anything excessive, just that I would remember this moment for the rest of my life.

I blew on the candles, then opened my eyes.

Clap, clap, clap—

Everyone clapped and wished me happy birthday. Inside Mom’s embrace, I held onto her hands and smiled brightly.

“Here you go, a scooter!”

“Oh? When did my grandson get so much?”

“...It’s because you give him too much allowance, Father. You shouldn’t spoil him so much.”

“Ha, are you complaining because I didn’t give you as much when you were his age? What do you think, Daughter?”

“I... Here, Nayun! It’s the penguin with glasses~”

Mom changed the subject and gave me a Pororo plushie. I remembered reminding Mom that this penguin was called Pororo.

But now, I couldn’t say anything because I had a lump in my throat.

The surroundings were already turning white, almost as though ink was coming off a painting.

Time was up.

My heart felt like it would burst, and the tears I held back were beginning to flow. Still hearing the loving voices of Mom and Oppa, I closed my eyes.

...Soon, the world became silent.

Chwaa— Then leaves rustled.

When I opened my eyes, I was inside a mountain.

I stretched, unable to think about anything.

Now, it was time to go find Kim Hajin.



Chae Nayun reached her hand out to me, and I stared back at it. Was she trying to help me up? I took her offer.

“Thanks.”

When I got up, Chae Nayun gave me a renewed look.

“Hey.”

“Yeah?”

Chae Nayun handed me the time capsule.

“The time capsule?”

“I used it once, but it looks like it’s still here.”

“Really?”

I checked my smartwatch to find out why.

“...You take it.”

“Huh? Why? You should use it this time.”

Perhaps because it was brought to the present from the past or perhaps because it was already used once before, the time capsule had something called a ‘required magic power amount’.

15,000 units of magic power were needed to fully charge it, meaning that one’s magic power stat needed to be 15 to use it once. Afterwards, the required amount would double, making it practically impossible to be reused.

It went without saying that it needed to be charged in one go by one person.

“No, you should use it later when you want to see them again.”

“No, I can’t. It’s your turn to—”

“I told you.”

I interrupted her.

“I’ve never met them before.”

Immediately, Chae Nayun shut her mouth.

“So you use it, okay?”

“...Okay.”

Chae Nayun retorted half-reluctantly, half-gladly.

With a grin, I turned around and started going down the mountain.

“Ah, hey, where are you going?”

“I’m tired. I’m going back home.”

“What?”

Chae Nayun ran up to me and grabbed onto my sleeve. When I looked down at my sleeve, she pulled her hand back.

“W-Why? Why are you going back now?”

“Because I’m tired. Aren’t you? Because I sure am.”

“But still...”

“I’m not coming. I’m going back home.”

“...Fine.”

At my resolute refusal, Chae Nayun turned around pouting.

At that moment, my smartwatch rang.

[Here’s my account number. I’ll pay you back as soon as possible.]

It was Tomer.

Before I came here, I wrote a promissory note for Tomer. I even added the fearsome 'magic power contract' on top of it.

Using my smartwatch, I transferred money to Tomer's account.

"Hey."

Then, I called Chae Nayun. She suddenly turned back around with a mischievous smile on her face.

"Yeah~? You're coming~?"

"No, tell the other guys that I'm going back."

"....."

Her face contorted like an ugly newspaper.

"See you later."

The moment I turned around, I got an alert from Violet Banquet.

Tomer had transferred the fee, which would be converted into points for Violet Banquet and transferred to me when I gave the information.

I sent the information to Tomer.

[Fernin Jesus changed his name to Agus Benjamin...]

I descended the mountain as I wrote the reply.

When I arrived at the foot of the mountain and was about to take out my bike, I received another message.

[Thank you so much for today. ㄹ]

[It feels like I received something precious ㄹ ㄹ]

[I'll treat you to something good later ㄹ ㄹ ㄹ ㄹ ^-^]

It was a message from Chae Nayun.

"...She sure sounds affectionate."

What past did she see? I wrote the reply with a smile on my face.

[Yeah.]



7 P.M.

I returned to Cube. Although I experienced 90 days in the past, only 7 hours had passed by in reality.

“Uuk.”

Standing in Cube’s central park, I stretched and took in the ocean breeze. For some reason, I felt relaxed. This place seemed to have become my home. I turned on my smartwatch as I walked back to the dorm.

[Blessing in Disguise increases your stats by 0.005 points!]

[Blessing in Disguise increases your stats by 0.005 points!]

[Blessing in Disguise increases your stats by 0.005 points!]

[Your luck activates! By consuming food rich in mana, all stats increase by 0.01 points!]

I went through the backlog of alerts from the past 90 days. Afterwards, I checked my stats.

===

[Strength 2.970 (+2.970)]

[Stamina 2.980 (+2.980)]

[Speed 4.685 (+4.685)]

[Perception 5.620 (+5.620)]

[Vitality 3.070 (+3.070)]

[Magic power 2.005]

===

“Oh, I’m at full power.”

The numbers in parenthesis were temporary stats gained from Energy Conversion. Thanks to staying in a mana-rich area for a long time, it had filled up to 100%. Just looking at it put a smile on my face.

“...Hm?”

At that moment, I saw someone running toward me from the distance. A blonde girl wearing headphones, a sweatshirt, and sweatpants.

It was Rachel.

But I couldn't help but doubt my eyes when I saw her.

“...What's up with the color of the sweats?”

Her sweatpants were spinach-colored, while her sweatshirt was bright blue. She was well-dressed for the karaoke, so did she just put on whatever for running?

I didn't make such a detailed setting, so I had no way of knowing. I remembered writing that she grew up in a sheltered environment, but that was obvious as she was a princess.

Soon, Rachel's running speed slowed down. It seemed she discovered me.

“Hello.”

I bowed lightly when she came close. She took off her headphones and smiled.

“It's been a while, Rachel-ssi.”

“Yes.”

“Did you come back from England?”

“Yes.”

“Ah~”

I planned to head off since I didn't have much to say, but her sweats kept bugging me. I let out a dry cough and asked carefully.

“...Do you usually wear sweats when you run?”

“Yes? Ah.”

Rachel made an embarrassed face and asked shyly.

“Are they okay?”

“...Yes?”

“Well, um, this is a bit embarrassing, but I’ve never chosen my own clothes before... my attendant usually picks out my clothes.”

Rachel spun as if to show off her clothes. But it was just too unfashionable.

“Since I’ll be an adult soon, I’m putting more effort in choosing my clothes.”

She sounded unconfident in her fashion sense, and rightly so.
I scratched my neck and muttered.

“Um, I think you should just wear what your attendant picks out...”

“...Does it stand out.”

“Yes, a lot.”

“Ah...”

She scanned her clothes, then nodded as though she came to a decision.
What was she planning to do?
I watched her with interest.

“Ah~”

Almost as if she thought up a brilliant idea, Rachel suddenly bent down and pulled up one leg of her sweatpants. Then, she looked at me asking for confirmation.

“How about now?”

“.....”

It seemed she misunderstood what I meant by standing out. Perhaps it was a problem with her Korean.

“Just wear what your attendant suggests.”

“...Mm.”

Rachel looked a bit disappointed at my reaction, as she glanced at her legs for a moment, then pulled up the other leg of the sweatpants.

“How about...”

“Pull them both down.”

“Oh.”

Rachel pulled her sweatpants back down.

I breathed a sigh of relief and asked.

“Are you out on a run?”

“Yes. Hajin-ssi must have... come back from a barbershop. You have a beard now.”

“Yes? Ah, well, yeah. I’m going to buy some fried chicken and go back.”

“Fried chicken?”

“Yes, fried chicken, jokbal, bossam, and pizza.”^[1]

Rachel tilted her head.

I gave a brief explanation.

“I eat a lot.”

“I see.”

‘Me too...’ Rachel murmured softly to herself and smiled.

“Then I’m going to go run some more.”

“Yes, good night.”

With that, Rachel went off running, and I watched her for a moment before walking to

the cafeteria.



I returned home with both hands full of food.

But when I opened the door, Evandel didn't run up to me as I expected her to.

"Evandel?"

Feeling somewhat odd, I walked into the living room. Then, I was slightly startled.

"...The heck."

I was met with quite a strange scene.

Hayang was staring at me from the highest point in her cat tower, and Evandel was sleeping hugging the tower's pillar.

By the looks of it, she was trying to get Hayang to come down and fell asleep after exhausting herself out. Judging by the mess on the floor, there seemed to have been quite a chase between the two.

"They're still fighting, huh."

I approached Evandel laughing, then took a fried chicken leg up against her nose.

Sniff, sniff.

Evandel's nose wiggled.

Then, she opened her mouth wide.

Haap—

And bit down on empty air.

Nyam, nyam. When she couldn't taste anything after chewing over and over again, Evandel frowned strongly.

At that moment, Hayang jumped down from the cat tower.

Pabat!

Hayang's paws struck Evandel's head, and Evandel's eyes shot open.

"Ah, aaang..."

She grabbed onto her head and groaned.

“Ah!”

She then discovered me and scurried back to the wall.

“W-What!?”

“What do you mean.”

“Who, who is it!?”

“...It’s me. Hajin.”

“...Eh?”

Evandel began to dissect my face with her sleepy eyes.

“...Hajin?”

“Yeah, I had my hair cut. Come here, I brought fried chicken.”

“Fried chicken...?”

“Bossam and jokbal too.”

“Bossam... jokbal...”

Evandel muttered in a daze as she approached me. I knelt down and held my hands out. A small child waddled into my embrace.

I smiled.

There was something I always wanted to do.

I rubbed my beard against Evandel’s cheek.

“Ah, aak! What is it? No!”

Startled, Evandel tried to run away, but it was too late. I was seeing her for the first time in 90 days. Without a doubt, I missed her a lot.

I continued to rub my beard against her. Her soft skin felt nice against my prickly beard. Evandel resisted, even trying to shove her hand into my mouth and nose, but I didn’t stop.

Then, Hayang approached us.
She sent us a weird look, so I stopped rubbing my face against Evandel.

“...?”

Hayang stared at the back of Evandel’s head and raised her paw.
Just when I was wondering what she was up to...

Thwack!

Hayang smacked Evandel’s head and ran away.

“Ahhk! Uuu... Kim Hayang! You get back here!”

Evandel began to chase Hayang furiously. However, Hayang had reached the peak of the cat tower in the blink of an eye.

“Uuu! Y-You...!”

Evandel began to shake the tower with all the strength she could muster.

“Get down, get down, get doooooown here—!”

“.....”

I finally understood what I saw when I got home.

1. Google jokbal and bossam if you don’t know what they are!

Chapter 108

Action (1)

Tomer read the reply as she bit on her fingernails.

[Fernin Jesus changed his name to Agus Benjamin and smuggled himself onto Korea in 2020.

For an unknown reason, he entered a retirement center rather than starting a new life, and he died in 2024 at the age of 53. He was cremated with standard procedures, and his remains are inside a memorial.

The following is the name of the retirement center he stayed in...]

Immediately, Tomer's face stiffened.

Dead at the age of 53.

Although she could see the words written on her smartwatch, her brain couldn't accept the information.

"...Bullshit."

Tomer strongly bit down on her fingernails, causing flesh to split and blood to ooze out.

"Dead? What right does he have to die?"

Her heart felt like it was burning, as though a heavy fireball had been thrown inside it. The trash who killed her mother and abandoned her was dead. When she finally accepted this reality, she shot up. Her eyes were filled with tears of resentment. She glared at the information provided by Truth Agency, then kicked off the ground.

The retirement center he stayed in wasn't far away.

Tomer ran as quickly as she could. The magic power inside her formed a special sequence, amplifying her physical abilities. It was the magic spell – Haste.

With this spell, she only needed 15 minutes to reach the retirement center.

[Sunshine Haven]

Standing in front of this sign, Tomer took in a deep breath. She wiped away the tears in her eyes, then slowly turned the doorknob.

Kiiik—

An unpleasant sound rang out as the wooden door slowly opened.

First, a faint smell of medicine tickled her nose. It wasn't as bad as a hospital, but the smell of medicine was definitely present.

Tomer slowly walked up to the counter, where she spotted a nurse who seemed to be in her 30s.

The nurse also spotted her and asked.

“Do you need something?”

“Um... I'm here to find a patient. He's name is Agus Benjamin...”

“Who?”

The nurse tilted her head as though she had never heard of his name before.

“Agus Benjamin. He's a Latino like me and also old.”

“Ah~ the Latino man.”

As expected, a Latino man seemed to be rare as the nurse quickly recalled.

“I remember him now. He was an extremely shy and quiet person... but...”

The nurse's face turned a bit dark.

“I believe he passed away already. About 2 years ago.”

Tomer immediately felt her heart drop and her throat clog up.

Was he really dead? On his own, so peacefully, in such a calm place?

Her hands trembled, and a fiery rage surged up from the depths of her heart.

But no, it was still too early to come to a conclusion.

Until she saw a definitive proof, she refused to believe it.

“Um, this person—”

Tomer rummaged through her pocket, trying to take out a bundle of photos, but her hand lost strength and the photos fell to the floor.

The nurse walked up and helped pick them up.

“T-Thank you.”

“No, it’s fine... Ah, it is him. He looks a bit younger in the photos, but this is definitely him. I remember clearly because he looked different from all the other patients.”

The nurse explained as she looked at the photos.

Tomer found it hard to maintain her sanity, but she managed to endure her anger and ask.

“Then... what kind of a life did he have here?”

“I’m not sure... he didn’t really talk to any of the nurses or other elders.”

“Then did he leave behind a will or an inheritance?”

“Yes? Ah... um, I’m not sure. But even if I did, I would need to know what relationship you have with him...”

Tomer took out her wallet and showed the nurse her magician license.

[2-star Magician Jamer]

The nurse’s eyes widened in shock.

In a way, magicians were even rarer than Heroes. Even in Korean Magic Academy, the world’s number one academy, only 900 magicians graduated every year.

“I’m Jamer Jesus, and this man’s real name is Fernin Jesus. He’s... my biological father.”

Biological father. That was the best explanation Tomer could give.

Hearing this, the nurse became more compassionate.

“I see... but I really don’t know much about him. I’ve only seen him a few times while I was passing by.”

“Then do you know anyone who would know something about him?”

“Mm... if I remember correctly, there was a volunteer student who often talked to him.”

“Ah, really?”

The nurse nodded.

“Yes, I can’t remember all too well, but they seemed to be close. He even came by recently.”

“Oh, ooh! Can you tell me who that male student is?”

“Well, I’m not too close with him either... the head nurse was close with him, but she’s away on a foreign volunteer trip.”

“...Ah! You have a computer there. Don’t you have a record left?”

“Oh, you’re right. Hold on a minute.”

The nurse began to tap on the computer keyboard.

At that moment, Tomer’s smartwatch rang.

[Tomer, your mission has been terminated. We will deploy a new agent, so return. The disciplinary committee will decide on your punishment for failing your mission.]

[Tomer-ssi~ congrats on getting demoted~~]

“...Fuck that.”

“Duck?”

“Eh? Ah, nevermind.”

Tomer sneered at the fools who cared so much about hierarchy as Djinn.

In the first place, she entered the Djinn society because she thought that bastard became a Djinn.

Now that she had found what she wanted, she could care less about the mission or the disciplinary committee.

She didn’t care about anything else.

Tomer violently pulled off the smartwatch provided by Wicked.

“Ah, found it. It wasn’t recorded in the computer, but in the guest book.”

The nurse muttered as she held up a notebook.

“Really? So what’s his—”

“Kim Hajin.”

“Ah, Kim Ha... Kim Hajin?”

“Yep, Kim Hajin. But it will be hard to meet him because he was admitted to Cube. He’s an aspiring Hero.”

A familiar name and a background that matched too well to be a coincidence. Tomer fell into a daze.



End of Cube’s break.

Currently, I was walking through a metasequoia road.

Many trees were planted in Cube for the sake of maintaining a certain concentration of mana, making the roads this time of the year a popular date course.

Naturally, I could see many couples walking near me.

If it was like this in autumn, I wondered how bad it would be in spring when cherry blossoms bloomed.

This was all because of lack of discipline. Because dating was only technically prohibited, couples on a date could always say they were friends and no one would really care.

Tok, tok.

While I was walking grumpily, someone tapped on my back.

“Huh?”

When I turned around, I saw a girl staring at me with her arms crossed.

Her black dress shone beautifully, and her smooth, silky hair was perfectly maintained.

“What’s up?”

“Here.”

Yoo Yeonha gave me a document envelope.

“What’s this?”

“The things I promised before.”

“.....”

Promise? What promise?

I tilted my head and checked the content of the envelope.

Inside were 20 carefully wrapped pills and several documents.

It was then that I remembered.

“They were made from refining half of the ginseng you gave me before.”

“Half?”

“We needed to keep some to appeal to the market. We’re planning on using the other half in various ways later. We’ll give you company stocks to make up for its cost, and when things turn out well in the future, we’ll make you the other half of the medicine.”

“That’s fine with me.”

She was outright saying she spent half of the ginseng as she liked, but I didn’t mind since I knew Yoo Yeonha wasn’t the type to backstab someone.

In fact, Yoo Yeonha was the type who *got* backstabbed. Once someone earned her trust, the Yoo Yeonha of this time had the tendency to trust that person too much.

In truth, that was only natural. After all, she was only 17 years old.

The internal power struggle of such a massive guild was too dark and complicated for a 17-year-old girl to overcome.

...Ah.

Come to think of it, that event should be coming up around winter break.

The so-called ‘Yoo Yeonha Arrogation Scandal’.

“How are they?”

“Oh, are these what I asked for before?”

I took out one of the pills from the envelope.

“Yes. They were made from condensing the ginseng and mana crystals together. Each pill should be at least 100 million won.”

“100 million won per pill?”

In other words, I had 2 billion won in my hands.

“Are they worth that much?”

“Not exactly. But, the type of people who buy such pills get more suspicious if the price is too cheap. Also, those pills are a bit special. Using the same ingredients, we could have made 300~400 of other types of medicines. So they have to be expensive to make profit.”

“Mm.”

I checked the pill’s description using my laptop.

===

[Ginseng Pill] [High-intermediate rank] [Consumable]

—A medicine created by neutralizing mana crystal solution with ginseng. A glimpse of a skilled, meticulous technique can be seen.

*On consumption, strength, stamina, vitality, and magic power stats will be permanently increased by 0.001~0.02 over a 24 hour period. (note, the effect will diminish the higher the user’s stats are)

*Chance of Qi Deviation — 0.5% (consuming several within 24 hours will drastically increase this chance)

===

I was satisfied. Not only was it good for raising my stats, I could also modify it as I wanted to show even better effects.

“Eat one a day.”

“Yeah, thanks.”

Since I got something good, I returned the favor.

“Oh hey, take this.”

I took out a ginseng I kept stored in my Stigma. When Yoo Yeonha saw its faint brown glow, her eyes shone like jewels.

“Wow, you found another one?”

“Yeah, but Shin Jonghak will be mad if he sees this.”

At my meaningful words, Yoo Yeonha quietly stared back at me.

Even for me, it was impossible to find a ginseng every time I went to a mountain.

But it was a different story if the mountain had an owner, especially if that mountain rarely had human visitors, like Jinsung group’s Wind Mountain.

I whispered softly.

“I’ll leave it to your conscience. You can return it or use it.”

“Kuhum... well, Jonghak forgot my birthday once.”

Yoo Yeonha quickly understood what I was implying and smiled. As an accomplice, I also laughed.

The ginseng that should have entered Shin Jonghak’s stomach was now in Yoo Yeonha’s hands.

“Then I’ll take off now.”

“Yeah, see you.”

Yoo Yeonha turned back, and I continued on my way.

Then suddenly, my smartwatch rang.

[Um, it’s me, Jamer.]

It was a message from Tomer.

Seeing how her messenger ID was different, it seemed that she got a new smartwatch.

[What's up? Are you paying me back already?]

That was what I wrote back.

But no matter how long I waited, she didn't reply.

She must have gone to the retirement center, so she probably needed some time to collect her thoughts.

I decided to wait for her patiently.



“Hajin, Hajin~ what did you bring back~?”

“Meow~”

As soon as I came back home, Hayang and Evandel ran up to me.

“What, why are you guys so friendly today?”

“Un? We were always friendly~ right, Kim Hayang~?”

Friendly? Yeah, right. And what was up with Kim Hayang?

“Hajin, Hajin~”

Evandel hopped up and down in front of me, urging me to pick her up. I raised Evandel up and put her down on the couch along with snacks.

Today, I brought back a special roll cake.

“Whoa...”

Seeing the cake's white texture, Evandel's eyes sparkled.

I sat down on the kitchen table and swallowed a ginseng pill. Then, I checked the official schedule.

+++

[Mission Experience]

*Cadets are to select one of the six missions below to experience.

—Escort

—Tunnel

—Field

—Colosseum
—Group Monster Subjugation
—Dungeon
+++

Mission Experience.

As cadets, we were to experience the various missions Heroes would do. In a way, they were similar to combat training.

Each cadet had the same six options, and if my memory served correctly, Kim Suho and Rachel should choose the tunnel.

This was also when Lancaster slowly started to get active.

Wiing—

My smartwatch vibrated.

[Yo, Kim Hajin.]

[Which mission are you choosing?]

[I'm thinking of going with the tunnel ㄹ ㄹ]

[(emoticon of a hamster running around)]

It was a message from Chae Nayun.

When I was about to write a reply, a loud shouting rang out from the living room.

“Aaaaang, Hajin, Hajin! She keeps trying to steal my food!”

Looking up, I saw Evandel holding the cake box up high, with Hayang trying to climb up Evandel to get to it.

Just when I was wondering if they became friends...

“...Hayang.”

Hearing my voice, Hayang backed off.

Only then did Evandel put on a look of relief.

“Hajin gave this to me. You have your own food. Eat the cat food over there.”

Evandel scolded Hayang and put the cake box down on the table.

When I looked back down to reply to Chae Nayun, I received yet another message.

[Are you awake?]

The sender was 'Boss'.

That was what I had her saved as.

[Yes, I'm awake.]

“Ugyak!”

As I sent the reply, another ruckus broke out between Evandel and Hayang.

I didn't know what happened, but I figured I'd just leave them to sort things out.

[Little Apprentice, do you have a Violet Banquet ID?]

[No, I don't.]

[ㄹ ㄹ]

I furrowed my brows.

Did she just laugh at me through texting?

[Do you want one?]

[want one?]

[Typo.]

Laughing, I replied.

[It'd be great to have one.]

[ㄹ ㄹ]

She was laughing at me again.

What was she doing?

“...?”

Then suddenly feeling that things were too quiet, I raised my head. Weren't Evandel and Hayang fighting?

When I looked at the living room, Evandel was sitting on the couch pouting.

—I hate you, you always steal my food.
That was what she was murmuring.

“Hmm.”

Seeing how Evandel and Hayang had the same amount of whipped cream around their mouth, I could guess that they shared the roll cake evenly. Or perhaps it was more accurate to say they stole from each other evenly.
In any case, Evandel wasn't looking at Hayang at all.
However, Hayang was acting a bit strange.

Meow—

Hearing her cry, Evandel glanced at Hayang, but immediately turned back around.
She was pouting hard.
Hayang then sneaked up and sat down next to Evandel.

“Hmph, who might you be?”

Evandel muttered curtly and scooped away.

Meow—

Hayang chased after Evandel. Evandel repeatedly moved away, then plopped down in front of the TV. Hayang continually chased after her, purring cutely and rubbing her body against Evandel's body.
The corner of Evandel's mouth twitched.
Now it was only a matter of time before she forgave Hayang.
Hayang seemed to know this, as she continued to be playful.

While I was watching them with a fatherly smile, Boss replied back.

[I thought you'd say that, so I prepared a Violet Banquet ID for you.]

[The access code is qkenpwnkWSD394820##3. The ID is Fenrir, password is 'youcanchangethepasswordinyoursettings'.]

“.....”

The password was complex yet insanely simple.

[Thank you. But why Fenrir?]

[Fenrir. That will be your mercenary code name.]

[Ah.]

Fenrir, a mythical-grade wolf monster that appeared in Northern Europe several years ago.

It was world-renowned for devouring hundreds of Heroes and causing billions of euros of damage in property.

Although it was dubbed Fenrir, no one knew for real whether it was the real Fenrir from Norse mythology. As such, many people also called it the Demon Wolf, reserving the title Fenrir.

[That's quite a grandiose name. Isn't it too much for me?]

[I think it's fuffinf.]

[Fitting. You look like a wolf too.]

[Eh? Where?]

[Your chinky eyes.]

I looked at the mirror. Weren't my eyes pretty round? If anything, it should be because of my beard.

[If it's because of my appearance, can it be Lobo?]

[Lobo? Like robot wolf? That's a weird wolf.]

[No.]

I scratched my neck.

[Lobo. Like the wolf king...] ^[1]

"No, wait, why am I talking like I'm an official member? I never said I would officially join Jeronimo Mercenary!"

[Ah, wait, I still haven't...

“.....”

After thinking about it for a bit, I deleted the reply.

Now wasn't the time to play hard to get.

Soon, Chae Jinyoon would wake up as a devil. To prevent the tragedy that he would cause, I had to get close with Boss.

I already considered all other possibilities. Killing him was the only option.

The more I thought about it, the more complicated I felt.

I wrote up a reply.

[Do as you want. By the way, what about that 300 million won item we talked about?]

[I'll sebf it to yoru Violet Banquet ID.]

[Send. Stay online.]

Did she have small fingers? Or was she just bad at typing? She kept making typos.

Then again, Boss wasn't good with electronics even in the original story. She was weak with technology.

[Yes, I'll be waiting.]

1. Reference to “Lobo the King of Currumpaw” by Ernest Thompson Seton

Chapter 109

Action (2)

The world's rank 1 guild, Creator's Sacred Grace.

Inside its guild building known as Ark, Yun Seung-Ah was currently looking around a new office she received.

[Rank 250. Vice-leader Yun Seung-Ah]

She rubbed her badge displaying her newly updated rank.

The office she received to celebrate becoming the world's rank 250 Hero was fancy and grand.

"Do you like it?"

Yun Seung-Ah only smiled at her secretary's question.

"...Right, don't I have a schedule for Cube's Mission Experience?"

"Yes. October 5th, next Monday, Vice-leader Yun will be in charge of the tunnel."

"Is that so?"

Yun Seung-Ah sat down on her chair.

"Mm~"

Feeling the comfy leather seat of the blood alligator, she hummed in joy.

"I can't believe it's October already... time sure flies."

"You're right."

"So, are there any interesting news?"

“There’s one. It seems Jeronimo Mercenary has a new recruit.”

“Oh, really?”

Yun Seung-Ah’s eyes flickered with interest.

Jeronimo Mercenary had a deep relationship with her as well. Just like other top ranking guilds, Creator’s Sacred Grace was made up of several teams, and each team had a different delegated task. Yun Seung-Ah started her career in the Djinn Eradication Team, and the help of mercenaries was often required for Heroes to fight Djinns.

“Has his codename been determined?”

“Although we aren’t sure, our sources are saying it’s Fenrir.”

“Oh?”

Yun Seung-Ah let out a small exclamation of surprise.

“That’s quite a grandiose codename.”

Yun Seung-Ah had seen Fenrir before. Creator’s Sacred Grace also participated in the battle with that monster ten or so years ago, and valuable data on that monster still remained in their video records.

“Yes, but he specializes in assassination and sniping.”

“...Really? That’s not very fitting considering his codename. After all, the Demon Wolf Fenrir was a monster that tore everything apart with its teeth.”

Assassination and sniping.

Although they were both related to killing someone, mercenaries who specialized in this field were often given the limelight, as the primary enemies of humanity were Djinns rather than monsters.

“Since he joined Jeronimo Mercenary, he should be an extraordinary specialist in this field. They didn’t reveal his identity?”

“No, our sources only heard rumors about him joining. Not much else is known about

him.”

“Mm~ I’m looking forward to it. They make a spotlight video for every new recruit.”

These spotlight videos were officially called mercenary cinematics, and they showcased the spotlighted mercenary’s Gift and power. Jeronimo Mercenary started with 13 members, and they chose this method to advertise themselves every time a new member was added.

“It’s not looking like a new mercenary cinematic will come out.”

“Mm... well, I’m looking forward to it.”

Yun Seung-Ah felt her heart beat. It was almost as though she received news of her favorite game receiving a sequel.

That was how much Yun Seung-Ah liked using ‘Jeronimo Mercenary’ as a blade.



[Yi Yeonghan-nim invited Kim Suho-nim, Kim Hajin-nim, Yi Jiyeon-nim, Rachel-nim, Chae Nayun-nim, Hazuki-nim, and 3 others.]

Yi Yeonghan: [Hihi. This is the group chat for the tunnel team. Chae Nayun told me to make one.]

Chae Nayun: [?When did I say that?]

Yi Yeonghan: [??Huh?]

Chae Nayun: [What]

Kim Suho: [Mm? What’s up with this group chat? What is it for?]

Yi Jiyeon: [Hi Suho~ ㅎ.ㅎ]

Yi Yeonghan: [I don’t know. Chae Nayun told me to make it.]

Kim Suho: [Oh, hey.]

Kim Suho: [Chae Nayun did?]

Chae Nayun: [No no, it wasn’t me. Yi Yeonghan, do you want to die?]

Xie Chen: [Hello~]

Yi Yeonghan: [Oh~ it’s been a while, Chen!]

Yi Yeonghan: [Chae Nayun messaged me. She said to create a group chat, so we can move around together]

Chae Nayun: [When did I say that?? It isn’t me ⇨ really ⇨ you know that he’s a

pathological liar, right?]

“...The heck is this?”

When I came back from showering, there were 500 or so new messages on my smartwatch.

It seemed I was in a group chat for the tunnel team.

“Was something like this in the original story?”

I didn't think so.

I skimmed through the messages.

Cadets usually went to their missions on their own by 10 A.M. By the look of it, they were talking about meeting up and going as a group.

“Hm...”

Now that I understood the gist of the conversation, I sent a message.

Not to the group, but to Rachel.

[Rachel-ssi, are you going with the group?]

[Yes, I am.]

[Then you should wear what your attendant gives you.]

[...Why =_=?]

“...Ah, what do I do?”

In truth, Rachel has been my biggest concern lately. I had to give her the Butterfly Seedling Dust, but I just couldn't think of a method to give it to her.

“Should I put it in an accessory?”

The Butterfly Seedling Dust only adhered to targets with hidden potentials.

So, if I could seal up the Butterfly Seedling Dust in an ordinary necklace or bracelet and have Rachel wear it, the dust would naturally seep into her.

“Hm.”

That seemed like a decent plan.

Since a necklace would be too overbearing, a bracelet should do.

I could say that she did a good job on the team challenge and use that as an excuse.

“Perfect.”

I entered an accessory shop with my smartwatch.

I picked out a decently priced accessory that was about 100,000 won.

At that moment, I received a message.

[Hey, did you use to do volunteer work?]

It was Tomer.

[Yeah, I did. But why?]

[...No reason. I was just thinking maybe I should do it too.]

[That’s a good idea.]

[But have you ever met a Latino like me while you were volunteering?]

“Eh?”

Did she not find her father’s letter? What happened when she went to that retirement center?

“Ah, she must have met a different nurse.”

If she didn’t meet the head nurse like I did, there was a high chance she didn’t hear about the letter.

I replied.

[Yeah, I have. Why?]

But no matter how long I waited, Tomer didn’t reply.

Was she planning to message me a week later again?

Well, things must be complicated for Tomer, so I could somewhat understand it.

“Hajin, Hajin~”

Evandel called me from the living room.

I put on a t-shirt and walked over.

Hayang was lying on the couch, while Evandel was busily making something in front of the kitchen table.

I quietly watched her for a moment. Two sharply slanted eyes, a protruding mouth, and a four-legged body with a rough hackles.

It was a wolf.

“Wow, what’s this? It looks so good!”

I sat down next to Evandel and stroked her head. Evandel laughed joyfully and pushed the wolf to me.

“Here, it’s Hajin’s.”

“Mine?”

“Un, un. Look.”

Evandel tapped the small wolf’s back. Immediately afterwards, the white wolf that was frozen stiff suddenly developed color and ran into my chest growling.

“Whoa!”

Startled, I closed my eyes and fell on my back.

I quickly opened them back up, but the wolf was nowhere to be seen. Only Evandel was looking at me with mischievous eyes.

“What, did you pull a prank on me? You~!”

“Ah! No, no, uhehe, ah, uhihihi, ahahahaha~”

I tickled Evandel’s sides.

Evandel was especially ticklish. Just tickling her sides was enough to send her crying

and rolling around. But since tickling was too harsh of a punishment, I only continued for 30 seconds.

“Aaang... but it’s a present...”

Evandel muttered out of breath on the floor.

Only then did I realize that something was off and look down at my chest, where the wolf jumped into.

There, I was branded with a wolf symbol.

“What’s this?”

I checked my smartwatch.

===

[Buff – Infused Ghost Wolf. The wolf recognizes you as its master.]

—Energy of the Wolf

*Increases strength, stamina, speed, and vitality by 0.1 point.

—Sixth Sense of the Wolf

*When a life-threatening danger is sensed, a huge wolf will emerge to protect its master.

—Movement of the Wolf

*You make less sound while walking.

===

“...Oh wow.”

Evandel had finally learned how to make something useful. By the look of it, she wanted to show off to me and earn my praise, but I had misunderstood her instead. Feeling sorry, I hugged her tightly.

“Thank you.”

“.....”

Evandel didn’t say anything. When I looked down, wondering whether she was angry, I found her sound asleep.

She must have used up quite a bit of her physical and mental energy to create this wolf.

“Cutie.”

I picked her up and carefully put her down on the bed.

When I came back out to the living room, I saw that I received an alert from Violet Banquet.

[You received an item.]

It was likely from Boss.

A purple portal appeared in front of the laptop screen.

PONG!

A cylindrical object the size of a baseball popped out from the portal.

Although it looked like a Yoplait on the outside, it was actually something called an Under Armor.

===

[Pinnacle-grade Under Armor] [Pinnacle-grade] [Partial Artifact]

[Stored Mana 5000/5000]

—Body Reinforcement

*Increases strength, stamina, vitality, and speed by 0.3 points.

—Artifact Transformation

*Uses stored mana to activate the following effects:

-Haste

-High-rank Defense Enhancement

—Body Shape Correction

*Corrects to your body shape upon equipment.

—Underwater Mask

*Can create a mask that allows you to breathe underwater.

===

Under Armor, a state-of-the-art defense equipment created by refining artifacts with magic engineering.

“Let’s see...”

When I put the cylinder on my bare chest and infused some magic power into it...

Chwaak—

A dark blue mana spread out of the cylinder and enveloped my body.

As a defense equipment made out of mana-producing crystals, an Under Armor easily

surpassed 300 million won.

Considering the quality of this Under Armor, it could easily be a billion won or more...

As I thought, Boss had the tendency to undervalue items.

As I put the armor away, I made sure to text Boss a thank you message.



The next day, 9 A.M.

The tunnel team met in front of the Cube Portal Station as promised in the group chat.

With the exception of one person.

“Isn’t Kim Hajin always the last one? Don’t you think so too, Rachel-ssi?”

Yi Yeonghan asked Rachel. He tried to act friendly, but Rachel didn’t react in any way. In fact, her eyes seemed to be saying, ‘it’s bad to talk about someone behind his back.’

“...Kuhum. Ah, there he is.”

Yi Yeonghan pointed to the distance, feeling a bit awkward.

There, a student who wasn’t student-like at all was walking forward.

His hair was pushed up neatly in a pomade style, his beard was trimmed nicely, and he was wearing a black jacket and boots that made him look like he was in his mid-20s.

“He didn’t shave his beard yet. Maybe it’s because a certain someone praised him for it.”

Yi Yeonghan muttered quietly as he nudged Chae Nayun’s shoulder. Flustered, Chae Nayun’s face became flushed.

“W-What about me.”

“What~?”

“I-It’s not like that! He even ignored all the messages I sent him.”

“Oh~? You even messaged him first~?”

“Ii, iik.”

As Chae Nayun trembled in anger, Kim Hajin joined up with the group.

“Kim Hajin, you’re three minutes late.”

Yi Yeonghan tapped on his smartwatch as he clicked his tongue.

“Ah, sorry.”

“It’s fine, it’s only three minutes. Anyways Hajin, you look great today.”

Kim Suho said as he nudged Kim Hajin’s arm.

“Like you’re one to speak.”

Kim Hajin placed his hand on Kim Suho’s waist in response. Chae Nayun was disgusted by how close they became.

“I’ll forgive you since it was only three minutes. Alright, let’s go to Busan~!”

The leader of today’s group was Yi Yeonghan. Despite often being the butt of the joke, he was still the class president.

The group took the Portal to Seoul, then to their destination, Busan.

The most famous tunnel in Busan was the underwater tunnel.

Constructed by the world-renowned architect, Kim Kyungwan, it passed through the ocean, connecting Japan and China.

The purpose of this tunnel wasn’t trade, but subjugation of sea dwelling monsters and Dungeons.

“...Hey.”

As the group walked to the underwater tunnel’s entrance, Chae Nayun tapped on Kim Hajin’s shoulder.

“What.”

“Why didn’t you shave?”

“Hm?”

The answer was simple. It was because the beard's 0.5 charm buff would disappear. Kim Hajin retorted half-heartedly.

"Just because."

"...Just because?"

"What."

"No, nothing. By the way, why aren't you replying to my texts? It says you read them too."

To be completely honest, Kim Hajin was playing hard to get. Just thinking about it seemed to make Chae Nayun mad as she frowned strongly.

"I forgot."

"What?"

"Ah, over there!"

At that moment, Yi Yeonghan pointed to the distance. A woman was standing in front of the entrance to the underwater tunnel.

"Whoa! Isn't that Yun Seung-Ah Hero-nim!?"

Hearing Yi Yeonghan, the eyes of the cadets flickered.

The world's rank 250 Hero, Yun Seung-Ah.

Possessing both beauty and talent, she was often lauded as the future of Korea and looked up to by both civilians and Heroes. In front of such a great figure, a few cadets froze up completely.

When Yun Seung-Ah noticed that we spotted her, she took a step forward. In an instant, a powerful gale stormed and her single step covered 200 meters.

"Whoa!"

"Ah!"

It was teleportation using magic power combustion.
Her sudden appearance caused several cadets to jump back in surprise.

“Hello, everyone.”

Meanwhile, Yun Seung-Ah scanned the group with a leisurely smile.

“Suho-ssi, Nayun-ssi, Yeonghan-ssi...”

Then, she began to recite each cadet’s name.

“Rachel-ssi, and... Hajin-ssi? Is that you, Hajin-ssi?”

“Yes.”

“Oh my, you changed quite a lot. You... even grew a beard.”

Kim Hajin nodded silently.

“Good morning, everyone. Mm... I’m not good with words, so let’s just head down immediately.”

Yun Seung-Ah gestured with her hand, and everyone followed after her like ducklings following their mother.

Yun Seung-Ah and the cadets got on the elevator.

As the elevator went down, Yun Seung-Ah explained.

“This underwater tunnel is extremely useful. It allows us to hunt sea monsters and serves as a pathway leading to underwater Dungeons.”

Ding~

It didn’t take long for the elevator to arrive underground.

The underwater tunnel was truly massive. It was as wide as a four-lane highway going both ways and as high as two ogres combined.

Even in reality, the tunnel had rest areas, restaurants, and vehicles driving through.

“We’re still underground, but as we walk farther down the tunnel, you’ll find that we’re surrounded by water. It’s quite a beautiful view.”

Following Yun Seung-Ah's lead, the group began to walk.

"As you're walking down this wide main road, you'll see other roads forking out every once in a while. You can see where those roads lead to by reading the sign. If it says D, it leads to a Dungeon. If it says M, it leads to monsters..."

Tiriring— Tiriring—

Shortly afterwards, Yun Seung-Ah's smartwatch rang loudly. Yun Seung-Ah frowned and checked its content.

"...Ah shoot, it looks like there's an emergency situation at the end of the tunnel. I'll have to go ahead..."

Yun Seung-Ah made an awkward smile.

"I'll come back quickly, so you can just take a look around in the meanwhile."

"Yes!"

The cadets replied loud and clear.

"Don't go too far. Stay in groups of 2 and check out the sideroads."

Yun Seung-Ah was about to leave when she suddenly turned around and snapped her fingers.

"Ah, I'll form the groups fairly."

Yun Seung-Ah projected a smartwatch app that began to pair up cadets.

Kim Suho and Chae Nayun.

Yi Yeonghan and Hazuki.

Xie Chen and Yi Jiyeon.

Kim Hajin and Rachel.

The groups were quickly formed.

"Then I'll be back in a jiffy!"

Before Yun Seung-Ah ran down the tunnel, she winked at Chae Nayun.

However, Chae Nayun smiled bitterly as she watched Yun Seung-Ah run off.

‘You didn’t need to do that...’

Her gaze turned to Kim Hajin, who was laughing as he talked to Rachel.

“Tsk.”

Chae Nayun clicked her tongue and walked to Kim Suho.

“Hey, Chae Nayun.”

“Hey...”

Wiing—

At that moment, Chae Nayun’s smartwatch also rang.
She checked her watch casually.

[This is director of Daehyun Hospital.]

[Today, around 10:23 A.M., Patient Chae Jinyoon showed signs of waking up.]

[Although I can’t say for certain that he will soon wake up, it is surely a great sign.]

Hearing this sudden, unexpected message, Chae Nayun felt her head turn blank.

Author’s note: Yun Seung-Ah’s age has been buffed(?). Now, she’s only 10 years older than Suho!

Chapter 110

Action (3)

Road D-3C.

Rachel and I were walking through this road together.

'D' denoted that this road led to a Dungeon, '3' denoted that it was opened third, and 'C' denoted that the Dungeon had been conquered.

On the tunnel walls were lists of monsters from the Dungeon and Heroes who likely participated in the conquering of the Dungeon.

"...It feels like I'm in an aquarium."

The transparent walls revealed a beautiful ocean view.

We were about 75 meters under sea level, which was too shallow for monsters above intermediate rank to live. As a result, the monsters I occasionally saw were all at the level of being cute.

I didn't find the view too appealing, so I just continued walking forward. After a while, I found that Rachel had disappeared.

"...?"

Wondering where she went, I turned around.

Rachel was far behind me, stuck to the transparent wall, observing a school of fish. Her ocean-colored eyes sparkled like emeralds.

I sneaked back to where she was.

Pretending to look at the school of fish, I rummaged through my jacket.

The bracelet clinked in my hand.

How should I give it to her?

Would giving it now be too random? I had little experience giving presents, so I wasn't sure.

Also, what was I supposed to say?

I picked it up on my way here... was too weird...

Thank you for everything until now... made it sound it like I going away forever.
It will help your development... made me sound like a scammer selling a product.

“Wow.”

At that moment, Rachel let out an exclamation of awe like a child. I followed her line of sight.

Beyond the tunnel walls, a school of tiny fish were swimming in a line, forming a giant blob the size of a whale.

“Amazing.”

“Right? Korea is the only country with an underwater tunnel of this size!”

Rachel explained excitedly.

“Is that so?”

“Yes! I know because I read many research papers on underground tunnels.”

Research papers and Rachel. It would be hard to name a better duo.

“I had to work hard to understand those research papers since they were in Korean... Now that I’m looking at the real thing, it’s even more amazing.”

“I see...”

In the world I used to live, research papers were mostly in English.

But in this world, from college graduation thesis papers to academic symposiums, most were written in Korean. It was the result of Korean being a shared language throughout the entire world.

“Yes, because reading translated versions often leads to loss in meaning.”

“Ah, I see, translated versions... right, I’m grateful that Korean is my first language.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle as I said that. English was the subject I bombed on the College Scholastic Ability Test. I remembered regretting not going to additional English classes.

“I’m jealous. Ah, apparently, English was the shared language before Outcall. Isn’t that interesting?”

“Oh... then—”

“Wow, look! There’s a shark... ah, a baby shark!”

“...You’re right.”

This princess seemed to love the ocean, as she stared in awe at the tiny shark swimming by.

Regardless, this felt like the perfect moment.

With the vast ocean spread out around us, watching the scenery from inside the tunnel...

“Huu.”

I drew a deep breath.

“Um, Rachel-ssi?”

“...Yes?”

Rachel turned her eyes from the baby shark to me.

Smiling awkwardly, I took out the bracelet I prepared from my pocket. Inside its platinum outer shell was the sealed Butterfly Seedling Dust.

“This might be too sudden... but it looked like the perfect opportunity.”

“.....”

However, Rachel only stared at me blankly. She didn’t say anything, and she didn’t try to take the bracelet either.

I muttered the excuse I prepared beforehand.

“So, about this. Remember how you helped me a lot before as the team captain? Everyone chipped in to buy this bracelet, so don’t misunderstand.”

Rachel still didn't say anything.

A second that felt like ten seconds passed by. I suddenly felt dizzy.

'Screw it.'

I held up the bracelet on my right hand, and held up Rachel's wrist with the other. Then, I forced the bracelet on her.

Click.

I put the bracelet on. Now, once she unleashed her magic power, the Butterfly Seedling Dust would seep into her body on its own.

I breathed a sigh of relief, while Rachel silently looked back and forth between me and the bracelet. She stared at me with a sorrowful look, then dropped her head. Her lips wriggled like she was about to say something. It was then...

—*KOONG.*

A sudden vibration shook the tunnel, and all the lights flickered off. In the blink of an eye, we were surrounded by complete darkness. I quickly took out the Desert Eagle, and Rachel also pulled out her rapier.

Tak, tak.

Soon, we could hear footsteps ring out. I turned to the direction of the sound. However, not even my Thousand-Mile Eyes could catch a glimpse of the source.

"...What?"

[You're with a companion.]

A dark voice rang out. However, I couldn't quite understand what he was saying. I could tell that he was speaking in English, with a British accent.

But because of this, I could easily determine who it was.

Lancaster.

Rachel's face stiffened.

"...Sir Lancaster."

[Don't worry. I'm only here to talk. Because I watched something amusing today, I'm not really in the mood to fight.]

I could only understand the first half of his sentence. That he was only here to talk.

[Here.]

Here.

As soon as Lancaster muttered this word, a corpse suddenly dropped down from the sky. The corpse was bloodied from head to toe, and its limbs were twisted in the strangest ways.

“Hiik!”

“Whoa! The fuck is this!?”

Startled, I cursed subconsciously. Rachel also seemed shocked. Her widened eyes turned toward me.

“Y-You cursed...”

“Ah, kuum.”

I coughed awkwardly.

Then, we turned our focus on Lancaster.

[That person is an agent who has been guarding you from the shadows.]

“.....”

[Princess, I am always watching you. I want you to know that.]

After that, Lancaster's voice disappeared.

I struggled to comprehend this mind-numbing situation.

I expected Lancaster to appear, but I didn't remember anything like this.

He should have sent a few assassins, making Rachel who awakened her ability defeat them and saying, 'my goal today was only to scare you—'

But what the hell was he chucking around a corpse?

“...The heck.”

Just like Lancaster said, there were no other threats, and the lights soon came back on. The tunnel was lit once again.

However, the corpse that made us jump was nowhere to be seen.

“Where did the corpse go?”

I muttered in a daze. Then, Rachel tapped on my shoulder.

“Hajin-ssi, let’s... go outside.”

“Ah, yes.”

We began to walk back with our guards up.

Because of the eerie and chilling atmosphere, I got goosebumps on my arms.

Rachel glanced at me and asked.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes? Ah, of course. I was just surprised. So who was that?”

“Um... I... I will tell you later.”

We came out to the main tunnel.

Everyone else was already back and was in serious conversation.

“Hajin, come here.”

Kim Suho found me and called me over.

“...What’s up with them? Um, hold on.”

I left Rachel behind and ran up to Kim Suho.

“What’s up?”

“Hajin, you see...”

Kim Suho told me that Chae Jinyoon showed signs of awakening and that Chae Nayun left running to meet him.

The moment I heard this... I blacked out.

When I woke up, I was running somewhere.



I ran to Daehyun's VIP-only hospital. I would have gone there on my bike, but I left it home today. As a result, I took Busan Portal Station and ran all the way to Daehyun's VIP hospital in Seoul.

"Haa, haa..."

After running like the wind, I arrived in front of the hospital.

My heart was screaming out in pain, while my lungs were seemingly about to burst.

As I was catching my breath, a familiar voice rang out.

"You heard the news?"

Startled, I turned around.

As I thought, the familiar voice belonged to Yoo Yeonha.

She also seemed to have come in a hurry, but her appearance wasn't shaken up in the slightest.

"Yeah, you too?"

"Yes. I have the duty to participate in all important matters related to the Chae clan. But why did you run over in such a hurry?"

"....."

Without answering her, I glared at the hospital.

With the Book of Truth, I predicted that the Devil's Seed would sprout in January. Since it was still October, it could be said that there was time.

However, I had forgotten about one thing.

That was the possibility of Chae Jinyoon waking up before the sprouting of the Devil's Seed.

If this were to happen, things would only get more complicated. It didn't take a genius

to figure out that killing an unconscious patient was significantly easier than killing a conscious patient who was walking around.

Suddenly, a piece of cloth touched my forehead.

Looking up startled, I saw that Yoo Yeonha was right in front of me.

“Why are you sweating so much? Are you that worried?”

With her soft handkerchief, Yoo Yeonha personally wiped off my sweat.

I looked down, wondering why we were at a perfect eye-level. She was wearing kill-heels.

“...Done. Here, you can have this.”

Yoo Yeonha gave the handkerchief to me.

Looking at the handkerchief drenched in sweat, I was surprised.

“Uh, yeah... thanks.”

I took the handkerchief and looked back up at the hospital.

A deep sigh came out subconsciously.

“He didn’t wake up yet, but showed signs of doing so. It’s not something to make such a big deal out of.”

Yoo Yeonha answered what I was wondering.

‘I see... that’s great.’

I turned back.

“Eh? You’re going back already? Don’t you want to see Nayun?”

Yoo Yeonha sounded surprised. I retorted as I walked forward.

“No, I don’t think I belong here.”

I moved my legs slowly.

I only ran for a little while, but my body and mind were drowsy.

Was this what mental exhaustion felt like?

“Haa...”

The moment I breathed out another deep sigh... my smartwatch rang with another message.

[Little Apprentice, I got the alert that you got yoru item.]

[Your. So when are you goign to take on your next misson?]

It was from Boss.

I realized once again.

She was... the only rope I could grab onto.

Clenching my teeth, I wrote back immediately.

[I can start tomorrow.]



Watching Kim Hajin’s figure slowly disappear, Yoo Yeonha thought about what he said.
—I don’t think I belong here.

“Pft. It sounds like a line from a drama. I don’t think I belong here~”

As she was murmuring in a deep voice and playing around, she received a message on her smartwatch.

[Yeonha, I’m heading over right now. Is Nayun doing okay?]

The sender was Kim Suho.

[I haven’t even met...

While she was typing up the reply thoughtlessly, she suddenly came to a realization.

“...Did he leave to make room for Kim Suho?”

Kim Suho and Chae Nayun.

Everyone knew that Chae Nayun had favorable feelings for Kim Suho. It was because Chae Nayun clearly acted different than her usual self in front of Kim Suho.

“Hmm...”

Indeed, if Kim Hajin wasn't dense, he would have realized that Chae Nayun liked Kim Suho.

Yoo Yeonha half-heartedly replied, [not yet—], and went into the hospital.

No, she was about to walk into the hospital.

But before she could, Chae Nayun trudged out from the entrance.

She seemed to have aged by 5 years on the outside, but had a faint smile on her face.

Yoo Yeonha raised her hand.

“Nayun.”

“Ah, Yeonha~”

Chae Nayun saw Yoo Yeonha and scurried up to her with a bright smile. Currently, she desperately needed someone to talk to.

Chae Nayun and Yoo Yeonha sat down on a nearby bench.

Yoo Yeonha then asked carefully.

“How's... the situation?”

“He's still uncon... I don't know. Um, the doctor said that the graph is spiking up and down. He chased me out, saying that Oppa needed to rest.”

Yoo Yeonha understood what Chae Nayun was implying.

“That's a good thing, right?”

“Yeah. There were apparently other cases like this, and those patients all woke up within three months.”

Chae Nayun then put her hands over her chest.

“I feel like my heart is about to jump out of my body. How embarrassing... I shouldn't cry...”

Chae Nayun lived the past five years of her life thinking that Chae Jinyoon would never wake up.

Her pent-up sorrow and struggles seemed to have overflowed as she clenched her teeth and cupped her hands over her face.

Soon, her true feelings came out in the form of sobbing and tears. Chae Nayun cried, trembling with her whole body. Her tears should be tears of happiness, but for some reason, it was sad and pitiful.

“.....”

Yoo Yeonha tapped on her back without saying anything.

Frankly, Yoo Yeonha had no way of empathizing with Chae Nayun’s story. Although Yoo Yeonha’s father was a bit obsessive and her mother was overflowing with ambition, it was a happy family nonetheless.

However, Chae Jinyoon had been in a coma for 5 years with no sign of awakening. The passing time could only have turned rage into sadness, sadness into frustration, frustration into despair, and despair into resignation.

But, just when all hope was lost, the possibility of returning alive had resurfaced. A family member who was thought to be lost forever was potentially coming back.

Yoo Yeonha couldn’t even imagine what Chae Nayun was feeling.

“Ah, *hic*... Ah, *hic*, my chest hurts.”

Once Chae Nayun’s crying died down a little, Yoo Yeonha spoke.

“Oh right, Nayun, apparently Kim Suho is going to come soon. That person already came by.”

“...That person?”

“Kim Hajin.”

“...Kim Hajin came too?”

“Yeah.”

Yoo Yeonha pictured Kim Hajin who she just met. He looked like he was about to cry and was drenched in sweat from head to toe.

“He was here even before me. He was covered in sweat.”

“.....”

Chae Nayun slowly looked around with an odd face. It was almost as though she was trying to find someone hiding.

“But he already left.”

“...Eh? Why?”

“I don’t know.”

Yoo Yeonha made a mischievous smile.

“Maybe he yielded the seat to Kim Suho.”

“...What do you mean?”

“Don’t you like him? Kim Suho, I mean.”

Immediately, Chae Nayun’s face stiffened. Right when she was about to say something, Yoo Yeonha turned her body slightly.

“Or maybe you *liked* him?”

“...N-No, it’s neither. W-What are you talking about?”

“Really~? That’s not how I saw it~”

Yoo Yeonha smirked and teased Chae Nayun. However, she seemed to have lost all her energy from crying as she didn’t react much.

It was then.

They felt the presence of people running toward them.

Yoo Yeonha and Chae Nayun simultaneously turned their heads sideways.

There, they saw Kim Suho, Yun Seung-Ah, and even Shin Jonghak.

Chapter 111

Action (4)

Rachel contacted the Royal Court as soon as she returned home. Then, she revealed everything that happened today to her butler.

That Lancaster had appeared and murdered the agent protecting her, but had returned without hurting her for some reason.

—Can you describe the situation before Lancaster appeared in more detail?

The butler asked with a serious face.

“Yes? Ah, um... I was in the middle of receiving a present from a friend.”

—By the way, Princess, you can use English when you’re talking with me.

“Ah, right, sorry. So um, about the situation...”

Rachel reported what happened in English. The butler rubbed his chin in thought, then continued in a low voice.

—Hm... perhaps Lancaster wants Princess to suffer the same pain he has.

“Yes?”

Rachel tilted her head.

—Lancaster lost the people precious to him in the London Incident. He must want Princess to share the same pain. He must have misunderstood Princess’ relationship with this friend.

“Ah...”

Looking back, it seemed fairly believable.

After all, Lancaster said he saw an ‘amusing’ scene.

“But that’s not it...”

Rachel looked at the bracelet on her wrist.

If that’s what Lancaster thought, he was gravely mistaken.

In Rachel’s mind, she wasn’t in any position to be intimate with someone else.

—Anyways, Princess, I can see that you’ve changed a lot.

“Eh? In what way?”

—In the past, you used to love eating and playing around like a child. But now, you’re calm and collected.

“T-That was before I matured.”

In truth, Rachel was quite playful until she was six.

But she was always responsible. Because she finished all her work before she went out and played, the queen, the royal consort, and Rachel’s butler could all only watch her with a smile.

It was only after that incident that her playfulness disappeared.

—Anyways, it’s getting late, Princess. You should go to sleep. We will let you know soon whether we will deploy another agent or hire a skilled mercenary.

“Yes... By the way, did that agent... have a family?”

Hearing Rachel’s careful tone, the butler smiled bitterly and shook his head.

—No, he didn’t.

“...I see. But please treat him well. I will also participate in the funeral.”

—Yes, understood.

Someone had died to protect her.

Although that put a heavy burden on her heart, Rachel hung up the call without showing a weak appearance.

“Haa.”

However, she couldn't prevent a sigh from escaping her complicated emotions. Rachel took out her earphones to soothe the suffocating pressure she felt. After putting the Bluetooth earphones in her ears, she looked at the music app on her smartwatch.

[If – Kim Hajin]

[Now I Wish It Was So – Kim Hajin (karaoke)]

[You In My Arms – Kim Hajin (karaoke)]

[To J – what I sang (karaoke)]

...

...

On it were several recordings she secretly made when she went to the karaoke with Kim Hajin.

Thanks to Kim Hajin's tender voice, she was able to deal with her insomnia to a certain extent.

On a side note, she also found out that she was a terrible singer through listening to her own singing.

“Today, let's go with...”

Now I Wish It Was So.

Rachel hit the play button and hopped into bed.



[I can start tomorrow.]

Seemingly encouraged by my positive reply, Boss contacted me the next day with a new mission.

==Apprentice Mercenary Mission==

[Difficulty: D]

[Reward: 400,000,000 Korean won or an item of an equivalent value]

[Goal: Attacking the Djinn group Jehon's human trafficking truck]

[Once every week, Jehon operates a human trafficking and human smuggling truck. At 10 P.M., two guarded trucks will cross the Weike Bridge. Attack them and rescue the

hostages.]

==

The mission location was China.

To be more precise, it was a road connecting China to Mongolia.

It was a trafficking and smuggling route often used by Djinns.

According to my setting, the Russian region neighboring Mongolia was a lawless zone, where strength reigned king. It was also the lair of Djinns who committed all sorts of crimes.

However, this 'lawless zone' had a society of its own operated by Djinns.

Although the UN refused to recognize it, this place was called Pandemonium and had the size of a small city.

When classes ended the next day, I went to Beijing through Seoul.

Once I arrived in Beijing, I made sure to always have a mask and sunglasses on.

Northern region of Beijing, an intermediate rank danger zone where monsters often appeared, and a worn-down bridge built above a river.

I arrived there after an hour of driving.

"...It's kinda creepy."

In intermediate rank danger zones, intermediate rank monsters appeared with high frequency.

So although the region would have housed a whole city in the past, not even a single person could be seen.

"Let's see."

I knocked down several short trees and blocked the bridge's sole entrance.

Soon, I received a message.

[There will be multiple enemies, but not all will be Djinns. Some are people drawn by evil and became the dogs of devils, and others are evil people who lead despicable lives. These are your targets.]

"...Hm."

Djinns were existences whose negative emotions were amplified through contracts with devils. As a result, weaker Djinns tended to commit harsher crimes, employing all sorts of methods.

Their instincts to become stronger and desires to be recognized weren't being met, leading to rage and being expressed in pure evil.

"That's nice to know..."

They were easier and less mentally burdening to deal with.

I looked around to find a cover.

The area around the bridge was like a desert. Although there was a forest nearby, the trees were all short.

There was no other choice.

I had to face them directly.

I got on my bike and drove about 600 meters over the bridge.

Then, I faced the bridge directly. The bridge and everything around it was in full view.

I checked the time.

9:35 P.M.

Their expected time of arrival was 10.

I weaved Aether into the shape of a chair and sat down on it. Then, I took out a cloth and wiped the Desert Eagle's barrel clean.

After about 30 minutes of killing time, I could see two trucks and four escort vehicles driving to the bridge.

"Here they come."

I slowly got up and infused the Desert Eagle with Aether, transforming it into a vicious sniper rifle.

Holding the sniper rifle up, I aimed at the truck drivers.

The truck driver in the front seemed to be drunk or high on drugs, as he was snickering with an unpleasant face.

I had no reason to hesitate.

I pulled the trigger.

TANG!

My clothes fluttered from the raging wind pressure. The bullet flew with great intensity, blowing up the truck driver's head.

There was no screaming or howling.

The truck window shattered and the driver immediately scattered into black dust. The bullet still didn't stop and even pierced the truck's cargo compartment.

Click—

I ejected the bullet casing.

The next target was the second truck driver.

He was still clueless as to what was going on, making him an easy target.

I aimed at the second truck and fired. Immediately, a white bullet pierced through the truck.

Kiiik—

With the drivers gone, the trucks skidded to the side and crashed into trees.

Only then did the escort vehicles notice the situation and come to a stop. The doors shot open and a total of 18 Djinns equipped with various weapons ran out.

Three with swords, four with spears, two with axes, three with bows, and the rest with assault rifles. I observed their movements as I took out a medicine from my pocket. It was a ginseng pill with its effects modified to my liking.

[Medicinal energy fills up your body.]

[For 5 minutes, all variable stats except magic power increase by 1.5 points.]

Only 5 SP was needed to make this modification. The low cost was likely because a permanent stat increase was changed to a temporary one.

I swallowed the medicine, activated the Under Armor's Haste effect, and transformed the Desert Eagle into assault rifle mode.

In the next moment, I could feel my body swirling with energy.

"Huu..."

After taking a deep breath, I stared at the incoming Djinns.

—他妈的是什么？

—你想回去吗？嘿！你这个婊子的儿子！

They were rambling to themselves. Of course, I had no way of understanding what they were saying since I didn't speak Chinese.

To be honest, I wasn't that curious.

“Shut up, will you?”

I aimed my gun at them leisurely.

Only then did they stop talking and rush toward me. Kicking up a cloud of dirt, they charged at me like enraged bulls.

However, within Bullet Time, they were moving like snails.

I first targeted the Djinnns with the assault rifles.

Six bullets, each to their head.

As they were unable to use even magic power reinforcement, they couldn't withstand the firepower of my bullets and scattered into dust.

My next targets were the ones rushing in with spears.

Although they managed to close in until they were only 200 meters away, they would be unable to step any farther.

“...Hm?”

However, they were clad in magic power reinforcement.

Although I was surprised, that was it.

Magic power reinforcement was different than qi reinforcement. The former was only a low-rank defensive skill that was the result of releasing magic power randomly.

Such an elementary skill could be easily broken through.

I fired three bullets simultaneously at the foremost Djinn.

The first bullet made the magic power reinforcement unstable.

The second bullet destroyed a part of the unstable magic power reinforcement.

The third bullet pierced through the gap in the magic power reinforcement and destroyed the body.

Only three bullets were needed to kill the spear warrior.

The world was still slow, and I was the only one maintaining a normal speed.

In Bullet Time, I continued to fire without stop.

Multiple sparks of light flashed from the barrel.

A barrage of bullets that slaughtered only weaklings.

I aimed like a sharpshooter and fired like a machine.

“.....”

Just like that, I fired a total of 30 shots.

With exactly three for each, ten warriors were killed.
Not even a minute had passed since they got out of their cars.

Now, there were only two left, the two Djinnns with bows.
They pulled their bowstrings courageously, but unfortunately for them, I only needed to flick my finger.
White light flashed from the gun barrel.

The two Djinnns scattered into dust.

“...Haa.”

Time returned to normal.
Feeling a bit lightheaded, I slowly walked over the bridge.
Of the two trucks, I opened the lock of the right truck and opened the cargo compartment.
It was then.

“Uaaaaaa!”

A man charged toward me with a dagger.
Caught completely off guard, my head turned blank for a moment.
The man’s eyes flickered with killing intent and his dagger glowed blue with magic power.
But before it could reach my heart, a giant wolf shot out of my chest and bit his neck.

“AAAK! AAAAAAAK!”

The wolf was the size of two adult men put together.
While the wolf was restraining the Djinn, I raised my hand and rubbed my chest.
I... wasn’t hurt.

“Whew...”

I breathed a sigh of relief.
Although I wasn’t hurt, I ended up making a potentially fatal mistake.
I should have been more careful.

“Kuaaaak...”

Crunch.

With his neck broken, the Djinn scattered into dust.

Next, I looked around the cargo compartment.

It was full with people who were presumably kidnapped. Their eyes were filled with fear and sorrow.

“.....”

[Mission completed.]

After sending Boss a message, I threw a smartwatch that a Djinn was wearing to them.

“The Djinn are all dead. You can use that to call Heroes. You can go home now.”

Then, the wolf that saved my life approached me. He was panting, seemingly asking for my praise, so I stroked its head.

At that moment, Boss replied back.

[Confirmed. We'll deal with the cleanup.]



6 A.M.

I stayed up all night at the Beijing Hotel and returned home around the time Cube's Portal opened up.

For some reason, the dorm room felt warm.

Was it because of Hayang, who was lying on the couch, and Evandel's ghost nightingales perched up on the TV?

With a thin smile, I walked into the bedroom.

Evandel was sound asleep on the bed.

I sat down on the edge and stroked Evandel's head.

As I was feeling Evandel's soft hair, I came to a realization.

This child has been my emotional support.

At the same time, I couldn't help but wonder when I had turned so weak that I needed to rely on such a young child.

“Ehew.”

I sighed.

Only a year had passed since I fell into this world.

I reached this point after only a year.

Once I spent another 10 years like this and returned to Earth...

Would I be able to go back to how I was?

Would I be able to forget everything about this world like it never happened?

“Haam~”

At that moment, Evandel yawned and opened her eyes.

She stared at me with narrowed eyes, then came into my arms with a warm smile.

“It’s Hajin. Hajin, Hajin...”

She murmured as she rubbed her cheeks against my chest.

“Oh right, Evandel, you saved me today.”

“Yummy, yummy food...”

But it seemed like Evandel didn’t care about that.

“...We can eat yummy food later. For now, sleep a bit more.”

I said as I rubbed Evandel’s back.



Three hours later, inside Veritas class.

Currently, I was slouched over the desk. Because I slept less than an hour, I was mentally and physically exhausted.

“Auu...”

When I was struggling to stay awake, someone sat down next to me and tapped on my shoulder.

“Yo~ Kim Hajin~”

I could tell who it was by her voice.

It was Chae Nayun.

Still slouching down, I turned my head to the side and looked up at Chae Nayun.

It looked like she was in a good mood.

In fact, she was beaming with joy.

“...What.”

“You didn’t forget your promise for tomorrow, right?”

“Promise?”

When I asked, Kim Suho joined in.

“You forgot, Hajin? We said we’d eat together.”

“Hah?”

Only then did I raise my body. Looking at Chae Nayun, I spoke.

“I thought you said you were eating together with Kim Suho.”

“Uh... ah, didn’t I tell you we were all eating together?”

“I’ll be there too.”

Even Yoo Yeonha appeared and stood next to Chae Nayun.

“Jonghak and Yi Yeonghan will be there too.”

“Yeah, it will be for all members of the time travel group.”

Chae Nayun placed her hand on my head as she said that. Startled, I stiffened up. Meanwhile, Chae Nayun straightened my hair with her own hand.

“There.”

Then, she smiled in satisfaction.

Dumbfounded, I glared at Chae Nayun. Even my mom stopped doing this to me after I hit puberty.

“Anyways, don’t forget to come. We’re going karaokeing afterwards.”

“But I’m busy that day—”

“Otherwise, we’ll invite you to a group chat.”

“That’s...”

I furrowed my brows.

Please spare me from that...

Chapter 112

Truth (1)

An underwater cave near England's Bristol Channel.

Chameleon Troupe founded a new base here. A guild expedition was planned near Suwon's abandoned factory and since they've wanted to move to a new base for a while, they used this opportunity to finally do it.

"Oooh..."

Today, the Chameleon Troupe gathered to assess their revenue for the third quarter and to discuss the battle prowess of their 'seat candidate'.

Or at least, that was their initial plan.

But because several members were busy with missions or personal affairs, only five had gathered for today's meeting.

Standing in front of these five, Boss displayed a video of Kim Hajin performing his mission.

"He killed 20 people in just 21 seconds. Is that even a gun?"

A handsome man with a gentle complexion spoke with awe. He was Chameleon Troupe's seat of Green, Jin Yohan.

"How can a gun be that strong? What a mysterious Gift."

"So? What do you think?"

Jain urged him to give his assessment.

"Hmm, I'm not sure, but he should be around the level of a high-intermediate rank Hero."

"What? That high?"

"Huh? How is that high?"

Jin Yohan's tone caused Jain to frown.

This was the problem she had with strong people. They underestimated the standard of lower ranks too much.

"10 high-intermediate rank Heroes are enough to beat you up."

"Nah~ that's an exaggeration. Maybe a hundred can."

Jin Yohan shook his head as he generously praised himself.

"Then what do you think, Jain?"

"I think he's... intermediate rank. Like Kim Suho, he should be about intermediate rank grade 7 to 9. I'm not sure about how he'll fare versus one strong opponent, but he seems helpful for fighting many weaker opponents."

Jain quickly pointed out Kim Hajin's strength and weakness, but if Kim Hajin himself heard it, he would collapse from being overpraised.

"Eeh, only intermediate rank?"

"I'm being generous too. If he has that much potential now when he's only 17... think about how he'll be in 5 years. He'll be an incredibly sharp weapon."

Jain had already come to her own conclusion.

That Kim Hajin had a weapon-type Gift that enhanced and transformed weapons using his magic power, and that he had an Anti-Magic Physique that transformed his internal magic power to have an anti-magic property.

"We need Gyeong for assessments like this. Is he still in the Demon Realm?"

"Yeah, that fool doesn't seem to want to come out."

Demon Realm.

It was another name for a place called Pandemonium.

Although humans avoided talking about it, Pandemonium was more lavish and hedonistic than Las Vegas, and was a place that anyone could enter, so long as they had the strength to break through the crowd of monsters surrounding it.

Cheok Jungyeong was currently taking pleasure in fighting in this place.

“What does Boss think?”

Jain turned the question to the leader. However, she didn't get a reply. Jain turned her head and saw Boss busily clicking on a gaming console.

“...Boss, you're playing a game?”

“Hm? Ah... it's nothing.”

When Jain asked, Boss retorted nonchalantly with her eyes still fixed on the console. She looked rather cute.

“Did you suddenly fall in love with electronics after exchanging a few texts with Kim Hajin?”

“.....”

Pibibip— A Game Over sound effect rang out.

Boss then turned off her gaming console and turned toward Jain with her black eyes.

“Jain, don't get cocky.”

Hearing this, Jain slowly averted her gaze.

But remembering how friendly she was when she was texting Kim Hajin, she felt wronged.

Feeling somewhat jealous, she changed the subject to Droon.

“Droon, you cleaned up properly, right?”

“Yep. The victims were rescued, and I ate the rest! Both humans and bullets.”

Droon said so with a bright smile.

Jain let out a sigh.

“...Say 'fed'. It's creepy saying you 'ate' it. Also, did you find out what that wolf was?”

“Yeah, it's Kim Hajin's pet!”

“No, that’s not what I...”

There was one thing Jain was unsure about. That was the mysterious wolf that suddenly shot out of Kim Hajin’s chest.

“Don’t worry about that.”

Boss stepped in.

“I will ask him myself. Kim Hajin seems to trust me very much.”

“...Really?”

“He’ll believe me even if I say you use red beans to make wine.”

“Well, if you say so...”

For now, Jain just nodded.



Two days later.

As promised, we met in front of the Korean restaurant Chae Nayun invited us to.

Han Jung Gak, a 3-star Michelin restaurant.

Although only five were supposed to come, I ended up joining as well.

“Welcome. Come in, come in.”

As a regular who enjoyed eating at Han Jung Gak since she was a kid, Chae Nayun led the group in.

Modeled after a traditional Korean house, Han Jung Gak’s interior was clean and homely.

We followed Chae Nayun to our reserved seats.

It was a long table for six, and I sat down on the innermost seat.

Next to me was Kim Suho, then Yi Yeonghan. In front of was Chae Nayun.

“The food here is amazing. You can look forward to it.”

Chae Nayun said as she looked into my eyes. Taken aback by her straightforward gaze, I looked down while pretending to nod.

Chae Nayun initiated the conversation in a cheerful voice.

“Being here together reminds me of the past.”

“The past?”

“1972. We were there for about 7 weeks. My skills improved so much while I was there. I haven’t lost once since I came back.”

“...Didn’t you lose to Rachel?”

“That was a tie!”

The others chattered happily. They talked about what happened in the world of the past like an enjoyable memory and spoke up about the worries they had about the upcoming exams.

Waiting for the food to arrive, I listened in silently. Then suddenly, I noticed that someone was acting strange.

It was Shin Jonghak.

“Oi, Kim Suho, is your exam preparation going well?”

“It’s so-so. What about you?”

“Have you seen me study for an exam? I’m different than you.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“Right, I’m different than you from birth. Someone like you who succeeded through hard work probably can’t understand.”

Although Shin Jonghak was showing rivalry towards Kim Suho, he wasn’t acting particularly hostile.

He should have been more intimidating if he was the same as in the original story, but Shin Jonghak’s current actions were mellow to the point it was funny.

Of course, this was a good thing, but still... I was curious.

Why did Shin Jonghak change so much?

“Your food is here.”

A waiter came into our private room, cutting off my thought.

All sorts of dishes like braised short ribs, soy sauce marinated crab, kimchi, and stone pot rice, were placed on the table. They were your typical Korean food.

Of the over dozen side dishes, only the grilled short rib patty was limited one per person. As it was also my favorite food, I picked up and took a bite.

“Wow, this is amazing.”

The patty practically melted when it entered my mouth, leaving an incredible taste that left me exclaiming subconsciously.

“Yeah, it’s really good.”

Kim Suho also commented from next to me.

He seemed to be the type who savored his food as only a small corner of his patty was bitten off.

However, I wasn’t that type.

I put the entire patty in my mouth.

“It’s good, right? Right? See, I told you it was going to be good.”

Seeing me chew the patty, Chae Nayun cheered ecstatically.

“It’s good, right~?”

“It is, so quiet down.”

“Huhu.”

I swallowed the patty and went back to observing Shin Jonghak.

He was staring at Kim Suho with hawk-like eyes. He seemed to be on the lookout for any breach of table manners so he could nitpick and attack, but soon, he gave up and focused on his own food.

I also looked down at my plate.

“...What?”

For some reason, there was another grilled short rib patty on my plate.

What happened? Did I spit it back out?

After looking at the patty in bewilderment, I raised my head. At that moment, my eyes met Chae Nayun's. She was smiling at me contently.

So this was her doing.

When I pointed at the patty with my chopsticks, Chae Nayun moved her mouth without making a sound.

'You can have it.'

"....."

Her kindness was a bit burdening.

However, the patty's savory smell tickled my nose.

Gulp.

I swallowed hard.

In the end, I surrendered to the patty and took a bite. While I was chewing on it, a sudden current of electricity sparked in my head.

I looked at Chae Nayun, who was eating bibimbap, then turned to Shin Jonghak.

Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, Chae Nayun.

In this three-way relationship, the biggest source of Shin Jonghak's character development was...

Chae Nayun.

I stared intently at Chae Nayun.

Did giving her the time capsule affect her too much?

No, that was impossible. Chae Nayun liked handsome men.

At that moment, Chae Nayun laughed.

"Why are you staring? Do you want me to order more?"

"Huh? Oh, um, no."

"Excuse me, Aunty~!"

Before I could stop her, Chae Nayun called a waiter.

"Can we get two more grilled short rib patties?"

With sadness and inexplicable anxiousness, I watched Chae Nayun ordering cheerfully.



The next course after lunch was karaoke. The group went to a karaoke bar near Han Jung Gak and took turns singing.

Chae Nayun was surprisingly good at singing, and Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan were decent as well. Shin Jonghak, whose singing Yoo Yeonha looked forward to hearing, was also better than average.

However, Kim Hajin was... on a whole different level.

He was in a league of his own, so much so that he would have been successful as a professional.

“Wow~ my ears are melting.”

“Why don’t you just go pro?”

While Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan were making a fuss, Yoo Yeonha glanced at Chae Nayun.

Kim Hajin’s singing had just ended, but Chae Nayun still had her eyes closed, seemingly savoring the lingering imagery.

It was then.

Yoo Yeonha received a message on her smartwatch.

[Come outside. I have something to talk to you about.]

The sender was Kim Hajin.

Yoo Yeonha glanced at Kim Hajin, then left the karaoke room.

After waiting for about three minutes...

“Hey, buddy.”

Someone called her in a friendly tone.

Yoo Yeonha couldn’t help but laugh.

“...Buddy? What’s up with the sudden English?”^[1]

“It means friend. Don’t you know?”

“Do you think I wouldn’t?... Well, anyways, you know how I am, right?”

Kim Hajin laughed and nodded.

Cutting straight to the chase.

Yoo Yeonha wasn’t the type who liked small talk.

“Of course, I do. I need you to make me some bullets.”

“Eh? Bullets?”

It was a request Yoo Yeonha didn’t expect.

“Yeah, but I’m not looking for manufactured ones. I’m asking for custom-made bullets. It’s possible, right?”

“...Yes, and Essence of the Strait’s workshop has state-of-the-art technology for it.”

Even the biggest bullet was smaller than most thumbs.

Compressing and injecting mana into such a small object was a state-of-the-art technology that was only developed in the 2000s.

“I know that. But also...”

Kim Hajin took out a small leaf from his pocket. Yoo Yeonha couldn’t tell whether it was a fallen leaf he picked it up from the ground or a fresh leaf he plucked off a branch, but it was still an item that didn’t fit the situation.

“...What’s this? A leaf?”

“Grind it up and put it inside the bullets.”

“Come again?”

After taking the leaf from Kim Hajin, Yoo Yeonha scrutinized it carefully. But no matter how much she looked, she couldn’t find anything special about it. Yoo Yeonha furrowed her brows and stared at Kim Hajin.

“You won’t tell me what it is even if I ask?”

Kim Hajin nodded silently.

“...I just have to grind it and put it in the bullets?”

“Yep.”

“Okay.”

“Thanks. Ah, tell the other guys that I’m going home first.”

Yoo Yeonha tilted her head.

“We’re leaving soon too, so why don’t you stay?”

“I don’t feel comfortable. Shin Jonghak is eyeing me too much.”

With that, Kim Hajin nudged Yoo Yeonha’s shoulder. Startled, Yoo Yeonha took a few steps backwards.

“D-Don’t do that... It hurts.”

“Ah, sorry. Anyways, I’m leaving.”

“...Yes, see you.”

Yoo Yeonha watched Kim Hajin walk away as she rubbed her shoulder. Then, an emergency message arrived on her smartwatch.

[Master, we may have found an incident related to Kim Hajin.]

Yoo Yeonha’s eyes widened when she saw the message.

[Report.]

[Something called Kwang-Oh Incident occurred on the year Kim Hajin was born. There is a huge cover-up of any information on it. One of our men was attacked while looking into it.]

“Attacked?!”

Yoo Yeonha quickly began to type her reply. The amount of effort and money she spent on finding her investigators lingered in her mind.

[Is he okay?]

[Yes, he is recovering without any problems.]

[Submit what you’ve gathered so far to me and halt the investigation for now. The safety of investigators always comes first.]

[Understood, Master.]

After ending the conversation, Yoo Yeonha stared at the words ‘Kwang-Oh Incident’.

“Kwang-Oh Incident... Kwang-Oh Incident... why does it sound so familiar?”

Then, she remembered seeing the phrase in a casebook inside her family home’s library.

No, rather than a casebook, it was more like her father’s diary.

Although she was only seven when she saw it, she remembered it clearly.

She couldn’t read it in detail because most of it was written in Hanja, but her father had scolded her harshly for reading it without his permission.

“...I’ll have to take a look later.”

‘Since Father is going on a trip this Friday, I can sneak a peek then.’

“Huhu.”

Yoo Yeonha felt proud.

Now, she felt like she could properly return the favor to her ‘ally’.

When she turned around joyfully, she saw Chae Nayun glaring at her.

“Hiik!”

Yoo Yeonha jumped in surprise.

“H-Hey, Nayun, what’s up?”

“I was wondering where... you went.”

With her chin, Chae Nayun gestured her to come back into the karaoke room.

“Uh, yeah... Oh, Nayun, that person said he’s leaving first.”

“What? Why? What did he talk about with you?”

Chae Nayun furrowed her brows and asked.

Finding this side of her quite cute, Yoo Yeonha poked her side with her finger.

“Ak! What is it?”

“Geez, you don’t have to look at me like that.”

“Like wh— ah, hey, aang, s-stop!”

Yoo Yeonha kept poking her.

Starting from her side to a more sensitive area.

“Ahng, st-stop poking me.”

“What was that?”

“R-Really, aang. Hey!”

Unable to endure it any longer, Chae Nayun covered her breasts with her hands.

“Why are you poking me there? Are you mad!?”

“It’s because I’m jealous.”

Even as she explained, Yoo Yeonha kept her eye out for an opening.

She couldn’t help but wonder how someone could have such a perfect figure with such a perfect squishiness and softness. On top of all this, her skin was milky white as well.

Poke, poke.

“Ah, aah. S-Stop, d-don’t. I-I’m ticklish, ah, stop—!”

Chae Nayun ran away from Yoo Yeonha’s sensitive fingering with a flushed face.

1. In case it wasn’t clear, Hajin says “Hey, buddy” in English.

Chapter 113

Truth (2)

I returned home before it was too late in the night.

As soon as I opened the door, Evandel and Hayang ran up to me. By now, I was used to Evandel's 'Hajin Hajin' and Hayang's meowing.

I hugged the two children and sat down on the couch.

I bought an animated movie, which I promised Evandel, and put it on TV.

Evandel and Hayang both became silent the moment the film distributors logo popped up on screen.

No matter how much I thought about it, Hayang's intelligence seemed to be at the level of humans. Not only did she refuse to eat normal cat food, she knew to be absolutely obedient to this household's ruler – me.

“...Wait a minute.”

Suddenly, I caught sight of the ring on my finger and Hayang's wagging tail.

I had a strange idea.

Who said only humans could wear rings?

===

[Homer's Ring] [Artifact] [Awakened]

A ring that was worn by Homer in the past.

Resonates with nature and endows its wearer with a crystal 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]

===

Out of curiosity, I modified the ring's setting.

[Intelligence Increase – increases the wearer's intelligence by 0.001 points every 24 hours up to a maximum of 0.365 points.]

[For one selected non-human target, the increase becomes 0.01 point per 12 hours.]

[40 SP will be used.]

“Huh? This works?”

I tried calculating in my head.

With 0.02 points per day, 18 days were enough to obtain the maximum stat increase.

Plus, the required SP was small.

...What if I got rid of the non-human part?

[The rate of intelligence increase will double for the first person who wears it.]

[250 SP will be used.]

The required SP was 250. It seemed the gap between a human and an animal was big.

“...Hm.”

I fell into thought for a moment.

The cost was 40 SP and 18 days' worth of time.

Would Hayang be able to help me more if she was smarter?

I looked at Hayang who was in Evandel's arms.

Although she might not be able to help me, she should be able to help Evandel.

...It probably wouldn't hurt.

I put the ring on Hayang's tail.

Hayang turned and looked at me, then found the ring on her tail.

1 second, 2 seconds, 3 seconds... She stared at the ring fixedly, then wagged her tail, seemingly satisfied by the ring's sparkle.

“Let's see how smarter you are in two weeks.”

I stroked Hayang's back.

Because of Hayang, I thought of the wolf Evandel gave me.

I turned on my laptop and checked the wolf's stats.

===

[Ghost Wolf]

[Servant] [Intermediate rank]

—The first Servant created by the witch, Evandel.

▷Basic Stats

[Strength 5.350]

[Bite force 6.150]

[Speed 7.550]

[Perception 7.605]

[Vitality 2.750]

[Magic power 3.850]

▷Special Skills

[Intuition (Advanced)]

*Ability to sense danger.

[Absorption (Low)]

*Strengthens itself through absorption.

[Tattooification (Low)]

*Merges into its master's body in the form of a tattoo, charging its magic power and strengthening its master's stats.

▷First Servant

*Its growth potential and hierarchical rank is superior to other Servants.

▷Unity of Soul

*Grows stronger to match the level of its creator witch.

===

“Wow.”

First, I was surprised by its stats. Its speed and perception stats were especially incredible. If its vitality and stamina stats increased, I could even ride it instead of my bike.

What caught my attention next was the word ‘Servant’.

“So that’s why.”

Then I understood why it was so strong.

The ability to create Servants was one of a witch’s authority. In doing so, a witch would separate a part of her soul to create a ‘clone’ of sorts.

As a result, Servants were stronger than a witch’s normal creations, and a witch was only able to create three to five Servants throughout her life.

In the original story, Evandel's most notorious Servant was the three-headed dog, Cerberus. I remember taking special care in describing it. A huge body burning with black flames... or something like that.

"...I'll have to give the Under Armor to him."

This wolf had the potential to grow into a real Fenrir.
But why did Evandel choose a wolf? Did I resemble one like Boss said?

"Haha, look at that, Hayang."

I could hear Evandel's giggling.
She was focused on watching the animated movie.
She laughed at the funny scenes, stared in shock at the serious scenes, teared up at the sad scenes, and moved her head side to side for racing scenes.

Woong—
I received a message.

[Traveling club. This Saturday, we will go to a festival in Busan. Please RSVP to say whether you are going or not.]

I furrowed my brows.
To be frank, the traveling club would get involved in some sort of trouble every time it went out.

"Vroom~"

Evandel tilted her head to the right following the car on TV. I carefully placed my hand on her head.

"Evandel?"

"...Yeah?"

"Let's go out and play this Friday."

The traveling club's destination was Busan. Since the festival was Saturday and Sunday, I should be able to grab a hotel room and play with Evandel on Friday.

“Play!?”

Evandel’s eyes sparkled.

“Yeah, it looks like I’ll have time on Friday. Since we went to Disneyland last week, this week, we will...”

Evandel’s eyes sparkled with anticipation.

“Go to a festival.”



Friday, 2 P.M.

“Combat magic is important, yet simple.”

Currently, I was in the middle of [Combat Magic and High-rank Magic Application] class.

I glanced at Tomer who was sitting next to me. She was jotting down notes as though she wasn’t affected in any way.

Recently, I was talking with Tomer a lot.

Tomer stealthily asked me questions on Agus Benjamin, like what kind of relationship I had with him and what kind of a person he was. As I replied to her questions, I set up devices to bring Tomer to my side.

The cremation urn of Tomer’s father should currently be surrounded by flowers I gifted.

“Most spells require you to refine the magic power inside your body. However, there are spells where this is unnecessary. The most well-known example is the Barrier spell...”

The class continued, seemingly without end.

Just when I was about to doze off, Tomer tapped on my shoulder. When I wiped away my drool and turned to the side, she gave me a piece of paper.

[How did you get close to that person?]

I looked at the paper, then at Tomer's face.
She had a serious expression.
I cleared my throat and began to jot down the reply.

[It wasn't easy.]

[So how? The nurses said even they couldn't get close to him.]

[Well... he didn't have a family. We were in similar situations.]

With that, I passed the paper back.
Tomer looked like she didn't understand what I meant as she began to jot down her next question.

[What do you mean by similar]

"...Oh right."

However, she stopped writing mid-sentence.
Since she should have investigated my background, she would know that I'm an orphan.
Tomer glanced at me with sympathy, then scratched out her previous sentence and wrote a new one.

[Got it.]

Next, I took the lead.

[You've been asking about him since last week. Why?]

[That person is my biological father.]

"...Eh?"

I wanted to poke her a bit, but I never expect her to drop the bomb.
I was seriously taken aback.

[I know what you're thinking. I feel the same way. I never thought I'd find someone

who knew him either.]

Tomer jotted down quickly.

[That person abandoned me and ran away. That's why I've been looking for him.]

I closed my mouth.

Unlike Tomer, I knew the truth. Tomer's father didn't abandon her and run away.

It was the opposite.

He had protected her by leaving. The reason he killed his wife was because she became a Djinn and tried to sell off their daughter.

[So, I'm wondering. Did that bas... person leave a will or keepsake behind?]

The South American culture back then was to kill off all relatives related to Djinns. Because of this witch hunt culture, Tomer's father had chosen to become a criminal. Although he ran away to protect his daughter, he had always missed her and wanted to see her. The letter he left behind was for that purpose.

[Yeah, he left behind a letter.]

Immediately, Tomer's eyes flickered with coldness.

[Where?]

[In a memorial, along with his cremation urn.]

[Where's the memorial?]

[Let's go together. I'll take you there.]

[Shut up and just give me the address.]

...Although the theatrical effect wouldn't be as strong if Tomer went alone, it didn't matter too much.

[Here.]

I gave her the address.

Tomer typed the address on her smartwatch, then wrote on the paper once again.

[By the way, today will be my last day at Cube. I'm not trying to run off with your money, so don't misunderstand.]

"Excuse me."

It was then.

Kim Hyojun, the chief magician from Seoul Magic Tower who was giving the lecture, pointed at us.

"Are you two in a relationship?"

Only then did I realize what position Tomer and I were in. Our arms were practically touching while we were writing secrets notes to each other.

Tomer quickly scurried off to the side, but the cadets' attention had already fallen on us.

"I don't think you guys suit each other... also, dating so openly is prohibited in Cube."

"It's not like that."

As I answered, I felt an intense stare on me.

It was Chae Nayun. Yoo Yeonha, who was sitting next to Chae Nayun, was taking notes without caring about Tomer and me, but Chae Nayun was glaring at me with puffed up cheeks.

"Cadet Kim Hajin? Come here for a minute."

"Ah."

"Ah?"

"Ah, yes."

...I knew this would happen. There was no chance Kim Hyojun would just let this slide. He was the type who embarrassed students to make himself feel superior. I scratched my neck and got up the front of the class.

“Cadet Kim Hajin, you passed the first semester with average scores all around.”

Kim Hyojun projected the scores I got on last semester’s tests.
Light Sphere, magic power emission, magic power harmonization, etc.
The scores were all between C and B+.

“Then what was today’s lesson about?”

“Uh...”

I didn’t know.
I was dozing off.
While I was at a loss for words, a quiet whisper rang out.
—Barrier, Barrier.
It was Kim Suho.

“It’s Barrier.”

“...That’s right. Can you demonstrate it for the class?”

Kim Hyojun asked.
Wait... Barrier?
I suddenly remembered a scene from the original story.
Seoul Magic Tower’s Chief Magician Kim Hyojun.
Just like I explained in the first semester, Kim Hyojun was a jealous, petty prick who bothered Kim Suho in various ways.

“Barrier?”

“Yes, try it.”

Feeling a bit nervous, my lips parched up.
I activated Stigma’s magic power and created a Barrier that was only big enough to cover my upper body.
Doing so cost one and a half streaks of Stigma.
A clear and glaringly blue magic power formed a pentagon that covered my upper body.
In my eyes, it looked quite decent. The pentagonal barrier had a vein-like circuit that efficiently transported magic power across the barrier. As magic power passed

through, the magic power circuit glowed with a pretty blue color.

Although I didn't mean to, what I created was a perfect Barrier.

Kim Hyojun made a somewhat displeased expression, but he soon put on a fake smile and praised me.

"...It looks good. The magic power's transparency is especially noteworthy."

However, he quickly added negative remarks.

"But it's weak, too weak. Everyone, do you know what the problem is with a cadet like him?"

He suddenly turned to the class and lectured as though I did something deplorable.

"It looks pretty on the outside. In fact, it's extremely pretty, as if its appearance is all that matters. No, that's the truth."

I glanced at my barrier.

It was just what Stigma gave me.

"Cadet Kim Hajin!"

Suddenly, Kim Hyojun pointed fingers at me.

"You are not a celebrity! A Barrier must be sturdy, even if its appearance isn't the best!"

Kim Hyojun ignited a fireball on his palm.

"The Barrier you created will be blown away by even this tiny fireball."

"Um..."

I stared at the fireball.

To be honest, I didn't think it would penetrate my Barrier.

"Cadet Kim Hajin, are you ready?"

"Yes? Ah, yes."

“Then I will now demonstrate why a Barrier shouldn’t just be pretty.”

Kim Hyojun didn’t throw the fireball. An instantaneous combustion of magic power sent the fireball quickly flying toward me on its own.

Boom!

A small explosion erupted, along with a light smoke.

However, my Barrier was perfectly fine, and the fireball scattered when it touched my Barrier.

Immediately, a heavy silence descended.

I was surprised.

As I thought, Stigma’s magic power was qualitatively on a whole nother level. Its only flaw was its quantity.

“...K-Kuhum, looks like it isn’t so bad. BUT!”

Ding—

At that moment, the bell rang signaling the end of class and cutting off Kim Hyojun.

“Huu.”

After letting out a sigh, Kim Hyojun glared at me uncomfortably and muttered with his teeth clenched.

“You can go back to your seat.”

4 P.M.

Friday’s final class ended just like that.



[5:00 P.M.]

A large, 1500-square-meter mansion located in Gangnam, Seoul.

This Western-style castle, which took up land that was tens of billions of won, was the family house of the famous Yoo clan.

Yoo Yeonha came here today as soon as class ended.

“Welcome home, Young Lady.”

When she approached the front door, a butler greeted her politely.

“It’s been a while. So... are Father and Mother home?”

Yoo Yeonha whispered.

“Master is on a business trip, and Mistress left for a seminar.”

“Oh~? How unfortunate... I dropped by to see them.”

“Should I give them a call? Mistress left not too long ago.”

“Yes? Ah, no, you don’t need to do that.”

Yoo Yeonha smiled happily as she gave her baggage to the butler. With even her Mother gone, the situation was better than she expected.

“I have exams coming up, so I’ll go up to the library to read Father’s books.”

“Yes, Young Lady.”

Although she knew her father and mother weren’t home, she still tiptoed upstairs to her Father’s library.

It was to look for information regarding the Kwang-Oh incident.

“I haven’t been here in such a long time...”

Her father’s library was filled with tens of thousands of books. The entire collection would be just as expensive as their family house.

However, Yoo Yeonha’s attention was elsewhere.

She pushed aside her father’s desk and moved the carpet that was underneath it.

A secret vault revealed itself.

“...Huh? It needs a password now?”

Ten years ago, it was only a simple box.

Yoo Yeonha thought for a moment, then pushed four numbers.

0429.

It wasn’t Yoo Yeonha’s birthday.

0816.

It wasn't her mother's birthday either.

"Hmm..."

Yoo Yeonha thought harder.

Although there was a skilled hacker among her investigators, this vault wasn't connected to the internet, so it was impossible to hack into it. Did she have to give up after coming all the way here...?

04290816.

Suddenly remembering something, she put together her birthday with her mother's. Bingo.

Peebeep— The vault opened.

"Let's see."

Inside, she found an old and thick diary.

It was the diary her father kept for 20 years. Flipping through pages of the diary, Yoo Yeonha looked for the word 'Kwang-Oh'.

Kwang-Oh, Kwang-Oh, Kwang-Oh...

"Ah, here it is."

[Today, I received a report on Kwang-Oh.]

September 9th, 2008.

Yoo Yeonha began to read the diary happily.

Chapter 114

Truth (3)

[Today, I received a report on Kwang-Oh.]

As soon as she read the first line, her investigators sent her a message, saying that Kim Hajin was admitted to an orphanage near the Kwang-Oh Evacuation Shelter.

Yoo Yeonha felt sad that she didn't have potato chips with her as she slowly turned the page.

Now that she was older, she could easily read Hanja, which her father often used to write.

[The media reported last night's incident as 'Djinn Attack on Kwang-Oh Evacuation Shelter'. That civilians and nine Heroes who evacuated to the shelter were massacred by a single Djinn...

...I would never be able to forget what happened that day in Kwang-Oh for the rest of my life.]

At first, it seemed like a simple recount of the Kwang-Oh Evacuation Shelter Massacre. However, starting from the next paragraph, the tone of the writing changed.

[...President Kim Sukho declared Jin Younghwan, who troubled him, to be a secret agent of the Djinn. However, I knew that Jin Younghwan was an honest man. His only flaw was that he was too honest, and perhaps Kim Sukho didn't want his embarrassing secrets to leak out.

However, Chae Joochul agreed that Jin Younghwan was a Djinn. Chae Joochul also wished for Jin Younghwan's death. But Jin Younghwan was a trusted man with many loyal subordinates. If he was assassinated when he was alone, it would have surely raised suspicions. As such, Chae Joochul ordered for a massacre, hiring a skilled assassin and leaving me to oversee the plan.]

“...?”

Yoo Yeonha turned the page back and read it once again.

But she couldn't understand the content even after reading it a second time. Thinking

that she misinterpreted a few words, she even translated it with a smartwatch app. However, the content was unchanged, and Yoo Yeonha continued reading her father's confession in confusion.

[On that day, I received a transmission from Jin Younghwan. His voice was urgent, but it was me who concocted that monster invasion. I told Jin Younghwan that saving civilians came first and drove them to a corner.

Kwang-Oh Evacuation Shelter.

Jin Younghwan tried to protect the civilians in that place.]

The neat handwriting Yoo Yeonha recognized pricked her eyes. Yoo Yeonha felt a strong headache.

However, she couldn't stop reading.

[November 8th, 8 P.M., the assassin Chae Joochul hired invaded the evacuation shelter. He murdered Jin Younghwan and his subordinates.

That was their end.

I wanted to bury this incident in my heart.

But the very next day, I received the assassin's report. That one of Jin Younghwan's subordinates was with his pregnant wife.]

Pregnant wife. Yoo Yeonha froze when she read this word.

Pregnant.

Kim Hajin was admitted to an orphanage the day after Kwang-Oh Incident.

[There was another interesting matter in the report. That an umbilical cord was found at the site.

Even in the face of death, the mother had given birth.

The corpse of the baby was never found.]

When Yoo Yeonha reached this part, she fully realized what happened. Although there was no evidence, her heart was screaming. Yoo Yeonha squeezed her chest, hoping that the baby wasn't Kim Hajin.

[This baby was fated to die. Even if he extended his life by a little bit, he would have no future. So, I set out to find him and kill him.]

When she read father's heartless declaration, she felt something inside her shatter. Pieces of her memory flashed by her mind.

—Don't worry about it and sleep. It'll be over by the time you wake up.

An image of a man who fought against an entire army of monsters to save her emerged in her mind.

He had put his life on the line to save her.

However, her father had led his parents to death and had tried to kill him as well.

[But I suddenly remembered April 29th, when my daughter was born. Although she couldn't do anything by herself, just her existence brought me great happiness.

I called the assassin and asked what happened. He said that he threw away the baby without killing him.]

Yoo Yeonha dropped her head and tightly clenched her trembling hands.

At that moment, a familiar voice rang out in her head.

—Hey, don't you think we can become good allies?

It was her own voice.

For the first time in her life, she had asked someone to become her ally.

Though insignificant, it was her way of showing her gratitude.

[In the end, I omitted information about that child from the report. However, I killed his parents and didn't help him live. Left alone on the cold ground, he might be slowly dying at this very moment.

I have no intention of denying this.]

—Buddy means friend. Don't you know?

In a not so distant past, he had acknowledged her as an ally. His voice from that time transformed into a sharp blade that struck her heart.

Yoo Yeonha's fingers trembled. She no longer had the courage to turn another page.

Her heart began to beat violently.

She felt an unknown emotion rising from the depth of her heart.

Guilt, resentment, anguish... She couldn't think, and she didn't want to either.

Cold sweat formed on her forehead. Her vision turned blurry as a world-shattering exhaustion engulfed her body.

[I've lived the life of a coward. Even if I dirtied myself more, it would make no difference.

So I decided to forget.

For my daughter and for my clan.

But I am leaving the truth behind in this diary.

Was I just trying to appease my guilty conscience? Or was it to spite Chae Joochul?

That, I didn't know.]

Kim Hajin's face and her father's confession joined together to form an image of a monster.

Yoo Yeonha couldn't withstand this monster.

Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin... his name flickered in her vision like an apparition.

She choked up, and her heart ached.

The torrent of emotions was too much for her to bear.



[Seoho Memorial]

On a dark night, a crescent moon shone down cold light.

Tomer was standing alone under this pale light.

She had already dealt with all of her personal affairs before coming here.

She couldn't predict what her days would be like going forward.

She lived her life for revenge, but now that revenge was impossible to achieve, it was entirely possible that she tears her father's will apart and takes her own life.

Kiik—

Tomer roughly opened the silent memorial's door and looked for Agus Benjamin's name.

Soon, she found a cabinet engraved with his name, which stood out from the rest.

[Agus Benjamin]

Inside the small, square cabinet was a cremation urn with the name 'Agus Benjamin' written in Spanish.

Because of the flowers surrounding the urn, it didn't look so lonely.

"What's this?"

Dumbfounded at the number of flowers inside the cabinet, Tomer pulled the cabinet all the way out and picked one of them up. On it was a small card.

[2024 April, Kim Hajin]

Tomer immediately checked the rest of the flowers.

[2024 August, Kim Hajin]

[2025 April, Kim Hajin]

[2025 August, Kim Hajin]

They were all from Kim Hajin.

Because the flowers were uselessly refined with mana, they didn't wilt either.

"...The hell."

Tomer cursed and threw the flowers aside.

Then, she found a yellow envelope inside the cabinet.

Tomer carefully held it up.

Written on the cover in Spanish was the phrase, 'To my daughter'.

Immediately, a fiery heat rose up from her heart.

She ripped the envelope open and began to read the letter.

She was curious what excuse her damnable father had cooked up.

[Dear my beloved daughter,

As I am writing this letter, I am wrought with complicated emotions. On one hand, I hope that you don't read it. But on the other, I hope that you do. I am also worried how you will feel afterwards...]

Tomer skimmed over the letter. It was partly because it was hard for her to get used to reading Spanish again.

[Unable to withstand the temptation, your mother sold her soul to a Djinn.]

[I couldn't let anyone find out that she became a Djinn.]

[It was the only way to save you from a society where relatives of Djinnns were lynched or executed.]

However, there were several sentences that she found hard to understand. Furthermore, she found them harder to accept.

Rather than acceptance, Tomer felt rage.

As far as she was concerned, her father was refusing to repent and was blaming her mother.

[I wanted you to go to Korea. I wanted you to live a more stable life in a more stable place. But when I came to Korea, you were gone. I gave up everything I owned to a friend to protect you, but I couldn't contact him either.

Feeling like everything in the world betrayed me, I thought to end my worthless life...]

Tomer crumpled the letter without reading it until the end.

She considered it a lie and was about to tear it apart.

It was then that two items fell on the ground from inside the envelope.

A rusty brooch.

The birthday gift her father gave her when she was little.

A small watch.

The gift she gave her father by saving up her allowance.

Tomer stared at the two items in a daze.

At the same time, she felt the foundation of her being rumbling.

Tomer leaned against the wall, and opened up the crumpled letter.

Collecting her thoughts, she began to read the letter again.

This time, slowly and thoroughly.



The Lotus Inn, Busan.

Currently, I was staying at the presidential suite of this luxury hotel.

On the balcony of this 500-square-meter room, I was sipping on a glass of wine.

Usually, a suite like this was hard to come by even with money. But because someone canceled right before I made the reservation, I was able to do so cheaply. Though, it was still a room that cost 8 million won a night.

In any case, luck made my daily life comfortable to no end.

“...What a beautiful view.”

Sitting on the balcony, I stared into the horizon.

The beach was within my view, and as it was the night before the festival, the streets were lit up with beautiful colors.

After arriving in Busan at 5, we enjoyed the festival eve until 9.

Water gun wars, fireworks, and even dining at a 3-star Michelin restaurant. I took pictures of Evandel and Hayang running around and having fun. My personal favorite was Evandel's face when she tasted a 3-star Michelin dish for the first time. For the first time in a while, I felt like I was on a true vacation.

[Thanks.]

That was the message I just got from Tomer.

This also made me happy.

Since the magic power contract was still active, our relationship as the creditor and the debtor still existed.

Now, Tomer should become my ally without careering off course.

“Wow~ look at that, Hayang! We're inside this paper~!”

I could hear Evandel's voice coming from the living room. Evandel seemed to be fascinated by the pictures I printed. I couldn't help but smile at just how pure she was. When I took a sip of wine feeling the fresh air, I received another message on my smartwatch.

[Um, Hajin-ssi, if possible... can you maybe teach me how to wield magic power?]

The sender was Rachel.

That wasn't the only message.

[To be honest, I was in awe when I saw the Barrier Hajin-ssi showed in class. Recently, I've also been feeling like I hit a wall... (ㄒ_ㄒ)]

Although I found her message cute, there wasn't anything I could do for her.

I didn't know a thing about Barrier, since Stigma created it for me.

Rather than that... a wall?

Was the bracelet not working?

I should have tested it before I gave it to her.

[I can even give you lesson fees (★ω★)/ !]

When I was about to refuse her offer, I suddenly thought of something.

Hitting a wall.

If the bracelet I gave her worked as intended, the Butterfly Seedling Dust should have

seeped into her, helping her reach a new height. It wasn't just because it awakened her potential. It was because Rachel's Gift was related to 'elementals'.

"Hmm..."

Rachel was a proud girl. I knew it well because I was the one who created her. The fact that a proud girl like Rachel was asking someone like me for help showed how frustrated she was with her current situation.

I couldn't blame her.

She should have been Enlightened at the end of the first semester, but it was being delayed for close to half a year.

[See you Sunday night.]

In the end, I agreed. All I needed to do was make the Butterfly Seedling Dust in her bracelet seep into her body.

"Ah~ what a great breeze."

Standing up imposingly, I leaned against the handrail. I looked down instinctively. From the presidential suite on the 60th floor, people below looked like ants.

While I was observing the people walking by, my eyes fell on a man walking by a seemingly average street.

No, to be precise, the man caught my eyes. He was dressed more fancily and brightly than anyone else.

Black hair, tall nose, and well-defined facial lines. This handsome man seemingly resembled Legolas.

At that moment, I was struck with an ominous sensation.

I stared at the man intently.

The man looked up as though he felt my gaze.

Although an ordinary person would have never been able to discover me with the distance between us, I could tell that he was directly looking at me.

The man smiled almost as though he was trying to confirm something.

Feeling my heart tremble, I returned a relaxed smile. Then, the smile on his face became even thicker.

For some reason, I felt like I knew who he was.

My intuition as the original author of this world was screaming.

A man who was born in another world just like Kim Suho, but had a completely different personality.

A man despairing at the loss of his home world, and betrayed and worn down by his desires.

A seeker of evil with twisted beliefs, searching for a false paradise.

The 'growth-type final boss' I designed, whose name I feared to utter.

However, I was only the original author.

I had no way of knowing what changes the co-author made. Not to mention, I went on hiatus right when he should have started to get active.

...Hold on.

Suddenly, I had a strange thought.

Did the final boss I designed look like that?

It was true that the Busan Festival was where he first appeared.

However, his smile was strange.

He was still looking at me and smiling.

I didn't remember writing anything about him smiling frequently.

At that moment, the man nudged his companion and gestured at me. It was as if he was saying, 'look at that guy'.

Right, he had a companion.

A guy and a girl.

They both looked up at me.

I met eyes with the girl.

A navy haired beauty with a sharp expression who resembled an elf.

Her eyes flickered coldly.

Her piercing killing intent pressed down on me.

This crazy girl was letting out killing intent just because I met her eyes.

"...Wait a minute."

Suddenly, I felt a bit scared.

Could it be?

The final boss was supposed to be the polar opposite of Kim Suho.

Could it be that he became... a she?

...Although it wasn't implausible, I hoped that the co-author had enough common sense to not let that happen.

Chapter 115

The First Encounter (1)

I calmly and carefully observed the final boss party to find out which of them was the final boss and whether that person was a he or a she.

The party started talking to each other while pointing their fingers at me.

With my Gift, I could hear their voices.

—Sahyuk, what do you think about him?

The man called the girl, who was still glaring at me, Sahyuk.

In that case, her last name should be Jin.

Jin Sahyuk.

I couldn't help but sigh.

I pressed down on my temple.

The final boss had the same name I gave... her.

I held up my smartwatch, but there were no messages to explain this situation as I had hoped.

Meanwhile, they continued to talk.

—Is he really looking at us?

Glaring at me, Jin Sahyuk asked the man.

—Of course, our eyes met.

—Really? But he didn't look like someone who was strong.

Jin Sahyuk was designed to be the 'growing final boss'.

Having the same or perhaps higher potential than Kim Suho, she would grow faster than Kim Suho and become the final boss by the end of the story. In a way, she was Kim Suho's true rival.

Even though she was now a girl, her fate shouldn't have changed.

If I had the bullet refined with Misteltein's leaf, she was an enemy I would kill even if I had to consume all of my SP.

—Sahyuk, train your discernment ability. Someone with the eyesight to look down at us from that distance and the courage to glare back at you couldn't possibly be average.

Just like the man said, my eyesight was special. To have the same level of eyesight as me, one's perception stat needed to at least be 15.

—And look at that beard. He looks strong too.

I rubbed my beard. I left it alone because I was getting SP just by walking around Cube, but it seemed it was time for me to cut it.

—Didn't you tell me not to judge a book by its cover?

Jin Sahyuk glared at the man. However, the man only laughed in response. I grew more and more curious about the man's identity. In the original story, Jin Sahyuk only had his lackeys beside him...

“Ehew, nevermind.”

This world was different.
I needed to stop crying about the original story.

—Ehem, that's because I have good discernment and you don't. Listen brat, stop glaring at him. Are you trying to pick a fight?

—He glared at me first! In fact, he's still glaring at me!

—I'm sure he's just attracted to you. Why don't you wink at him instead? Show off your beauty.

—What about a death wink? I can shoot a beam of magic power at him.

I flinched. This crazy bitch...
Thankfully, the man reacted sensibly and stopped Jin Sahyuk. Then, he waved at me and began to walk away.
I watched them leave to an unknown place.
Although I was caught off guard, I was able to ascertain the girl's identity.
But who was that man? Who could be standing beside her as her equal or perhaps

even a superior?

“Hajin~ can Hayang and I go swimming together~?”

At that moment, Evandel’s cheerful voice rang out.

“Hm?”

I turned around.

Evandel was swinging her legs inside the presidential suite’s indoor swimming pool, while Hayang was happily swimming around.

“Sure, but do you know how to swim?”

“Of course, of course~”

Evandel jumped into the pool boasting.

She didn’t need to change into a swimsuit because her clothes were made of magic power.

“Hayang, Hayang~ let’s race~”

Hearing Evandel, Hayang swam to the starting point.

I could clearly see that this mystical cat was getting smarter.

“It will be ready, start, then go. Okay? Ready...”

Evandel dragged out her word and observed Hayang’s posture.

Then suddenly...

“Start—!”

She quickly shouted and got a head start. Surprised by her cheap tactic, Hayang quickly moved her tiny feet and chased after her.

I smiled warmly as I watched them.

Was this what having a daughter felt like?

...Though of course, I wouldn’t be able to have a child like Evandel with my genes.



Saturday morning.

Rather than returning to Cube, I went to the new apartment I purchased.

Located in Seoul's Seocho District, each of the apartment's rooms was about 160 square meters on average. By buying this apartment, I realized that my financial power wasn't anything to be proud of. Even though I became a multi-billionaire through the stock market, buying this apartment cost half of my entire savings.

Of course, the cost of the land had to be considered.

Despite being a superpower in this world, Korea was a tiny country.

"Hajin, Hajin, where is this? It's so big~"

"It's our new house. We'll be staying here from time to time. You can think of it as... a villa."

"Aha~"

Just as she liked to do in Cube's dorm room, Evandel ran and sat down on the couch. On the other hand, Hayang walked around the room, looking for somewhere high to climb to.

"I should have brought the nightingales~"

Evandel murmured as she rolled around on the couch. Just to be clear, nightingales referred to all the birds Evandel created. Although they all looked different, Evandel called all birds nightingales, most likely because that's what I called them.

"Evandel, play with Hayang here. We have Legos, dolls, a video game console, and a TV here, and there are food and snacks in the fridge. Uncle is going to be out for a bit."

"Un!"

"Meow~"

Because I played with them all night yesterday, Evandel and Hayang happily agreed. I left the room and got on Augusta.

Listening to its clear engine noise, I raced through the road and arrived at Seoul Portal Station at 8 p.m.

It was an hour before the promised time.

I parked the bike and sat down on a bench inside the Portal Station's waiting room.

As time passed, people began to arrive.

First was Oh Hanhyun. As soon as he saw me, he widened his eyes, clearly surprised that I was here early.

"You're already here, Hajin-ssi?"

"Yep."

Kim Suho, who was the next person to arrive, also reacted the same way. He was also dragging along Yi Yeonghan, who still seemed to be half-asleep.

"Hajin? Why are you here so early?"

"No reason. I guess I was just looking forward to it."

"Ah, I get it. Kuku, that's cute."

Kim Suho laughed. Then, as though he suddenly remembered it, he spoke to Oh Hanhyun.

"Oh right, Senior Oh Hanhyun, Yoo Yeonha says she will come later tonight. Apparently, she's not feeling well."

"What?"

I was the first one to be surprised.

Yoo Yeonha coming late? Why wasn't she feeling well? There shouldn't have been any incident that would make her ill...

"Do you know why?"

"Apparently she's hospitalized."

"What? Hospitalized?"

My surprise turned into shock. Yi Yeonghan replied as he yawned.

“I think it was gastritis caused by stress? You know, she’s kind of sensitive. Chae Nayun even went to visit her yesterday.”

Speaking of the devil, Chae Nayun just came into the station.

“Yo~”

With a bright smile, Chae Nayun waved her hand and ran up to us.

I was puzzled. Chae Nayun wasn’t the type to smile so joyfully when her friend was sick.

“I heard Yoo Yeonha’s sick.”

“Oh, Yeonha? She’s fine now thanks to me staying up with her all night. Her complexion isn’t pale anymore either. She told me to go ahead.”

“Did she?”

In that case, she must have just eaten something bad. After all, Yoo Yeonha liked to secretly eat junk food.

“Alright everyone, let’s go~”

Oh Hanhyun smiled brightly and led us through the Portal.

It only took ten steps for us to get from Seoul to Busan.

Once we left the Busan Portal Station, Busan’s scenery was in full view.

Busan was fully deserving of being called the second capital of Korea. A blue sky, a variety of shops lined up on the streets. People of all nationalities were lined up in front of them, but they all spoke Korean.

“Today, we’ll go on a street tour. Busan is full of street shops: clothing shops, miscellaneous item shops, weapon shops, antique shops, and others. It’s my hometown, so just follow me.”

Oh Hanhyun confidently took on the role of a guide, and we followed after him.

“Busan, Busan~ Busan seagulls~”

Chae Nayun hummed happily and came next to me.

“Hey, have you been to Busan?”

“Yeah, obviously.”

“I see. Oh look, that must be Busan’s street shop road.”

Chae Nayun nudged my arm and pointed at a road filled with street vendors.

Together as a group, we walked in.

Clothes, weapons, scrolls, books... there were all sorts of items on display. Chae Nayun looked around with her eyes opened wide, then disappeared like the wind.

After about five minutes...

“Hey, try this.”

Chae Nayun brought a hat from somewhere.

“What’s this?”

“Try it on.”

Before I could say anything, she put the hat on my head, then glanced at me from top to bottom.

“Oh~ not bad. Do you want me to buy it for you?”

“No, I’m good.”

“But I already bought it, so just keep it on.”

With that, she disappeared once again.

I looked at the price tag that was still on the hat.

What kind of a hat was 350,000 won?

Since it was gifted, I kept it on and continued looking around the shops. I was looking for a proper antique shop, hoping to score some valuable items like I did in Clancy Islet.

At that moment, Chae Nayun appeared once again. This time, with a hot dog in hand.

“Hey, eat this.”

“Where did you...”

Before I could even speak, Chae Nayun stuffed the hot dog in my mouth.

“...Why aren't you eating?”

“I'll get sick if I do.”

Chae Nayun looked at me eating a hot dog and giggled like a child.

I stared back at her silently.

She was cheerful and energetic. Her brightness and positivity were making me tired. Was she like this because Chae Jinyoon's condition improved? Or was it because she... Suddenly, I felt my stomach churn.

A fundamental question rose up in my head.

Was I allowed to be this friendly with Chae Nayun?

An uncomfortable acquaintance. Wasn't that the relationship I wanted to maintain with Chae Nayun?

“.....”

However, one's feelings weren't so easily controlled.

Now, a dark thought that has been sleeping inside me began to emerge.

That it was okay as long as she never found out.

“Hey, try putting this on. It's going to get cold soon.”

After disappearing once again, Chae Nayun reappeared with a scarf, then put it around my neck.

“Where do you keep getting these things from. Take it off.”

“Ah! But it's going to get cold soon. Hey, Kim Hajin! Where are you going!?”

I ran away as quickly as I could.



I was exhausted.

The day went by while we were having fun, and it was already evening. Because it was autumn, the sun set fairly early, and darkness had descended.

“Today’s final course is... Busan Disneyland~”

We stood in front of our last destination for the day, Disneyland.

Inside Disneyland, smugglers should be conducting a trade secretly. But soon, they would get into a conflict that would devolve into chaos. Kim Suho would then run into Jin Sahyuk while trying to suppress the mess.

When we were just about to go in, Chae Nayun raised her hand after checking her smartwatch.

“Ah, Yeonha says she’s here now.”

Immediately afterward, a limousine stopped in front of Disneyland’s entrance.

The door opened, and Yoo Yeonha came out. Chae Nayun hopped toward her and asked.

“Are you feeling better now?”

“Yeah.”

With a short reply, Yoo Yeonha walked past Chae Nayun and Kim Suho, stopping when she reached me.

“.....”

Yoo Yeonha stared at me lifelessly. Unlike her usual self, she seemed weak and fragile. Was her food poisoning that bad?

“Does it still hurt?”

Yoo Yeonha shook her head.

At that moment, Oh Hanhyun spoke up.

“OH right, we’ll be traveling in pairs inside Disneyland.”

“You, go with me.”

Yoo Yeonha spoke before Oh Hanhyun even explained how the pairs would be formed.

“Huh? Me?”

“What, what are you doing, Yeonha?”

Chae Nayun gave her an odd look, but Yoo Yeonha tightly grabbed onto my sleeve. I was also wondering why she was acting this way, but since it looked like she had something important to say, I agreed.

“Sure.”

Just like that, I became paired with Yoo Yeonha and entered Disneyland.

Once we were inside, it felt like we were in a fairy tale.

But even while we walked through this world of hopes and dreams, Yoo Yeonha was silent, sighing and stealing glances at me from time to time.

Wondering why she was so down, I brought her to a rollercoaster to cheer her up.

As I expected, Yoo Yeonha panicked as the rollercoaster went up and looked completely lifeless by the time the ride ended.

“Are you feeling better now?”

“.....”

“If not, we’ll go on it again.”

“N-N-No, I’m fine. S-So let’s skip t-this and r-ride that.”

Yoo Yeonha pointed at the giant Ferris wheel nearby. I furrowed my brows slightly.

“Isn’t that a couples ride? Why would you want to go there with me?”

“There’s... something I need to talk to you about.”

Yoo Yeonha’s voice was trembling.

“If you say so... What is it about?”

“.....”

Yoo Yeonha didn't reply, so I followed her wish and went to the Ferris wheel. To be honest, this was my first time being on a Ferris wheel. Inside the Ferris wheel's slow-moving pod, we stared at each other silently.

“...What is it?”

In the end, I asked out of frustration.

“Oh, is it about the bullet I asked you to refine? Is it too difficult?”

“No... I should be able to give that to you by next month. That leaf wasn't an ordinary leaf.”

“Right? Ah, if any of it's left over, you can use it for your research.”

“Research?”

“Yeah, for your pharmaceutical company. We're allies, aren't we? Or maybe I'm just an investor, haha.”

“.....”

In response, Yoo Yeonha clenched her teeth and dropped her head in silence.

It was then.

KOONG!

An explosive rumble resounded.

I looked down from the pod's window, then looked back at Yoo Yeonha. To my surprise, Yoo Yeonha was staring at me with a determined look. She seemed to be unconcerned about the chaos happening below.

“...What?”

“...Remember what I said? That I had something to talk to you about.”

“Yeah, go ahead.”

“You see...”

KOONG!

At that moment, the Ferris wheel shook strongly and stopped working. Yoo Yeonha didn't react in the slightest, but I quickly looked back down on the ground.

Underneath the Ferris wheel, where the explosion took place, two people were glaring at each other.

I focused my hearing and sight.

—So, it really was you. To think you're having fun with a girl. Should I say it's to be expected from a kid?

Jin Sahyuk was leering at Kim Suho and Chae Nayun.

—... You.

Kim Suho glared at Jin Sahyuk with a stiffened face.

—So, you do recognize me. Well, you would be a fool not to. After all, it's just you and me.

—Who are you and why are you picking a fight with us?

Chae Nayun furrowed her brows and stepped forward. She was wearing a polar bear hat that she must have won from a game.

—Shut your mouth, shit for brains.

—Shi... I dare you to say that again.

Chae Nayun was a headstrong girl in her own right, but Jin Sahyuk was on a whole new level of crazy.

Jin Sahyuk suddenly condensed her magic power into a ball and threw it at Chae Nayun. The ball then exploded, bursting into a beam of magic power that struck Chae Nayun's stomach in the blink of an eye.

Chae Nayun was blasted away by a hundred meters, striking the asphalt ground. It was a sudden ambush that even Kim Suho couldn't react to.

“Hey, I think we’re going to have to talk later.”

The situation wasn’t good. To think that Chae Nayun would be knocked out in one blow... Jin Sahyuk was supposed to be a ‘growing’ final boss. Why the hell was she so strong?

I quickly opened the pod door and tried to jump down.

However, Yoo Yeonha grabbed onto my wrist.

I looked back at her hand holding onto my wrist, then looked up at her face.

“I don’t think I can do it later. If it isn’t now... I don’t think I can say it.”

Yoo Yeonha looked like she was about to cry as she blurted out in a desperate voice.

I froze.

Just what could have caused... Ah!

A light bulb went on in my head.

The pieces of the puzzle were finally coming together.

A part of ‘Yoo Yeonha Scandal’ must have happened already.

In that case, it made sense why she got stress-induced gastritis.

“...Then you don’t have to say it.”

Even if you don’t, I’ll help you.

I smiled brightly and tapped Yoo Yeonha’s head.

Then, I jumped down from the Ferris wheel.

Chapter 116

The First Encounter (2)

I jumped down from a height of around 100 meters.

Air pressure seemed to constrict my body, but my feet were on the ground before I noticed. Even with my weak body, I didn't feel much pain.

However, my smartwatch told me the cold truth. With that fall, I lost 15% of the stats I obtained through Energy Conversion.

Though it felt like a bit of a waste, I put the thought aside and quickly ran to Chae Nayun.

"Ah..."

Chae Nayun was sitting on the asphalt, holding onto her stomach. Even though she was hit with such a powerful blast of magic power without qi reinforcement, her injuries didn't seem all that serious.

"Kueek!"

...Or at least, that's what I thought. Almost as if to prove me wrong, she coughed up a mouthful of blood. Chae Nayun then staggered a bit before collapsing on the ground.

"Hey, wake up."

"...Kim Hajin?"

Breathing roughly, Chae Nayun looked up at me blankly.

I took out a potion from my belt bag and poured the red liquid into Chae Nayun's mouth.

"Drink it."

"Uup."

Chae Nayun managed to swallow the entire potion, but a potion was painful regardless

of whether it was applied externally or internally.

“Uu! Uk! Uuk!”

Chae Nayun twisted her body in pain before fainting.

However, her pulse was normal and steady, and her breathing soon returned to normal. In 20 minutes or so, she should be fully recovered.

I pulled Chae Nayun away and hid her in some shrubbery nearby. Then, I quickly ran back and looked at Kim Suho and Jin Sahyuk.

—Try running to that girl. I’ll kill you both.

—... Why did you change so much?

—Change? First, don’t you talk to me so casually. We might be in a new world, but that doesn’t change our past relationship.

Kim Suho and Jin Sahyuk began to talk to each other about their past. Nobles, peasants, knights, continent, sword technique... words only they could understand rang out. It looked like a fight would break out once they were finished.

—Sigoal, Rowle!

Soon, Jin Sahyuk unleashed her magic power with a thunderous roar.

Her magic power condensed into dozens of spears and rose up into the air.

The magic power weapons flashed with a cold light as they targeted Kim Suho. Against these terrifying spears, Kim Suho only had a steel pipe he found on the ground.

—Do you need to do this? What reason is there for us to fight?

—What are you smoking? Anyways, is that steel pipe going to be enough?

After a short exchange of words, she sent her spears flying like bullets.

The spears were impossible to track with the naked eye and accompanied a vicious destructive power and explosive blast. Almost like missiles flying through the sky, the spears rained down from the sky.

Kim Suho dodged what he could and parried the ones he couldn’t.

The spears that missed pierced through the asphalt, creating huge craters. As a result, the ground caved in and many of the amusement park rides broke down.

After a full minute of Jin Sahyuk's attacks...

Disneyland turned into a wasteland devoid of hopes and dreams.

"She's OP..."

Jin Sahyuk destroyed her surroundings just with her magic power, without moving even a single step.

To make matters worse, Kim Suho didn't have Misteltein with him. As Kim Suho's antithesis, Jin Sahyuk didn't use 'weapons'. The source of her strength was her overwhelming steel-colored magic power.

Kim Suho was incapable of defeating Jin Sahyuk.

No, the current Kim Suho didn't even have the intention of defeating her.

"...Huup!"

Kim Suho swung his pipe, sending a magic spear back to Jin Sahyuk. However, Jin Sahyuk's defense was just as strong as her offense, easily blocking the spear with a shield of magic power.

At the same time, a magic spear struck Kim Suho's shoulder.

"Uk!"

Although Kim Suho's qi reinforcement managed to stop the spear from penetrating his skin, Kim Suho was sent flying by the impact.

Jin Sahyuk didn't miss this opening. Beams of magic power shot toward Kim Suho who was still in mid-air.

Boom, boom, boom, boom.

Dozens of blasts made Kim Suho's body ricochet in the air. Even after Kim Suho lost consciousness, Jin Sahyuk's attacks continued.

It seemed like I had no choice but to intervene.

Thankfully, I had some medicine ready for moments like this.

[Your stats increase by 1.5 points for 10 minutes.]

[Overlapping consumption further increases your stats by 0.75 points for 5 minutes.]

[Overlapping consumption further increases your stats by 0.375 points for 2 minutes and 30 seconds.]

Feeling a surge of energy coursing through my body, I slowly walked up and stood in front of Kim Suho.

I couldn't help but wonder what I was doing as a supporting character, but reality had deviated from the script long ago. As the character who was inserted into this new scenario, I had to correct it.

"Give it a rest."

"Hm? Who are... Oh, the guy from yesterday."

Perhaps because of our eye contact yesterday, Jin Sahyuk stopped attacking for a moment.

"You're his teacher?"

"...Teacher?"

Ah, I guess I didn't look like a high schooler with my beard.

I smirked and opened my mouth to correct her.

But at that moment, Jin Sahyuk's magic spears shot toward me.

Shoulders, neck, heart, right leg, left arm... In the blink of an eye, six spears shot past me, locking me in place.

BOOM!

A huge explosion erupted behind me.

I fell in a daze at the sudden barrage of attacks, but I soon snapped out.

Jin Sahyuk's killing intent was still present.

In other words, she wasn't done yet.

I immediately activated Bullet Time as a single spear shot toward my head.

In the slowed world, I could at least feel its movement.

I tilted my head to the side and dodged the spear by the skin of my teeth.

BOOM!

The spear then struck the merry-go-round behind me and exploded.

"...Hm."

If Jin Sahyuk continued her attack, I wouldn't have survived.

However, she only stared at me with a look of surprise.

"You dodged that? I thought for sure you wouldn't since you didn't react at all to the

other six.”

Seeing her serpentine eyes, my heart began to beat crazily.

Her eyes were full of interest. I wasn't sure if it was because of what happened last night, but Jin Sahyuk was overestimating me.

In that case, it was probably best that I play the role.

“Why don't you stop here? Kim Suho and I didn't even bring our weapons.”

I spoke as imposingly as I could.

The Jin Sahyuk I knew wasn't the type who couldn't hold back her temper. Since she beat up Kim Suho, she should be content.

“And why don't you answer my question? Are you his teacher?”

Jin Sahyuk asked once again.

I shook my head.

“No, I'm a friend of the guy you sent flying.”

“Then leave. Otherwise, I'll bury you with him.”

...Jin Sahyuk was more violent than I thought.

With no other choice, I put my hand in my pocket.

From the looks of it, Jin Sahyuk had no intention of stopping here. In that case, I had to take advantage of her reckless personality to get out of this situation.

I compressed Aether into a 500 won coin and 'scanned' it.

As I slowly took it out of my pocket, I looked at the number inscribed on it – 40%.

“What's that?”

Jin Sahyuk furrowed her brows looking at the 500 won coin.

“I told you, I didn't bring my weapon.”

“...So?”

“So, I'll just have to throw this at your face.”

When I said that with a shrug, Jin Sahyuk began to snicker.
Thankfully, her arrogant personality seemed to have stayed the same.
I let out a dry cough and asked carefully.

“Can I try?”

“...Pfft. Try it if you think you can hit me.”

She stretched her arms out, showing her willingness to take on my attack.
I smiled inwardly as I gripped the 500 won coin.
I only had one chance.
I had to strike her head with the coin.
I wrapped the coin with all of Stigma’s magic power with the property of anti-magic
and added one more item to it.

[Ginseng Pill]

—Seeps into emitted magic power and strengthens it.

It was a similar method to what I used in the past to kill Evandel and obtain Aether.
I melted the ginseng pill into the anti-magic magic power enveloping the coin.
Then, I glared at Jin Sahyuk.
She was watching me with eyes full of anticipation.
While she was showing no signs of defending, the anti-magic magic power began to
let out a bright blue light after infusing with the ginseng pill.

“Oho, that’s quite an interesting—”

“...Huup!”

Without showing any hesitation, I mustered all the power I had into my right arm.
The muscles on my right arm puffed up as I squeezed out every single drop of Stigma’s
magic power and threw the coin.

Pshuuuu—!

The coin shot toward Jin Sahyuk, spinning fiercely. Stigma’s magic power enhanced
the coin’s power many times over.
Jin Sahyuk watched the coin’s movement at ease and created a magic power shield.
Anyone could see at first glance that there was something unique about her magic

power. The clearness and toughness of her shield was proof of it.

But no matter how strong her magic power was, it was magic power in the end.

Drrrrrr-!

Using its centrifugal and rotational force, the anti-magic coin drilled a hole in Jin Sahyuk's shield, continuing through and striking the area between her eyebrows.

"What—!"

The coin began to push her back fiercely.

Jin Sahyuk kept her eyes open as she withstood the coin's force. As she was being pushed back, her feet plowed through the asphalt.

"...Fuck."

The coin eventually came to a stop, but Jin Sahyuk wasn't even showing signs of fainting.

Clang—

The coin fell to the ground.

At the same time, two streams of blood flowed down from her forehead.

"That hurt..."

Jin Sahyuk condensed her magic power while giving me a deathly glare. However, my coin certainly succeeded in damaging her brain. The brain was a vital organ in wielding magic power. As a result, she couldn't condense her magic power into the form she desired, and it repeatedly broke down.

This looked like a golden opportunity.

However, I only looked at her without doing anything.

It was because I couldn't move even a finger. Along with Stigma's magic power, I also had squeezed out every stat boost from Energy Conversion.

...I was at a loss for what to do.

But at that moment, a man appeared like a savior.

"That's enough. Get back."

It was the mysterious man who was with Jin Sahyuk last night.

Seemingly appearing out of nowhere, he grabbed Jin Sahyuk's arm and pulled her back.

“...Ah, let me go. I’m fine. I can still kill him.”

Despite what she was saying, she wasn’t in a good condition. She couldn’t even stand straight and was staggering back and forth.

“Ehew.”

With a sigh, the man karate chopped Jin Sahyuk’s neck. Immediately, the light in her eyes flickered out, and she collapsed on the ground. The man picked up Jin Sahyuk and hung her on his shoulder. Then, he stared back at me.

His eyes were cold.

“This is our first meeting, right?”

I only nodded. I couldn’t move my mouth.

“Mm... well thanks to you, she won’t be so careless next time.”

With just that, the man disappeared.



By the time the dispatched Heroes arrived and were cleaning up the mess in Disneyland, the man was on the move with Jin Sahyuk on his shoulder. As she couldn’t struggle, she was as light as a feather, but the man could feel his back getting wet.

“Ah, she’s drooling... Do you have to sleep so dirtily?”

The man used his magic power to put a mask over her mouth.

When he was about to leave Disneyland’s premises...

“Where are you going?”

The cold voice of a woman held him back.

To the man, it was a familiar voice.

After coming to a stop, he smiled joyfully and turned to the direction of the voice.

“...Jain.”

The voice that called him belonged to a woman, but the person in front of him was a man dressed as Disneyland's security guard. But because of Jain's voice, he easily recognized that it was her.

Jain smirked and nodded.

"It's been a while, old man."

"...Yeah, it really has."

Looking at Jain, the man remembered the days when he wasn't called by his name, but a color.

Putting this useless thought aside, the man asked Jain.

"I heard the empty seat will be filled soon... is the little brat not here?"

'Little brat' referred to Boss, and in this world, only he was qualified to call her that. Jain retorted simply.

"I'd rather not see blood."

"Oh~ worrying about me?"

"No, I'm worrying about Boss. Because she can't win against you."

"...Hm."

The man stared intently at Jain. With just a look, Jain's camouflage faded away. Soon, her true beautiful appearance revealed itself.

"...Then why did you come?"

"No reason. I just wanted to see how well you were doing."

Jain glanced at the girl on his shoulder.

"Looks like you already found a new child."

At this, the man simply smiled.

“Right, she’s my disciple. Though, she’s a bit special and is constantly trying to kill me.”

In the next moment, magic power condensed around the man’s hand.
No, his hand transformed into magic power itself.

“So, Jain looks like you gained some confidence. Or did you just become fearless?”

His magic power hand wavered like a heat wave. It would be impossible for anything that made contact with it to come out unscathed.
However, Jain was steadfast even at his clear threat.

“Remember what you said? That people who have something to protect can’t act as they wish.”

Jain moved her hand and pointed at the girl on his shoulder.

“Just like how you can kill me, I can kill that girl.”

“...I guess you’re right.”

The man smiled lightly. At the same time, the undulating magic power surrounding him disappeared like it never existed.

“Then I’ll take my leave now. It was good to see you.”

The man walked past Jain under the faint moonlight.
Glancing at his back, Jain continued what she came to say.

“Are you fine just leaving like this?”

Jain’s voice rang out behind the man.

“The new Black discovered by Boss. A wolf hired solely to kill you.”

The man continued to walk without replying.
Just like how Fenrir devoured Odin alive, Boss gave Kim Hajin the name, hoping to reproduce the olden myth.

“Fenrir is right there.”

Only then did the man stop.

On his face hidden from Jain's view was a surprising, thick smile.

"I wish him the best of luck."

The man remembered what he saw before.

Although Jin Sahyuk's foolish carelessness played a huge role in the outcome, the boy had suppressed his disciple with only a single, special coin.

"It looks like..."

The man turned around, revealing the smile on his face.

"He has the potential."

His easygoing attitude was as though he really wanted to be killed.

Hearing this, Jain's expression turned sour, but she returned an even thicker smile, refusing to lose.

Chapter 117

The First Encounter (3)

The dispatched Heroes and police arrested all the smugglers who caused a scene in Disneyland.

Tomorrow's headline should be something like, 'Failed Negotiation Leads to Smuggler' Infighting'.

Jin Sahyuk's party, who was the real cause behind much of the mess, disappeared before the authorities arrived, and Kim Suho and Chae Nayun recovered thanks to my potions.

“.....”

Currently, Kim Suho was sitting between the destroyed pieces of asphalt. I walked up behind him and put my hand on his head. His hair was quite soft.

Kim Suho turned around and smiled when he saw me. I smiled back and sat down next to him.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, thanks to you. I'll pay you back for the potion.”

“You don't need to. So, how are you related to the girl from before?”

Although I already knew the answer, I asked anyway. Kim Suho looked at the far horizon and murmured.

“She's just someone I know.”

“I see.”

I didn't ask any further.

For a while, we both stared at the night sky silently.

“...Hajin.”

Then suddenly, Kim Suho called my name in a serious tone.

“Yeah?”

I spoke as softly as I could. Kim Suho turned to the side and faced me directly. His eyes were filled with emotions that were hard to describe with words.

I understood what he was feeling, yet I couldn't understand them at the same time. Losing one's home. That sense of loneliness was something I could empathize with, but unlike me, Kim Suho didn't have the hope of being able to go back.

“...Nevermind.”

“Lame.”

I laughed and brightened up the mood.
Kim Suho accepted it with a soundless smile.

“By the way, you're the one who suppressed her, right?”

“No, she was the one who suppressed herself.”

“...What does that even mean?”

I got up and put my hand on Kim Suho's shoulder.

“It means she underestimated me.”

“.....”

Kim Suho looked up at me with clear eyes.
I realized that Kim Suho had several charms. Most of the time, he was a reliable and bright guy, but today he had a melancholic aura about him.

“I'm leaving. I don't know who she is to you, but don't be so down.”

“...I'm not down.”

Kim Suho smiled bashfully as he said an obvious lie.

Finding this side of him a bit unpleasant, I ruffled his hair strongly.

“A-Ah! W-What are you doing!?”

“I’m leaving for real now.”

“What? Hey!”

With his hair puffed up like a lamb, Kim Suho glared at me half-smiling. I received his look with a playful smile as I walked back to the hotel.



Busan luxury hotel’s 2-person room.

Yoo Yeonha was currently deep in thought.

Today was an especially complicated night. In truth, it was the first night she experienced since finding out the truth as she was passed out last night.

“...I couldn’t tell him.”

She murmured.

Although she was determined to tell Kim Hajin the truth, she missed the chance while hesitating.

—You don’t have to say it.

Yoo Yeonha still remembered what he told her. However, he didn’t know what confession she would make. Furthermore, even without what he said, Yoo Yeonha felt like there was a chance that she wouldn’t have confessed.

She was afraid.

That one day when he found out the truth, his gun would point toward her. That the man she considered her ‘ally’ for the first time in her life would become the most threatening existence to her life.

That was what made her afraid, and that was what made her sad.

“Ah~ that felt great~”

At that moment, Chae Nayun came out of the shower and interrupted Yoo Yeonha’s somber thoughts. Yoo Yeonha looked back at her. Chae Nayun was in the middle of

putting on her underwear.
Yoo Yeonha asked.

“...Does it hurt anywhere?”

“Huh? Oh, it’s fine. Apparently, the emergency treatment was good.”

The immediate consumption of a potion and the toughness of her body made it so that her internal injuries were easily healed.

“Whew.”

Chae Nayun sat down on the edge of her bed wearing nothing but her underwear. Yoo Yeonha glanced at her. There was a cartoon cat drawn on her underwear, but she didn’t look childish because of her excellent figure.

Chae Nayun picked up her smartwatch instead of putting on clothes. Seeing her typing on a holographic keyboard, Yoo Yeonha asked.

“What are you doing?”

“Hm? Oh, I’m texting Kim Hajin. I thought I should thank him.”

“.....”

Yoo Yeonha watched her silently.

Chae Nayun respected Chae Joochul, her grandfather.

But Chae Joochul played an even greater role than Yoo Jinwoong in the tragedy Kim Hajin suffered.

Of course, Chae Joochul wouldn’t have shown his ugly side to his granddaughter. However, the longer Chae Joochul remained a ‘good grandfather’, the more Chae Nayun would feel betrayed when she found out.

‘Should I tell her about Kim Hajin’s past? That the one who killed Kim Hajin’s parents, robbed him of his family and forced him to live in solitude was Chae Joochul, the one she admired the most.

Or should I just remain silent?’

...Yoo Yeonha spoke her name.

“Nayun.”

“Yeah?”

Chae Nayun didn't know anything about Kim Hajin's twisted and tangled past.

And if possible... Yoo Yeonha wanted her to remain oblivious.

Yoo Yeonha knew Chae Nayun well. As someone who knew the pain of losing one's family, Chae Nayun would undoubtedly feel more guilty and sad than Yoo Yeonha.

“...Who was that person?”

“What do you mean?”

“The person who attacked you.”

“Oh. I don't know.”

“You didn't tell the police?”

“Yeah, I was too lazy.”

Chae Nayun didn't tell the police that she was attacked. It was likely because she was afraid of her father finding out and causing a mess.

Tap, tap, tap.

Chae Nayun's eyes and fingers were focused on her smartwatch screen.

Yoo Yeonha stared at her intently, then added.

“...Be nice.”

“Hm?”

“When you text him. Be nice and not snarky.”

“...What?”

“Just listen to me so you won't regret it later.”

“What? Are you high?”

Chae Nayun looked dumbfoundedly at Yoo Yeonha who silently crawled into the bed. Tilting her head, Chae Nayun looked at the reply she just received from Kim Hajin and frowned.

[Sleep.]



Two days later. 11:00 A.M., Sunday.

I returned to Cube's dorm room with Evandel and Hayang. Compared to the presidential suite and Seoul's apartment room I enjoyed over the weekend, Cube's dorm room was too small and cramped.

Thankfully, I would be assigned a bigger room next year. If I couldn't endure it, I could always move out of the dorms and commute to school.

"Chicken~ chicken~ chicken, chicken, chicken~"

As I walked into the kitchen with three roasted chickens I bought, Evandel and Hayang waited anxiously at the kitchen table.

"Since Hayang only eats legs and wings..."

Evandel gave Hayang two chicken legs and wings. After fighting for a long time, Evandel seemed to have finally learned the concept of sharing.

I watched them eat with a smile, then walked into the bedroom and turned on my laptop.

[You obtained 433 SP!]

[Luck applies, giving you 22% bonus SP!]

I gained quite a bit of SP with last night's incident. Just the luck bonus was close to 100 SP.

Since I accumulated enough, it was about time I use it.

"Mm..."

I typed in one of the Physiques I thought of.

[Medicinal Memory Physique]

It was one of the more recent ones I came up with. Since it looked like I would be consuming a lot of medicine from now, I came up with a Physique to make the effect more permanent.

===

□Memory

—When consuming medicine with the same property and effect, the body will memorize a portion of the medicinal effect. The amount is dependent on the luck.

□Reproduction

—The body will naturally produce medicinal effects that are 100% memorized. The amount is dependent on the luck.

—Reproduced medicinal effect will have different ‘reproduction cooldown times’ depending on its effect.

□Adaptation & Growth

—The medicinal effect will increase with repeated consumption and reproduction. The amount and frequency is dependent on the luck.

===

[1000 SP will be consumed. Would you like to save?]

“Damn.”

As expected, modifications related to a permanent stat increase were extremely expensive.

But being expensive also meant it was worth its cost. Not to mention, I had more than enough SP to pay for it thanks to fighting Asura and attacking Jin Sahyuk,

[The setting has been changed.]

[Luck applies, improving Medicinal Memory Physique’s overall functionality!]

“Hm.”

Next, I tried eating a ginseng pill.

[By consuming a medicine, your strength, vitality, stamina, and magic power stats increase slowly.]

[Your body remembered 4% of the ginseng pill’s ‘stat increase’ medicinal effect.]

4%.

Assuming that the increase was linear, I only needed to consume 25 pills for my body to learn to reproduce it.

“That’s not bad at—”

Then suddenly, my upper arm began to ache.

It was a pain I’ve been expecting but wasn’t looking forward to having.

I quickly took off my shirt and looked at my arm. A crescent line was being drawn above the cross-shaped Stigma.

I clenched my teeth to prevent groaning.

Evandel was currently outside. I couldn’t let her worry about me for no reason...

Under the burning sensation that was impossible to get used to, my consciousness began to fade away.



“Huk!”

When I opened my eyes, it was 11 am.

Furthermore, today was Sunday, the day I promised to meet with Rachel.

“Shit, I’m screwed.”

I went to the living room and found Evandel and Hayang sleeping.

I first checked my smartwatch.

[Missed call – 6:34]

There was one missed call at 6:34 am.

Could it be...?

“Argh.”

Although my arm still hurt, I quickly ran out of my room and raced to the place I promised to meet Rachel.

After arriving in just five minutes, I hid in a bush nearby and looked for Rachel.

“.....”

As I thought, Rachel was still waiting for me. She was next to a street cat, perhaps to deal with her loneliness.

Rachel stroked the cat's back and looked up at the sky. Her mouth moved slowly. One, two, three... It seemed she was counting stars.

Although I felt extremely sorry, I first checked her wrist for the bracelet. Without it, there was no way I could help her.

Thankfully, she was wearing the bracelet.

I approached her as I scratched my head.

"Um... Rachel-ssi?"

Rachel discovered me, then dropped her head silently.

For someone who waited for five hours without hearing back, she didn't seem too angry. However, her faintly protruding lips and sharp, cat-like eyes told me that she was upset.

I couldn't blame her. After all, she waited five hours.

"Sorry, I'm late. Something came up."

I slowly walked up to her.

Rachel greeted me with a faint smile.

"It looks like you just woke up."

Rachel glanced at my hair. I touched my hair. It was indeed puffed up like I just got up from bed.

"But that's okay, I just came here too."

"...Eh? Ah... kuum, sorry."

She definitely sounded upset. Feeling awkward, I stretched my arms a bit.

"Since I'm late, I'll cut straight to the chase. Um, Rachel-ssi wanted to learn about Barrier, right?"

Rachel nodded silently.

“But before I can teach you Barrier... why don't you try following my training method?”

“Yes?”

“You know, people have different training methods. One of the best ways to overcome a slump is to change one's training method. The method I use might be suitable for Rachel-ssi too.”

Hearing my hurried and flustered tone, Rachel looked at me doubtfully.

“Why don't we take it slow tomorrow...”

“No, no, just try sitting down like you're meditating.”

Rachel tilted her head as though she didn't understand what I meant.

“Just sit like me.”

“Ah, yes.”

Rachel sat down cross-legged on the ground.

“Next, spread your magic power throughout your body. This is called breaking through acupoints...”

I muttered some buzz words I remembered from martial art novels. Thankfully, Rachel began to concentrate on controlling her magic power without complaint. A faint blue glow began to surround her body.

“Good, just keep going.”

I encouraged her, hoping she wouldn't find it too suspicious.

“Next, try moving all that magic power to your left wrist. We're going to make it go around your body afterward.”

This was the most important part.

The moment her magic power opened the bracelet on her left wrist, this useless

training method would become the greatest training method.

“Put strength into your left wrist, kind of like you’re emitting magic power from it.”

Pssssh.

The bracelet began to shake from the vibration of magic power. However, the Butterfly Seedling Dust showed no signs of flowing out, while Rachel’s face turned red like a tomato.

“Harder, like you want to break that bracelet on your wrist...”

Rachel’s trembling became stronger. The movement of her magic power also became fiercer, and in the end...

Snap—

The bracelet snapped in half.

The Butterfly Seedling Dust inside finally began to pour down.

Chapter 118

What Must Be Done (1)

From the broken bracelet, the Butterfly Seedling Dust scattered down, seeping into Rachel's magic power. Rachel did not notice this silent change as she was focused on the movement of her magic power.

"Now, with your right wrist..."

To prevent her from being suspicious, I made her circulate her magic power throughout her body. From the left wrist to the right wrist, ankles, then forehead. Soon, Rachel was covered in sweat.

"...Haa, haa."

"It's hard for everyone on their first try."

I couldn't help but laugh at myself inwardly. I was coaching someone with a 9~9.5 potential rating.

But this training shouldn't be completely meaningless. After all, it was the breathing exercise Kim Suho did every morning.

"Alright, next..."

In any case, the Butterfly Seedling Dust successfully seeped into Rachel's body. But to make the dust settle in and show its effect, Rachel needed to exercise her magic power.

"Try standing up."

Rachel stood up enthusiastically, thinking that it was time for the real thing.

"We'll set Barrier aside for now."

However, she lost her enthusiasm at my next words and tilted her head.

“Rachel-ssi, we’ve known each other for about 8 months now. And for a semester, we were pretty close together because of team challenges.”

“Yes? Ah, yes, you’re right.”

“Take it with a grain of salt, but I’ve been watching you in battle and thinking... Have you taken an elemental affinity test?”

“Elemental affinity?”

“Yes, I’m good at discerning talent. I guess you could say I have sharp senses. You know that I helped Chae Nayun too, right?”

Chae Nayun was a hot topic in Cube's community and several guilds. Not only did she change from a bow to a sword, she was showing immediate results.

“Yes, I took one when I was young and the results came out positive. But how did you...”

She was looking at me, wondering how I knew.

“There’s something different about your magic power. The property of your magic power changes slightly depending on the environment you’re in.”

This was Rachel’s trait that I created.

Rachel seemed to know what I was talking about as her eyes widened.

“Ah, you’re right! I’ve been feeling it too. As for my elemental affinity, it hasn’t increased since I was 10, so I gave up on it.”

That was obvious. Research on elementals was scant, and people of this world knew little about how to cultivate one’s elemental affinity. Elementalists were uncommon even in the other world Kim Suho came from.

But it was different now.

The Butterfly Seedling Dust that seeped into Rachel’s body would work as a pathway that would connect Rachel and elementals together.

Furthermore, I already knew the efficient training method Kim Suho and Rachel took painstaking efforts to create in the original story.

“Then let’s start from the beginning. You might have used a wrong training method.”

“.....”

Rachel looked at me doubtfully.

I felt like I could understand what her eyes were saying. She must be annoyed that I was going on a tangent when she came to learn Barrier.

“Your current problem isn’t Barrier. Didn’t you say that you were in a slump? You have to think about how to overcome your slump. Learning Barrier is trying to put the cart before the horse.”

“Ah, I see, you’re right.”

To my surprise, Rachel was quickly convinced.

She was unexpectedly wishy-washy.

“Try to resonate your magic power with the grass below us, like you’re about to talk... or rather, share your magic power with the grass.”

“Yes, I’ll give it a try.”

The most important aspect of wielding elementals was ‘resonance with nature’.

Rachel closed her eyes and did as I said.

Just like that, 3 minutes, 5 minutes, and 10 minutes passed by...

Rachel’s body also became more and more hazy. But because no changes were happening to the grass, I was about to speak up thinking it failed. That was when a change occurred.

“Oh!”

The grass Rachel’s magic power touched emitted green shining droplets.

Although the light was faint and the droplets were few, it undoubtedly confirmed Rachel’s ability.

Power to wield elementals. This tricky ability not only required one’s Gift to align with it, but also a certain disposition.

“Rachel-ssi. Rachel-ssi? Try opening your eyes.”

Hearing my voice, Rachel slowly opened her eyes.

“..Un?”

Her voice was full of uncertainty.

But that changed when her eyes fell on the green droplets floating in front of her. Seeing her dazed face, I smiled and muttered.

“Well, well, it looks like I’ll have to accept quite a hefty lesson fee.”

Rachel then turned and fixed her shocked gaze on me.



After meeting Jin Sahyuk in Busan, nothing eventful happened in Cube. In a novel, this period would have certainly been a time skip.

During this time, I did what I had to do.

First, I completed two more missions as Jeronimo’s mercenary. One was assassinating a Djinn, and the other was escorting cargo.

Boss seemed to have liked how I handled things as she made another offer.

This time, it was an official contract.

As Cube’s cadet, I trained with Rachel every night for one hour. This was a beneficial time for both of us.

Ever since the day I awakened her talent in elementals, she thought of my words as the words of God and trained her elemental affinity accordingly. As for me, I trained myself to react more sharply and efficiently in Bullet Time, with the help of Rachel’s rapier attacks.

[Sparring with a strong opponent increases your speed by 0.05 points!]

[Sparring with a strong opponent increases your vitality by 0.05 points!]

[Sparring with a strong opponent increases your stamina by 0.05 points!]

As a result, I saw a natural stat increase for the first time in a while.

Time flew by and November 22nd came around.

A year had already passed since I was thrown into this world.

In two weeks, a new year would begin.

“This will be covered on the exam so make sure you know it.”

Currently, I was in the middle of Phenomenon Realm Analysis II. Even though it was only two in the afternoon, the sky outside the window was dark because of abnormal climate. It was especially chilly as well.

However, cadets were no different than usual.

They shortened their sleep to study for the upcoming exams and train their bodies. As soon as class ended, half would go to the library, while the other half would go to the Fitness Center.

As for me, I was completely ignoring the content of the class and staring at my laptop screen.

[24 hours passed since medicine consumption. All stats increase by 0.005 points.]

[You memorized painkiller’s medicinal effect.]

[Completely Memorized Medicinal Effects]

1. Painkiller

▷Increased pain resistance for 30 minutes

▷Reproduction cooldown time: 6 hours

2. Detox

▷Cures toxin below intermediate rank

▷Reproduction cooldown time: 6 hours

3. Instant Amplification

▷Increases your strength, stamina, speed, perception, and vitality by 2 points for 10 minutes

▷Reproduction cooldown time: 12 hours

===

[Strength 3.405 (+ 1.070)]

[Stamina 3.435 (+ 1.980)]

[Speed 5.140 (+ 2.685)]

[Perception 5.655 (+ 2.620)]

[Vitality 3.405 (+ 1.070)]

===

My body memorized several medicinal properties and effects. The above three were 100% memorized, allowing me to reap their medicinal effects whenever I want without any side effects.

“This is as far as we’ll go in this class. Starting from next week, you’ll have free study periods. Since you don’t need to prepare for class, focus on reviewing everything we’ve learned this semester.”

Then suddenly, the professor’s closing statement rang out. I packed my stuff up and got up to leave. Today, I had to leave Cube for an appointment.

“Hey, Kim Hajing.”

When I turned around, I heard an unknown nasally sound. When I furrowed my brows and turned around, I could see Chae Nayun standing in front of me with her nose red.

“...Why is your nose red?”

“I caught a cold.”

Her nasally voice reminded me of a TV program I watched. In it, a child asked a Hero whether Heroes could catch colds.

The answer was yes.

Though it would only last a day at most, Heroes could still catch a cold. It was proof that they trained hard. When magic power instantly left one’s body, a huge change would occur in one’s internal temperature, leaving them vulnerable to light sickness like the common cold.

“Aren’t you working too hard lately? You’ve been training at the Fitness Center until 3. You’re only going to hurt your body if you overwork yourself.”

“...What, are you worrying about me?”

Chae Nayun’s brows danced up and down. I shook my head.

“Nevermind. So, what do you need today?”

“Ah, teach me this.”

Chae Nayun handed me the homework the Phenomenon Realm Analysis professor just gave out.

Since she was clearly asking me to do it for her, I just solved the whole thing.

“Yay~ thank you.”

Seeing the solutions I wrote on her notebook, Chae Nayun smiled brightly and put her notebook away.

“Oh right, Kim Hajing, I’m going to be in Master’s camp for winter break.”

“Master?”

“Yeah, Yoo Sihyuk.”

“Ah...”

Yoo Sihyuk’s hell training.

Only Kim Suho was supposed to go this year, but it seemed Chae Nayun was also going because she switched to a sword.

It was a good thing.

“That’s great.”

I said with a smile.

Yoo Sihyuk’s camp lasted from December to early February.

In other words, Chae Nayun would be away from Seoul for 3 months.

I couldn’t be more glad.

“Good luck and try your best.”

I stopped here and tried to walk past Chae Nayun.

“Hey, hey, by the way...”

But Chae Nayun grabbed onto my sleeve.

Pulling on it here and there, she continued.

“Let’s go on a trip with the other guys before that. Once I go to the camp, I won’t be having much fun for the rest of my winter break.”

“I... don’t think I’ll have time.”

“Come on~ let’s go. I’ll pay for everything.”

She kept pulling on my sleeve, smiling happily.
However, I refused her resolutely.

“I can’t go.”

“...Really?”

“Yeah, I don’t have time.”

Hearing the same reply I gave before, Chae Nayun let go of my sleeve and pouted.

“Fine, you don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

She muttered with a disappointed face, then left the classroom before me.
Feeling the gazes I was receiving, I looked around.
Kim Suho, Yi Yeonghan, and Yoo Yeonha were giving me strange looks.

—Hey, Yi Yeonghan, he’s playing hard to get, right?

—No doubt about it.

I could hear Kim Suho and Yi Yeonghan whispering to themselves.



3 hours later.
Gangwondo Field.

“...Bite!”

I sounded like an owner training his dog, but the outcome of the single word I uttered

was massive.

A giant wolf shot out of my chest, raced forward and bit down on a troll.

—Kieeeeeek!

The troll struggled to pull the wolf off, but Evandel's Servant was several tens of times stronger than a low-intermediate rank troll.

Not long afterwards, the troll collapsed on the ground.

—Auuuu~

After taking care of the troll, the wolf howled loudly, expressing his joy.

I checked my smartwatch.

[Ghost Wolf absorbs troll's blood, acquiring lowest-rank regenerative power.]

By killing a troll, he acquired its regenerative ability.

Five days ago, he acquired an ability called skin hardening by killing an orc. The Ghost Wolf's Absorption ability was showing great results.

Recently, I've been focusing on raising the Ghost Wolf. As Evandel's first Servant, he was worth every second I spent on making him stronger.

To be completely honest, he was much stronger than me even now.

If anybody asked who Fenrir was, I might have to say that it was him.

—Hek, hek, hek.

The Ghost Wolf came back to me panting. I couldn't call him cute with his teeth covered in blood and flesh, but I happily stroked his back.

"Well done, well done."

—Grrr.

The wolf closed his eyes and expressed his satisfaction.

Next, I contacted SH Agency and let them know where I was. In about five minutes, one of their employees should come and retrieve the troll's corpse.

While I waited, I sat down on the wolf's back and looked around SH Agency's homepage.

“...Wow, looks like it’ll go public soon.”

The homepage looked much better than before.

Not only were there 23 contracted hunters, there was even a contracted Hero named Jin Jangho.

Park Soohyuk’s business was expanding quicker than I thought.

Thinking about how close I was to its owner and how I owned 4% of this future giant’s stock, I couldn’t help but smile.

While I was being satisfied with myself, I received a message.

[Where are you?]

The sender was Yoo Yeonha.

[I’ll go to you. Where are you?]

[No, I’ll go.]

[I’m in Gangwondo Field.]

[Then wait just 30 minutes.]

“Hm.”

Today, Yoo Yeonha asked that we meet.

She most likely succeeded in refining Misteltein's Leaf and was going to bring me the bullets.

After letting the wolf hunt for the next 30 minutes, I went out to the Field’s entrance when Yoo Yeonha messaged me that she arrived.

At the Field’s entrance, I saw Yoo Yeonha waiting for me. When she saw me, she waved her hand.

I approached her and asked.

“Is it about the leaf?”

“Yes, our research showed just how extraordinary it was. We could hardly believe that

a single leaf had a similar amount of magic power as an artifact. Sadly, we couldn't figure out its origin."

"It must have been difficult to grind and refine it."

"Taking opportunity cost into account, it should have been close to 100 million won."

Yoo Yeonha nodded as she handed me a suitcase. I took it without restraint.

"Five bullets. We had enough left over to make three tenths of a bullet, but we used it for research like you suggested."

"Thanks."

Yoo Yeonha bit her lips in response to my thoughtless praise.

"...Don't thank me."

"Then what, you want me to sue you or something?"

"...No, I'm just sorry. Anyways, was it really okay to use such a precious leaf to make handgun bullets?"

"Yeah, I told you, these are just for looking."

All five bullets were made for my Desert Eagle handgun. Since I could modify their size with Setting Intervention, it didn't matter all that much.

"Please, I'm not that gullible. Those bullets even have medicinal effects in them. I can hardly believe you won't actually use them."

"Really? You could have give me the medicine later when things are going well..."

"It's going well."

Yoo Yeonha interrupted me.

"We already set up our potion brewing chain with cultivated ginseng, and although they're only novices, we have three ginseng diggers contracted."

Yoo Yeonha smiled as she said that. However, her smile lacked sincerity and looked more like a smile to hide sadness.

“Well, that’s good. There aren’t other problems?”

I put my hand in my pocket and grabbed an envelope.

It was a list containing the names of traitors related to ‘Yoo Yeonha Scandal’ and the misdeeds they committed. It cost me 150 SP to obtain all this through hacking.

I tried to give it to her, but Yoo Yeonha cut me off.

“No, there’s none.”

“...Eh?”

None? Did Yoo Yeonha Scandal not happen yet?

I let go of the envelope in my hand.

“I have things to do, so I’ll be leaving now. If you need anything else, feel free to ask me whenever. I’ll do my best to meet your need.”

She couldn’t be more reliable.

It was convenient to have the future queen of Seoul as my ally.

“Oh, I’m about to head out too. Do you want to grab lunch together?”

“No, like I said, I have things to do.”

Seeing Yoo Yeonha turning around coldly, I said just three words.

“Sundaeguk or hamburger.”

“.....”

Yoo Yeonha flinched momentarily, then leered at me strangely.

“I keep telling you, I don’t like those things.”

Grumbling, she quickly disappeared into a limousine, which drove off immediately.

I didn't doubt that its destination was McDonald's or a *sundaeguk* restaurant.
After watching her leave, I opened the suitcase.

Click—

Five bullets were lined up on luxurious velvet.
I could see my reflection on the bullets' sleek surface.
I was expressionless.

===

[Refined Misteltein Bullet] [Partial Divine-grade] [Null attribute]
.44 Macon platinum bullet with highly pure magic power and compressed Misteltein.
It seems to contain a portion of god-slaying powers.
[Attack Power - 9/10]

===

Attack power of 9.
This was undoubtedly enough.
I closed the suitcase. Its black surface was incapable of reflecting light, and I couldn't tell what kind of a face I was making.
But the important thing was that the preparation was finished.
Now...
It was time to make the request.

Chapter 119

What Must Be Done (2)

Last Friday night, I sent Boss a message.

I said that I wanted to negotiate.

Boss was silent for a week until she messaged me today.

The content of the message was a coordinate pointing to an intermediate-rank danger zone on the outskirts of Gyeonggido.

She was clearly telling me to come.

“...Huh?”

When I arrived, I saw an abandoned house standing alone in the middle of a dense forest.

It was a stone house that often appeared in scary movies, with stone bricks with fading color covered in moss and vines, and darkness shining through the broken window.

I went inside.

The sound of footsteps echoed out from darkness. I got goosebumps on my skin every time a chilly wind blew.

“Hello?”

The moment I voiced out, something large dropped down from the ceiling. Evandel's Ghost Wolf shot out of my chest in response, and I opened my eyes to grasp the situation.

“...A bat?”

Flying Nightmare.

A giant bat was being crushed by Fenrir. Er, wait, I was Fenrir.

—Krrrr! Krrrr!

—Guaaaa!

The giant bat struggled as hard as it could under the Ghost Wolf, but its neck was quickly bitten and twisted like a stringless puppet.

The Flying Nightmare should be an intermediate rank grade 6 monster, but it was helpless against the Ghost Wolf.

“I guess I’ll leave close ranged combat to him.”

I could just shoot from long range and the wolf could take care of anything that neared me. It was the perfect combination.

Kiiiiik—

Soon, the door behind me opened and small footsteps rang out.

I turned around.

As expected, it was Boss.

She looked back and forth between the dead bat and the wolf, and asked.

“Is it your pet?”

“Yes? Ah, yes, something like that.”

“It’s cute. First, take a seat.”

Boss pointed at a table, which was the only furniture in the house.

I sat down in front of it, with the wolf lying next to me.

I asked Boss.

“Did you leave the bat here on purpose?”

“No, many monsters live around here. It must have come in on its own. Anyways, I heard you wanted to negotiate?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s hear it. What condition didn’t you like?”

Boss took out the contract once again.

An official mercenary contract. It was a good offer with a salary, which mercenaries rarely received.

However, what I wanted couldn't be written down on a contract, nor was it allowed to.

"I liked the conditions."

"Then what?"

"There's one request I'd like to make."

Boss tilted her head with a puzzled look.

With a thin smile, I told her what must be done.

"I need you to help me kill someone."

Silence descended. I couldn't even hear Boss' breathing.

I did my research and the result was conclusive.

It was impossible for me to kill Chae Jinyoon alone.

Daehyun Hospital's VIP ward couldn't be underestimated. Each room was a fortress that could withstand a full-powered attack from high-intermediate rank Heroes, and Chae Jinyoon's room even had 3 powerful mercenaries protecting it in shifts.

The situation was still better than when he was first hospitalized, when even a high-intermediate rank Hero was guarding him. Regardless, I had no way of penetrating their defense.

And even if I somehow managed to do so... my identity would certainly be discovered. The Chae clan could easily make use of Yoo Jinhyuk. There was simply no way I could avoid his Gift.

As selfish as it may be, I still wanted to stay together with the few comrades I've come to rely on.

"You want to... kill someone?"

"Yes."

With a stiff expression, I gave Boss an envelope.

Boss stared at the envelope for a moment, then grabbed it with a light sigh. Her small hand entered my sight.

She opened the envelope.

Pictures of Chae Jinyoon and information about him fell down.

Immediately, Boss' expressionless face changed. With widened eyes, Boss looked at

me and asked.

“...Is there a specific reason?”

I nodded.

“What is it?”

“Mm... for the sake of world peace.”

Although what I said was the truth, Boss made a sullen face.

I couldn't do anything about it, since it wasn't that I had personal grudge against him.

“.....”

Boss was silent for a while.

It was undoubtedly because Chae Jinyoon was a difficult target, even for her. Chae Jinyoon's clan, to be exact.

“I'll be the one to kill him. You just have to create the opportunity...”

I didn't plan on asking her to kill him. She probably wouldn't agree in the first place. Seeing her completely silent, I added a secret word.

“...Boss.”

For this day, I purposely avoided calling her Boss.

Immediately, Boss' eyebrows twitched.

She was trying to keep her imposing manner, but I could see the corner of her lips curling up faintly.



On the other hand, the 'Past Family', excluding Kim Hajin, was meeting in a coffee shop. Although the purpose was to study for the final exams that would start in a week, Yoo Yeonha was the only one actually studying. Even Kim Suho was busy texting on his smartwatch.

Chae Nayun stared at Kim Suho suspiciously.

“Kim Suho, you’re texting Seung-Ah Unni, aren’t you?”

“Huh?”

“I knew it. So that’s why she kept asking me about you.”

Kim Suho flinched.

“Uh... we’re just talking normally.”

Yoo Yeonha cut in.

“Isn’t that stranger? A cadet having personal conversations with a guild’s vice-leader? And she’s currently the most popular Hero too...”

“Eh? Ah, no, it’s not like that...”

Taken aback, Kim Suho began to ramble. Luckily for him, the subject of the conversation quickly changed. Yi Yeonghan mischievously teased Chae Nayun, who was sitting in a daze.

“Why are you so quiet? Are you thinking about Kim Hajin?”

“Why would Chae Nayun be thinking about that idiot?”

But it was Shin Jonghak who reacted first, and Yoo Yeonha also frowned at his language.

“...Jonghak, don’t call him an idiot. He’s rank 1 in theory.”

“Right, Jonghak, didn’t you ask him for help yesterday?”

“What? Don’t make things up, Kim Suho. Have you finally gone mad?”

“I saw you ordering Kim Horak to ask for you.”

Kim Suho remembered seeing Shin Jonghak awkwardly handing Kim Horak his notebook and Kim Horak going to Kim Hajin with it.

“...That was just him asking what he didn’t understand.”

“What nonsense is that...”

“Shut up—!”

“Stop being so loud. I’m tired and annoyed by my recent hellish training.”

Chae Nayun quickly suppressed Shin Jonghak’s delirium.

On the other hand, Yoo Yeonha smiled bitterly and closed her textbook. No one seemed to be interested in studying.

“So, all three of you are going to Yoo Sihyuk Camp? Then you’ll be a league above the other cadets once you come out.”

“Yeah, we’ll come back early March.”

“Hm... then when should we go on our trip?”

The best part of being students was being able to go on trips with friends. Hearing Yoo Yeonha’s words, Chae Nayun replied in a better mood.

“December 17th, a week after finals.”

“Oh, that day doesn’t work for me. I have a promise with Hajin.”

“What?”

Chae Nayun’s eyes widened at Kim Suho’s unexpected words.

“W-W-What promise?”

“Uh, we’re going...”

Kim Suho paused.

Last week, Kim Hajin said that he found a Dungeon and invited him to come. Kim Suho felt that it was something he shouldn’t reveal to others.

“...we’re going on a drive together.”

“A drive?”

“Uh, yeah. I’ve been wanting to try riding his bike.”

“Pft, what a fitting duo.”

Shin Jonghak sneered, while Chae Nayun suddenly began to bang her head against the backseat of the couch in a fit of rage.

“Ha, haha, I can’t believe this. Ha, haha.”

After repeating this woodpecker-like motion for a bit, Chae Nayun suddenly shot up.

“Hey, I’m going first.”

Kim Suho asked.

“Where are you going?”

“Training. I’m going training. Don’t follow me, Shin Jonghak.”

“...Kuhum.”

Shin Jonghak, who was stealthily trying to get up, sat back down.

Koong, koong.

Chae Nayun then stomped out angrily for no determinable reason.



9 P.M.

After talking with Boss, I met with Rachel as soon as I returned to Cube. This was our standard one-on-one training time.

“By the way, why did you ask me to help you with Barrier? I’m only rank 334.”

Before the start of training, I suddenly got curious and asked.

Rachel looked at me for a minute, then spoke with a sheepish smile.

“I’m not that stupid. I already know that Hajin-ssi is staying at that rank on purpose.”

“...Yes? Ah, well...”

I shrugged at Rachel’s surprisingly high evaluation of me. Thinking about it carefully, she wasn’t wrong. If I utilized Stigma’s magic power well, I felt like I could easily climb to rank 30.

Any higher made me doubtful because of my stats.

0.7 from Aether, 0.3 from Under Armor, and 0.1 from Ghost Wolf. Even with a total of 1.1 points from items, my stats still weren’t great.

“Let’s start. Try activating Barrier.”

Rachel nodded with a look of determination. She stood up straight and invoked Barrier.

Although it looked a bit jagged, it was still covering her upper body, and its defensive capability looked high even at a glance.

“Now, I’ll try attacking.”

I held up my cadet handgun and aimed at her Barrier.

Although I could easily kill a low-intermediate rank monster with a cadet handgun, I shouldn’t be able to penetrate Rachel’s Barrier.

“Before that, cover yourself with qi reinforcement. Just in case you get hurt.”

“Yes!”

Along with an enthusiastic reply, Rachel covered herself with qi reinforcement. She really was passionate about learning.

“Now, try to stop my bullets using that Barrier.”

“...?”

This time, she seemed a bit confused.

She probably thought the Barrier would defend on its own.

“Using this Barrier?”

“Yep, you’ll know what I mean once you try. It’ll be quite difficult.”

“.....”

Rachel quietly curled her body behind her Barrier.

I grinned and aimed my gun at her.

“I’m shooting.”

I fired immediately. The bullet I shot curved in an odd way, digging underneath Rachel’s Barrier, then suddenly shooting up and hitting her arm.

“..Uuu!”

Rachel trembled at the sudden impact. Then, she rubbed her arm with her hand.

Since she had her qi reinforcement up, it should have only felt like a sting.

I provoked her slightly.

“If you want to block my bullet with that Barrier, you’ll need to practice for at least three years.”

“.....”

Rachel opened her eyes flaringly like her pride was hurt.

“I, I want to try again.”

“Of course.”

The decision Rachel made to deal with my bullet was enlarging the size of her Barrier.

With a small smile, I aimed where her Barrier couldn’t cover, her toe.

Tang.

“Auu! Ow!”

Her qi reinforcement must have been weaker around her feet as she fell to the ground holding her foot. Then, with teary eyes, she glared at me with a wronged face.

“T-That was mean!”

“What do you mean? That was Rachel-ssi’s fault. Why try to block a bullet with just a Barrier?”

“...Eh?”

“Try asking the grass, or the wind.”

I remembered a scene I described.

A breathtaking scene from the future, where Rachel would ask her elementals to cast hundreds of Barriers. Using this fairytale-like power, she would save thousands of people and overcome her trauma at the same time.

“.....”

Of course, that was in the future. The present time’s 17-year-old Rachel was only glaring at the grass, unable to understand what I meant.

Buzz—

Suddenly, my smartwatch rang.

This buzz was an alarm function I added to notify me whenever a change happened to me.

===

[24 hours passed since consuming a ginseng pill. All stats increase by 0.0012 point.]
[Medicinal effect, ‘Physical Body Reinforcement’, has been 100% memorized.]

4. Physical Body Reinforcement

- ▷Increases all stats by 0.001~0.02 point. (The increase is only dependent on luck. Your physical stats will not affect it in any way.)
- ▷Reproduction cooldown time: 24 hours.

===

After eating Yoo Yeonha’s ginseng pill every day, I finally obtained its medicinal effect. Although the ginseng pill’s effect permanently increased its user’s stats by 0.001~0.02 point, the upper limit was only achievable by children or the elderly. I’ve only been

able to get 0.0015 point at max with each max.

But now that I had this Physical Body Reinforcement effect, my stat increase would take a new turn. Assuming I only gained 0.0018 point per day, a year would give me 0.657 point, and ten years would give me 6.57 points...

“Mm.”

After nodding in satisfaction, I held up my gun once more.

“Alright, let’s go aga...”

It was then.

Psssh, psssh.

I could hear the rustling of leaves behind me.

Who was it?

I quickly turned around, but the person who was watching us seemed to have run away.

However, my Thousand-Mile Eyes could easily see through the forest and find the person running away.

“...Huh?”

A familiar silhouette with brown hair.

It was Chae Nayun.



Time flew by like a river, and the hellish finals began for Cube’s cadets.

But just like always, I breezed through the written exams.

What most cadets were concerned about were the combat exams.

“Listen up. For the final exam, everyone will start from an equal position.”

Today was December 8th.

All first-year cadets were gathered in Gyeonggido for the final exam.

“The final exam will be Tower Climbing!”

Today’s exam was Tower Climbing, but I didn’t know much about it, since I skipped

writing about most of Cube's exams after the first semester.

I suddenly regretted it.

"This is a common training program used by guilds before attempting to conquer Towers. Up to 1500 people can enter at a time."

The building in front of us was too square to be called a Tower.

I looked up at this building in a daze.

Although it only looked like a 10-story building, it should be much bigger on the inside.

"This Tower's entrance is a magic engineered device that's similar to a Portal. Once you go inside, you'll be sent to a random predetermined location, so don't be alarmed!"

After the instructor's explanation, cadets began to enter the Tower one by one.

When it was my turn, I went in with my eyes closed.

Sensations similar to a Portal enveloped me, and in the next moment, I could clearly feel that I was transported to another space.

Even when I opened my eyes, all I saw was darkness.

I looked around using my Thousand-Mile Eyes.

Although there was darkness all around me, my extraordinary eyes could see everything as though it was day.

"Hmm."

I was in a small white room with only a small pathway to my right.

Finding my way out of this room seemed to be my first goal.

I focused my vision and tried to see through the walls.

But as expected of a Tower, something seemed to be hindering my Gift as I couldn't see that far away.

"Argh, my eyes hurt."

I felt like I could peer through the walls if I added Stigma's magic power, but I decided to save it since I didn't know what would happen later on.

Soon, the lights came on, signaling that the exam had begun. At the same time, glowing sentences appeared on the white walls.

[3 Commandments]

[Cooperate with White to climb.]

[Be wary of traps.]

[Have faith.]

“...I’ll be damned if Lancaster or other Djinn’s don’t come out.”

I was all too familiar with how things were panning out.

Although Djinn’s wouldn’t dare to act too openly with so many watchful eyes on Cube, about 30% of Cube was already taken over by Djinn’s.

First, I took a careful look around. But just as I concluded before, there wasn’t anything special about the room.

“So I’ll have to cross that bridge...”

There was a pathway on the right leading to a bridge. It looked too much like a trap, with the left and right sides of the bridge being completely empty.

But I had no choice.

I walked down the sole pathway and arrived at the bridge.

While I was going over the bridge, one careful step at a time...

Shweeek—

An arrow came flying in with a fierce shockwave.

No, there wasn’t just one arrow.

One from the front, and one from the left and right.

However, all three arrows lost their speed three steps in front of my head.

Compared to Rachel’s rapier, these arrows were like turtles.

Under Bullet Time, which I was now all too familiar with, I grabbed the two arrows flying in from the sides, then dodged the one from the front by lightly tilting my head.

Then, I chucked the arrows forward, destroying the crossbow that fired the arrow.

“Ahahaha!”

After clearing the first trap with ease, I laughed imposingly.

However.

Doosh—

The sound of a door opening rang out.

“...W-What!?”

And the bridge I was standing on dropped down.

Chapter 120

What Must Be Done (3)

KOONG!

I touched the ground with a rough thud. However, I wasn't hurt thanks to covering my back with Aether.

I quickly got up and looked around.

I was in an empty cave-like complex.

The only thing even remotely noteworthy were the rocks on the ground.

"...The Tower I know isn't like this."

In truth, there was only one Tower that I carefully designed.

Tower of Wish, the largest Tower in history that was on a league of its own compared to other Towers.

The place would be called an alternate world, and it was the place I would go in the future. In fact, I *had* to go.

But that was for a future time.

"What am I supposed to do now?"

"Uwoooah!"

While I was looking around, a scream rang out from above as someone else fell to the ground.

A familiar face and a familiar body.

It was Chae Nayun.

Was it a coincidence? Or were stupid people more likely to fall for the trap? Though, that would mean I was stupid too.

"Auuu..."

Chae Nayun rubbed her back, then widened her eyes when she saw me.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't Kim-ssi."

Then, she narrowed her eyes and said some strange words.

“...Is your head hurt?”

I put my hand forward. Chae Nayun seemed to hesitate for a moment, but she soon grabbed my hand and got up.

She dusted off the dirt on her butt and back, then asked.

“Where are we?”

“How would I know? Rather, how did you fall down?”

“Well, a crossbow shot an arrow at me. When I destroyed it, the floor suddenly collapsed.”

Crossbow... ah, come to think of it, the color of that crossbow was white.

One of the three commandments was [Cooperate with White].

But how the hell were we supposed to cooperate with a crossbow that tried to kill us?

“Wait a minute.”

I widened my eyes and looked forward. My Thousand-Mile vision quickly expanded out.

About a kilometer past the empty cave complex, I could see a group of dwarves at work. They were standing in front of a stone door, diligently pulling on a rope connected to it.

“I found the way. Follow me.”

I gestured at Chae Nayun and walked forward. Chae Nayun looked at me somewhat grumpily, then began to follow me.

“Where are we going?”

“There are NPCs up ahead.”

“NPCs?”

Tower NPCs, beings created by the Tower's magic power that can only live inside the Tower.

These magic power existences were officially called 'Tower residents', but people liked to call them by the gaming language, NPC.

"There are even NPCs in this Tower?"

"I don't see why not."

Even an artificial Tower like this one was still a mystical space.

In any case, the two of us walked together in a running pace.

After about five minutes, we could see the dwarf NPCs.

"Wow, your eyes really are freak... amazing."

"Just say freakish."

It wasn't like her to use more kid-friendly language.

"W-What do you mean? I'm always like this."

Chae Nayun dodged my eyes as she flipped her hair over.

Ignoring her, I observed the NPCs up ahead. They were all wearing the same green clothes, but that was the only special thing about them.

"Ah! Who is it!?"

Once we walked a bit closer, one of the NPCs found us, causing the others to also look over.

"They must be here to help us!"

"O Venerable Giants! Please open this door for us!"

The dwarves ran up to us and pleaded.

"What do we do?"

"Hold on."

One of the three commandments was [Have Faith].
I didn't know what that meant exactly, but I couldn't be too careless.

"...What are your names?"

"I'm One!"

"I'm Seven!"

"I'm Twelve!"

"Nevermind then."

I counted the dwarves.
One, two, three... seven.
I couldn't tell if I was supposed to trust them.

"Is there anyone else?"

"We have other brothers!"

"How many?"

"100!"

White.

[1]

It was a stupid play on words, but that's what made it more believable.

"Fine, I'll help you."

I looked at Chae Nayun, signaling to her that it was her turn.
Chae Nayun grabbed the rope hanging on the stone door.

"I just have to pull on this?"

"Yes! But it'll be difficult to open alone!"

"You hear that?"

Without a choice, I also grabbed the rope.

When we pulled on the rope after a count of three, the stone door opened easily.

The problem was what was inside.

As soon as the door was opened, a giant praying mantis jumped out. From its black carapace, I could surmise that it was a fairly high-ranked insect-type monster.

Swinging its front legs, the praying mantis charged toward us.

However, Chae Nayun took out her sword before the praying mantis could get anywhere near us.

Moving faster than light, she slashed out in a clean motion.

The magic power extending from her sword cleanly cut the praying mantis' shoulder. Chae Nayun then kicked the shrieking mantis' abdomen and slashed at it again as it flew backwards.

Swish—

A crescent wave of magic power plowed through the ground, obliterating the mantis upon contact.

Chae Nayun closed her eyes and put her sword back in its scabbard, her short hair softly fluttering from the wind caused by the attack.

I blinked several times as I watched her display of power.

She was crazy strong.

“Thank you, thank you!”

The dwarf NPCs bowed and walked through the door.

We probably had to go in as well.

“...Let's go.”

“Take the lead, Kim-ssi.”

“...Hm.”

We quickly walked through the stone door.

However, what lied past the stone door was completely different than what it looked like from the outside.

In the blink of an eye, we found ourselves in a forest, with the dwarves waddling forward. Following the dwarves, we reached a town.

“Are Towers normally like this?”

“...Towers have intelligence, so I’m sure they can change their structures however they want.”

According to my settings, Towers had intelligence exceeding that of humans. The only problem was that the goal of their intelligence wasn’t survival, but another reason.

“Let’s follow those NPCs. It looks like there are other cadets in the town.”

“Sure, Kim-ssi.”

“...Ehew.”

We followed the NPCs into the town.

The town had all sorts of facilities, such as inns, restaurants, and weapon shops. Like I mentioned, there were other cadets here as well.

“Oh, it’s Nayun!”

One of the cadets shouted after seeing Chae Nayun.

“Nayun~~”

It was a high-ranking supporter, Yi Jiyoong.

“Yi Jiyoong? What is this place? How do you climb up?”

Hearing Chae Nayun’s barrage of questions, Yi Jiyoong pointed at the noticeboard in front of the town’s community hall.

“Take a look at that first.”

I began to read the noticeboard.

Chae Nayun also joined in, standing right beside me.

[Stage – Dwarven Town]

[Dwarves are being terrorized by enemies and are seeking outside help.]

[If you would like to join the war effort, please leave a thumbprint here.]

[You will be awarded 25 points for every enemy invasion you stop.]

[You require 100 points to get to the next stage.]

[You will be given bonus points based on your contribution.]

Once we finished reading, Yi Jiyoong spoke.

“Hurry up and sign up. It’s the only way you can get points.”

We promptly left our thumbprints on the noticeboard.

It was then.

“Enemies—!”

A dwarf standing on the watchtower shouted at the top of his lungs.

I turned to the direction the dwarf pointed.

Goblin warriors in the front, goblin archers in the middle, and goblin magicians in the back.

A group of about 300 goblins was marching forward.

“Hey! Gather up!”

Adapting quickly to the situation, Chae Nayun shouted loudly. Soon, all the cadets in the town gathered around her. There were 27 in total 17 warriors, 8 supporters, and 2 sharpshooters including me.

After calling everyone over, Chae Nayun seemed to be at a loss for words. I nudged her shoulder.

“Everyone’s here, Chae-ssi. What should we do?”

“Um... argh, who cares? They’re just goblins, just fight.”

“.....”

A brief silence descended.

“Then I’ll snipe the goblin magicians.”

“Huh? Oh, sure.”

I looked around.

Sharpshooters wanted to fight from a high ground. Although the town had a watch tower, I wanted somewhere higher. Thankfully, there was a tall 40-meter tree nearby. I ran to the tree and using Parkour, I jumped up and sat down on a large branch. Looking at the goblin magicians in the distance, I took out the cadet handgun.

“Scan.”

40%. It wasn't too bad.

The attack power of the cadet handgun was incomparable to the Desert Eagle, but we were fighting goblins, and goblin magicians had especially weak defense. I should be able to instakill them by hitting their heads.

—Kieeeeeek!

One goblin raised its staff and howled.

Was that the leader of the group?

I fired at the howling goblin. The bullet drew a clear arc and pierced through the goblin's head. As soon as I confirmed the goblin leader's death, I fired at the goblin magicians.

Each bullet killed one goblin magician, and soon, there were none left on the field.

“Nice, Kim-ssi! Let's go, guys!”

Along with Chae Nayun's command, the warrior cadets charged forward.



Once the easy fight ended, the sun set, making this place even more realistic.

Chae Nayun and I walked into the town's restaurant, wondering if we really were in a Tower.

“So, Chae-ssi, what are you going to eat?”

“Just fruit juice. By the way, why are you calling me Chae-ssi. It's kind of annoying.”

“You started it.”

“But that doesn't mean you can do it too.”

I had no clue what she was saying, so I ignored her.
I looked around the restaurant, then turned back to Chae Nayun.
She was admiring the sunset with a smile of joy.
I let out a bitter sigh with a heavy heart. Then, I called Chae Nayun's name.

"Hey, Chae Nayun."

Chae Nayun turned around and faced me.

"Eh? What's up, Kim-ssi?"

"...How's your oppa doing?"

Immediately, Chae Nayun made an obscure expression.

"What, you're finally worried about him?"

"No, I'm just wondering. It's probably the same for everyone else."

"Heh, don't lie. I know you were the first one to be at the hospital. Yeonha told me."

"....."

I stared at Chae Nayun.
To be honest... I wanted to ask.
I wanted to ask how she would feel if someone killed Chae Jinyoon.
But that was a question that shouldn't be asked, so long as you were human.

"By the way, Kim-ssi..."

Seeing me just staring at her, Chae Nayun changed the subject, wriggling her fingers.

"Was it, um, last week?"

She stuttered, looking down on the ground.

"What were you, um, doing with Rachel? At night."

Was she calling me Kim-ssi because she was sulking about that? Well, it was true that Rachel and Chae Nayun were rivals.

I replied shortly.

“Training.”

“Oh... Why are you training so late?”

Grumbling, she stuck out her lips.

But I was more curious about Chae Jinyoon’s condition.

Also, I was curious about Boss’ decision.

Would Boss help me?

“...Also, I heard you’re going on a drive with Kim Suho.”

Chae Nayun sure had a lot to say.

“I like motorcycles more than Kim Suho.”

“No, that’s...”

“Let’s go on a trip. I’ll pay for all the expenses.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Why? Just tell me why you don’t have time. I’ll fit my schedule for when you’re free.”

Seeing her throwing a tantrum, I just laughed silently.



Two nights passed by since the start of the final exam.

The first day was spent killing goblins, and the second day was spent killing trolls and yetis.

Over these two days, there were three attacks on the Dwarven Town.

We successfully blocked them all and obtained 75 points. Apparently, the bonus points would be given out once all four invasions were blocked.

“...Wow, I guess they saved the best for last.”

Today was the third day.

As expected of the last day, a monster on the level of a middle boss appeared.

“Uaaak! It’s the Black Ogre!”

The dwarf on the watchtower ran away screaming.

Black Ogre.

Seeing the appearance of this mountain-sized ogre, a few cadets turned pale.

“...For real?”

“This has to be a prank, right?”

I watched the Black Ogre carefully.

Even the weakest Black Ogre was at the level of an intermediate-rank grade-3 monster.

One thing to note was that its endurance was especially strong.

In other words, it was the perfect target to test my strength.

Now that I had 3 streaks of Stigma, I could add quite a bit of power to my attacks.

I tapped Chae Nayun, who was looking up at the giant ogre.

“Let’s do it like usual. I’ll support from the back, so you guys can kill it.”

“But against a Black Ogre, a bullet wouldn’t... Eh? You’re using a bow?”

Chae Nayun tilted her head, seeing the bow in my hand.

I bought one from Cube just in case I needed it. The cadet handgun was just too weak.

I also wanted to raise my rank until it was around rank 100.

...And who knew, maybe that ogre was sent by Djinn.

“You’re going to use magic arrows?”

“Yeah, I can’t keep using a gun forever. Alright, I’m going ahead.”

“Ah, hey, wait!”

I climbed up the usual tree and looked down at the Black Ogre.

Now that I was up high, I could see that the Black Ogre wasn’t as big as I originally thought.

Glaring at it calmly, I pulled the bowstring. Then, I imagined the arrow that would sit on the bowstring.

It couldn't be a normal arrow. The tip had to be jagged to increase its attack power, and the entire arrow had to be perfectly balanced like a spear. I should be able to use the arrow as a weapon itself.

Ssss—

Sucking in the surrounding air, Stigma's magic power gathered around the bowstring. Repeating back and forth between compression and condensation, Stigma's magic power formed the image of an arrow.

It was exactly the same as the arrow I imagined.

The attribute I infused was 'light'.

As a result, the arrow shone with a brilliant light.

However, I let out a sigh.

...This single arrow was all I could make using almost all 3 streaks of Stigma.

Of course, that meant its destructive power was unimaginable.

I pulled the bowstring using all the power I could muster.

The light shining from the arrow swirled like a tornado, and the light only grew brighter.

After a short breath, I let go of the bowstring.

The arrow shot forward like a beam of light. The Black Ogre seemed to have noticed its intense light as it raised its hand to block it.

However, the moment the arrow touched its hand... a silent explosion erupted.

With no flames or thunderous quakes, only a blinding light blazed, burning the Black Ogre's flesh.

—Guooooo

The Black Ogre's arm burned white. Its bloodcurdling scream rang out.

Although it only lost an arm, it simply couldn't fight against Chae Nayun and over a dozen other warriors with one arm.

Not to mention, Yi Jiyeon had several buffs on Chae Nayun...

"...Wow."

However, Chae Nayun was only blankly looking at the Black Ogre and not trying to charge in.

1. 100 is “baek”. White is also “baek”.

Chapter 121

What Must Be Done (4)

With an arrow using three streaks of Stigma, I took away the arm of a peak intermediate-rank monster.

It was a decent explosion, but I didn't have the energy to watch the outcome. In an instant, drowsiness flooded my brain, and the sky and ground switched places.

I had fallen down the tree from sudden dizziness.

"...Ah."

I looked at the battlefield in this state. I could see a sword of magic power shooting up. It was Chae Nayun.

Her greatsword, which was half the size of the Black Ogre's arm, swung down. Struck by this domineering slash, the ogre staggered on its feet, during which countless attacks of other cadets poured in.

...In any case, the recoil from using up a large amount of Stigma seemed to get stronger the more streaks of Stigma I got.

It was probably because my body couldn't withstand the emission of magic power.

"Argh."

Feeling dizzy, I closed my eyes.

Boom, boom, boom.

The battle was getting fiercer, but the sound entering my ears only got softer.

Eventually, I gave my body to the drowsiness.



When I opened my eyes, Chae Nayun was right in front of me.

Soft skin and an expression full of curiosity.

I was once again surprised by her otherworldly beauty.

"Ah."

Chae Nayun flinched and took a step back.

“...What.”

“Y-You, You’re awake?”

What was she doing to be so surprised? I asked as I rubbed my face.

“...Did you do something to me?”

“W-What do you mean? I was just surprised to see you sleeping so peacefully when everyone else is fighting!”

Chae Nayun sat down next to me as she yelled nervously.

“Oh, sorry, I was just tired.”

“...Kuhum. But what you did was awesome. Was that your finishing move? You know, like an ultimate ability.”

I nodded silently. What I wanted it to be was irrelevant. It seemed using it made me fall asleep for an hour or two, so it could only be a finishing move.

“What happened to the Black Ogre?”

“We killed it. It was easy thanks to you.”

“That’s good to hear.”

At that moment, a hologram window popped up in front of us.

[You cleared the stage!]

[Contribution points will now be awarded. The top three contributors are as follows.]

[Chae Nayun: 68 points]

[Kim Hajin: 39 points]

[Yi Jiyeon: 33 points]

[The bottom 30% of contributors will immediately be moved to a lower stage.]

[The top 30% of contributors will be moved to a higher stage after 2 hours of rest.]

[The remaining 40% will be given a chance to try again.]

Seeing the alerts, I finally understood how this Tower worked.

By repeating stages like this, cadets would either go up, go down, or stay on the same level. Grades should be given out accordingly once the exam ends.

“Ah~ so this is how it works.”

Chae Nayun seemed to have understood also as she clapped her hands together. Then, she poked my shoulder.

“Hey, team up with me.”

“Team up?”

“Yeah, there’s a party function. Look.”

Chae Nayun showed her smartwatch screen. Just like the last final exam, cadets were given exam smartwatches to wear during the final exam. At first, I thought that this exam’s smartwatch could only tell time, but there was now a ‘party’ function available.

“...The heck.”

“Let’s team up.”

I looked at Chae Nayun. Pressured by her sparkling eyes, I dodged her gaze. Chae Nayun then grabbed my sleeve.

“I want to team up with you.”

“Let me go.”

“Come on, let’s team up. Please~?”

Pulling my sleeve here and there, she was trying to act cutesy... but I could feel my brain shaking, like she was grabbing and shaking me by the collar.

“Hey, wait, let go. I’m going to puke.”

“I’ll let you go if you agree. Hurry up.”

She shook me with enough force to rip off my shirt.
Without a choice, I nodded.

“Okay, okay.”

Chae Nayun’s tussling didn’t stop until we officially partied up.



Afterwards, I went through two more stages with Chae Nayun.

In a forest, we protected an NPC from monsters, and in a colosseum, we fought against other cadets or giant monsters.

To be completely honest, Chae Nayun was carrying me. That was how overwhelming her display of skill was.

In the first place, Chae Nayun’s speciality was prolonged fights. Because of her immense magic power capacity, not even Kim Suho could stand up to her recovery speed. Naturally, Chae Nayun shined in stamina-heavy tasks like climbing a Tower.

Of course, even though Chae Nayun was carrying me, grades were given out individually.

I raked up points whenever I had the chance and constantly stayed in the top 30% of every stage.

[This is the final stage.]

Eventually, we reached the final stage, which was a cave.

Only the cream of the crop cadets should be present at this stage.

Chae Nayun nudged my shoulder and spoke.

“Hey, this must be the boss fighting stage. Try to see if there’s anything in front of us.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

I opened my eyes wide and focused.

My line of sight expanded, flying past the ground with nothing noteworthy.

Then, I caught sight of someone.

—Haam.

There was a girl squatting in front of a stone wall and yawning.

It was Rachel.

I smiled, happy to see her.

“There’s someone there.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, it looks like you can’t go in alone. Let’s go.”

“Okay.”

Chae Nayun and I ran forward.

Hearing our footsteps, Rachel immediately shot up. Then, she took out her rapier and stood with her guard up.

I shouted.

“Rachel-ssi!”

“What? Rachel?”

Chae Nayun suddenly stopped running. Meanwhile, Rachel put away her rapier and began running toward us.

It didn’t take long for us to meet up.

“Hajin-ssi...?”

Rachel called my name with a bright expression, which stiffened slightly when she saw Chae Nayun standing next to me.

“...Chae Nayun?”

“What, why is the princess here?”

Chae Nayun and Rachel exchanged displeased looks.

I reached out my hand to Rachel. Rachel shook my hand, then returned to glaring at

Chae Nayun.

So this was what it meant to have a rival.

For the next five years, the press would be constantly comparing them and encouraging them to fight. They had the same gender, the same age, and now they even had the same role as swordsmen. Naturally, they would be easy targets for Hero reporters, who were more extreme than typical celebrity reporters.

“So um, Rachel-ssi, why were you alone?”

“Yes? Ah, it said I couldn’t enter alone, so I was waiting for someone else.”

This final exam was dangerous for Rachel. Since Lancaster’s influence was still relatively small, monsters above high-intermediate rank wouldn’t suddenly pop out, but Rachel was certainly in more danger than other cadets.

“That’s good to hear. Then let’s go in together.”

“Yes, follow me.”

When Rachel touched the stone wall blocking the path, it suddenly rose up, revealing a corridor. Rachel led us in, and I walked along next to her. Chae Nayun glared at us from the back, then ran up and joined me.

After walking for about three minutes...

“Oi, Princess.”

After staring at Rachel for some time, Chae Nayun finally opened her mouth.

“You didn’t team up with anyone?”

“...Yes, I was alone the whole time.”

Rachel replied briefly.

“Oh, really~? Teamwork should be part of the exam’s grading criteria. You’ll probably get a zero for that then.”

Chae Nayun snickered and provoked Rachel, but Rachel remained silent. Then, Chae Nayun placed her hand on my shoulder and spoke.

“But you and I should get a perfect score.”

“What do you mean.”

“We were together from the first stage. Plus, I’m a warrior and you’re a sharpshooter. It’s the perfect combination.”

“Oh... well, sure.”

Rachel glanced at Chae Nayun.

“It’s combination, not combination.”

“...Same difference.”

After walking silently for three more minutes, Rachel clapped her hands together, as though she suddenly thought of something.

“Oh right, Hajin-ssi, would you like to come to England over winter break with some other team challenge members? There’s a huge festival in Clancy Islet.”

“In Clancy Islet? Sure, that sounds great.”

I’ve been wanting to go back for some time, but couldn’t because I had no invitation. Although I felt a bit sorry to Rachel, I wanted to make some more money until I got blacklisted from the casino.

“Great, then come with Hoseung-ssi, Bokgyu-ssi, and Jamer-ssi.”

Rachel smiled.

Jamer.

Hearing Tomer’s alias for the first time in a while, I suddenly grew curious how she was doing. At that moment, Chae Nayun muttered from the side.

“If you only play around, you’ll fall behind~”

“.....”

For a moment, Rachel's eyes narrowed sharply. However, people like Chae Nayun only enjoyed such reactions. Just as I expected, Chae Nayun smiled triumphantly.

"Have you heard of Yoo Sihyuk, Princess? What about the Yoo Sihyuk Camp? It's the camp that heirs of Hero clans pay billions of won to try to get in. That's where I'll be going over winter break. I might surpass you in swordsmanship soon."

In response to Chae Nayun's sneering, Rachel exhaled and retorted, while pretending to talk to me.

"Hajin-ssi, there are ways to be efficient in training too. Stupid people are often bad at comprehending what they're taught, so they aren't as efficient."

"...What? Did you just—"

"In that sense, I think I'm a very efficient learner."

Rachel was obviously not talking to me.

"Recently, I've gotten close to elementals elementals quite a bit."

Perhaps provoked by Chae Nayun's words, Rachel even emphasized the word 'elementals'. Just how Evandel called me Hajin Hajin, she said the same thing twice.

"...Elementals?"

"Yes, elementals elementals."

"What? What does she mean?"

Chae Nayun furrowed her brows. I could see her eyes burning with a sense of rivalry.

"Ah, my bad. That was supposed to be a secret."

Rachel put her hand over her mouth, with a somewhat proud expression. The cheeks were puffing up, like she was holding back her laughter.

...She usually wasn't like this.

I guess Chae Nayun had the tendency to make people around her just as childish.

“Did a hamster enter your mouth?”

While Chae Nayun was murmuring mockingly, we arrived at another stone wall. We didn't have to waste energy trying to open it. When the three of us walked up, it opened by itself.

“This is it?”

What lied beyond the stone wall wasn't any different than what was outside. But rather than a straight corridor, it was a circular room that was much larger.

“...Wait.”

I held my arms up and made the other two stop. It was because I could see someone in the distance.

He couldn't look more suspicious if he tried with a black robe covering most of his body.

“There's someone there.”

“Hello, cadets.”

The man approached us first.

“I am, Heuk Jeon, the exam overseer in charge of the final stage.”

I met his eyes, specifically his squirming black pupils.

No matter how much I thought about it, the aura he gave off wasn't that of an exam overseer's. More specifically, I could sense a ghastly aura and the smell of blood.

By the looks of it, Chae Nayun and Rachel seemed to share the same suspicion.

“Are you really an exam overseer?”

“Of course. But before you participate in this stage, I will pick someone to stay behind. Only two people can participate at a time.”

The self-proclaimed exam overseer took out a die.

“1 and 4 for the male cadet, 2 and 5 for the short-haired cadet, and... 3 and 6 for the

blonde cadet.”

Tok.

The die rolled on the ground.

“If your number is shown on the die, you won’t be able to participate in this stage.”

The result of the roll was 5 as expected.

Chae Nayun furrowed her brows, and the exam overseer spoke up.

“Short-haired cadet.”

“...What.”

The overseer flicked his finger. Then suddenly, a cage fell down from above, pulling in Chae Nayun with a powerful magic power.

“Ah! What’s this!?”

“Stay up for now. It will end soon.”

“Ah! Wait! Ah, uaaaaah...”

The overseer flicked his finger again, and the cage quickly shot back up. Seeing this, Rachel muttered nervously.

“Hajin-ssi, that person...”

“Yes, I also think he’s a Djinn.”

Rachel shook her head and corrected me.

“...He’s from Dark Moon Society.”

“Dark Moon?”

“Yes, look at that symbol on his robe.”

A black goblet and a faint moon above it.

Dark Moon Society.

Rachel clenched her teeth.

“...Sorry, it’s because of me.”

“Yes? Ah, no...”

Was Dark Moon Society that amazing?

I furrowed my brows.

I felt like it was part of the setting I wrote, but I couldn’t quite put my finger on it.

“Now then, shall we start the test?”

However, my thoughts didn’t continue for long.

Heuk Jeon raised his magic power, staring at us.

Koooong—!

Suddenly, the earth began to rumble.

Crevices began to appear on the ground, which slowly grew bigger.

“The test is simple.”

Behind Heuk Jeon, dozens of daggers shot up.

The killing intent he was emitting was real.

“There is a dueling arena below.”

Heuk Jeon jumped down a crevice. As the ground continued to break into pieces, Heuk Jeon’s voice rang out from below.

—If you can last up there for the next 10 minutes, you will have cleared the stage, and the test will end.

In that instant, a heavy pressure pressed down on me. At the same time, the ground I was standing on sunk down, causing me to lose my footing.

“Ak!”

Rachel immediately jumped and grabbed my hand.

“Hajin-ssi, are you okay!?”

“This...”

“It’s a gravitational field. Come... up... uk.”

Rachel tried to pull me up, and I tried to climb up.

In the next moment, however, my body became heavier. Since even Rachel was struggling, the pressure was undoubtedly immense.

As for me, I could hardly breathe.

—But if even one of you falls down...

Heuk Jeon’s voice echoed out.

—I will kill that person.

Kill.

The intent behind this word was chilling and honest. Fear spread across Rachel’s face.

—Ah, but don’t worry, the gravitational field will disappear once one person falls down. For the record, the chance of both of you surviving 10 minutes in that field is 0%. The gravitational field will continually get stronger until even I can’t withstand it, so one of you should just give up.

Just like he said, the gravitational field was getting stronger, and more and more of the ground was breaking apart.

“.....”

“.....”

Rachel and I exchanged glances.

I finally understood what his intentions were.

He wanted us to fight each other to survive, or fight each other to sacrifice ourselves.

Suddenly, Rachel’s expression turned serious.

“Hajin-ssi, don’t have strange thoughts.”

“...What, strange, thoughts.”

Seeing that I was on the verge of falling down, Rachel used both of her hands to hold onto my hand.

“Don’t try to let go. Put strength into your hand. Hurry!”

“...No.”

‘No, you see... unlike you, I can’t not let go out of my own volition.’

While I was inwardly laughing at myself, the gravitational field grew unbearably strong. Weight tens of times our own pressed down on us, and it was getting harder to keep my eyes open.

“Ah, ah, Hajin-ssi, don’t have strange thoughts and come up—!”

“.....”

Rachel was screaming my name desperately.

But feeling like I would die if I stayed up here any longer, I let go of Rachel’s hand strongly.

“Ah, aah, no!”

I fell down.

Rather than heading to my death, I felt like I was being liberated.

“Kim Hajin—!”

Screaming my name, Rachel also jumped down. However, a transparent barrier appeared out of nowhere, blocking her descent.

Rachel slammed the barrier with her fists, staring at me as I continued falling.



Thud.

“Argh.”

My back hit the ground, but like a déjà vu, I wasn't hurt thanks to Aether.

However, the situation was different this time.

I quickly shot up.

I could see the self-proclaimed exam overseer standing a fair distance away from me.

He spoke.

"So you came, just like I expected."

If what Rachel said was true, he should be from Dark Moon Society. Although I couldn't remember much about this organization, he should at least be at the level of an intermediate-rank Hero.

I felt my heart tremble.

I had an ominous feeling from the beginning of the exam. It seemed my intuition wasn't wrong.

"...So I have to fight you now?"

But even if I couldn't defeat him, I was confident in not losing.

He didn't know about the Ghost Wolf hiding in my chest.

There was a reason that surprise attacks were favored. As soon as he approached me with his guard down, the Ghost Wolf should bite off his neck.

"Are you confident?"

Heuk Jeon asked.

Without answering him, I fired the cadet handgun.

Tang, tang, tang, tang, tang.

I emptied the clip in less than a second. However, not a single bullet managed to reach him. The daggers hovering behind him had all cut them down.

"Unfortunately, I really will kill you."

He was quite talkative.

And that was exactly what I wanted.

I threw the cadet handgun at him. One of his daggers flew forward, cutting the handgun in half.

"You're abandoning your weapon? It's too quick to surrender, don't you think?"

“No.”

I stretched my arm out.

Magic power shot out of my upper arm, forming a handgun in my hand.

“You see, I’m the type that’s quite overgeared.”

Desert Eagle.

First, I transformed it into its assault rifle mode.

Since he didn’t show signs of approaching me, I had to make him do so.

Heuk Jeon was still smiling.

I smiled back, provoking him some more.

“Don’t hold anything back. You might regret it.”

“.....”

As I thought, his smile stiffened.

After clenching his teeth, he threw off the robe he was wearing and unleashed his magic power.

However, what caught my attention was the strange tattoo on his upper arm.

A black goblet and a faint moon.

Now that I saw this symbol again, I felt like I recognized it.

“Dark Moon Society...”

“...Oh? Looks like you’re quite knowledgeable for a brat.”

The man made a proud smile. He seemed to be happy knowing that his organization was famous.

I pondered over these three words.

What role did they fill in the original story...? I felt like it was on the tip of my tongue.

“AH!”

A light bulb went on in my head.

Simply put, these guys were... one of Chameleon Troupe’s many lackeys.

Chapter 122

What Must Be Done (5)

Chameleon Troupe had ties with several organizations and groups, since even they couldn't manage everything in this huge land.

Of course, most of these ties were only temporary, with Chameleon Troupe being in a clear-cut superior position. In fact, most of the groups they traded with didn't even know that they were dealing with the organization Chameleon Troupe.

Dark Moon Society was one of many private organizations based in Pandemonium. If I remembered correctly, their leader was from England, and their group was a crime syndicate similar to the Mafia.

“To think that even a brat like you has heard of us. We must have gotten quite famous, eh?”

Although the United Nations and several governments spread malicious propaganda against Pandemonium, Pandemonium wasn't the hell they made it out to be. In truth, Pandemonium was a city with a sizable number of residents that included humans. In any case, Chameleon Troupe didn't care too much about Pandemonium, but Dark Moon Society desperately clung to them in the hopes of elevating their status. After all, having Chameleon Troupe as their backer would give them quite an edge in the power struggles against other organizations.

As for why a member of Dark Moon Society was trying to kill me, it was likely because they were hired by Lancaster. This was especially likely, considering Lancaster and Dark Moon Society's leader were both from England.

Getting back to the matter at hand, the fact that Dark Moon Society was Chameleon Troupe's lackey changed nothing. It wasn't like I could go up to him and introduce myself as a friend of Chameleon Troupe's boss. If I did, Boss would probably kill me.

“Then let us start.”

Heuk Jeon chillingly spoke as his daggers gathered together.

I counted the number of daggers he had.

One, two, three... seventeen.

From the looks of it, he was controlling them with his magic power. If he could control all seventeen daggers skillfully, he was at least at the intermediate-rank level.

“Come, I’ll allow you to make the first move.”

Despite talking like he was looking down on me, he didn’t let his guard down in the slightest. His magic power infused daggers were thoroughly protecting his body like a curtain of blades. I couldn’t see a single opening to make use of.

“...Fine.”

First, I used the third medicinal effect memorized by my body.

[Instant Amplification]

In an instant, a surge of heat coursed through my body and my muscles bulged up. My body fiercely reacted at the spontaneous rush of adrenaline coursing through it.

Along with the strengthening of my physical body, my thought processes also sped up.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

“Despair is a part of death. I’ll let you experience it thoroughly.”

Click.

I shot open my eyes and aimed my gun at the blabbering fool.

Tududududu—

An explosive sound erupted as my 45-round magazine emptied in a second.

But even against such a terrifying firing speed, Heuk Jeon didn’t bat an eye. The seventeen daggers hovering around him like satellites cut down all the bullets.

Clang, clang—

Severed bullets fell on the ground.

Once the initial explosive sound died down, only silence remained.

“Hm... that’s it?”

Heuk Jeon smiled leisurely.

Tsk. I clicked my tongue and pulled my hair up.

Unfortunately, I was a bad match against him.

Although I could fire bullets powerful enough to break his daggers, the problem was that he had seventeen of them.

“...Huu.”

However, I couldn't die to him.

If I really wanted to win, I could do so whenever I wanted.

The god-slaying bullet, Misteltein.

Although it would be like using a guillotine to behead a chicken, it would certainly guarantee my survival.

“How disappointing. If that's all you have to show, I'll be attacking now.”

Heuk Jeon was kind enough to announce his next move. I focused my attention on his daggers. A sly smile emerged on his face, and his daggers flew toward me.

I immediately activated Bullet Time.

In this slowed world, I stared at the flying daggers... and felt that something was off.

A single dagger suddenly accelerated toward my head.

But I saw it coming before it even happened.

Perhaps it was easier to predict because the dagger was flying straight.

If I was right, the second dagger that was flying toward my heart would suddenly shoot up to my chin.

For some reason, I could see this before the dagger even came near my heart.

Knowing where the daggers would go, it was easy to deal with them.

I fired. Although my bullets wouldn't be able to overcome his daggers, they were more than capable of changing their course.

Clang, clang, clang.

Explosive sounds rang out as the bullets clashed with the daggers.

His daggers continued to change direction as they flew forward, and I fired at their predicted trajectory.

Tududuk.

Fragments of my bullets crumbled after hitting the daggers.

As this fierce exchange continued, I realized how I was predicting his attacks.

Throwing daggers with magic power and using magic power to change their course.

This was classified as a 'long-range' attack.

My Gift, Master Sharpshooter, put me at the peak of long ranged attacks. As long as an attack was long ranged, I could read its trajectory without being the attacker.

"...Tsk."

However, being able to predict their travel course was different than being able to defend against them.

Although my eyes could follow their movements, my body could not.

Bullet Time only lasted three minutes. Once Bullet Time ended, I would undoubtedly be in trouble.

Unfortunately, the flying daggers didn't show any signs of stopping. Meanwhile, Heuk Jeon leisurely observed me from afar.

As I continued to change the daggers' trajectory, I thought of the other weapon hidden in my Stigma.

===

[Awl of Weakening] [High rank – Enchant] [Poison attribute]

*An awl that weakens the pricked target.

*Enchanted with the high-rank magic effect 'Weakening'.

===

This item was the weapon Tomer got from Wicked's executive when she was tasked with weakening Rachel. Its high-rank magic effect should work on Heuk Jeon as well.

"Uk."

As Bullet Time ended, Heuk Jeon's dagger grazed my shoulder.

I clenched my teeth at the sharp pain.

Once.

I just had to stick this awl in him once.

The problem was how...

Then suddenly, I thought of something.

Stigma's magic power.

The power that turned my will into reality.

It wasn't impossible. Although there were many things I couldn't do with my limited streaks of Stigma, it was worth trying now that I had three.

I focused all my senses on Stigma.

“...Uk.”

Meanwhile, Heuk Jeon’s daggers cut my flesh apart, overloading my pain receptors sharply.

Still, I stood my ground and maintained my focus.

What I wanted was to stand behind him...!

Suddenly, Stigma shone brightly, its blue glow leaking through my shirt.

Immediately, the world seemed to turn upside down. As though the world was dismantled and then reassembled, the scenery distorted and changed. In the blink of an eye, I found myself standing behind Heuk Jeon.

I didn’t miss the opportunity I created.

Taking out the Awl of Weakening from Stigma, I struck down on Heuk Jeon’s shoulder.

“...What!?”

Although he showed an incredible reaction speed, it was too late.

I released the Ghost Wolf from my chest.

“Bite!”

The wolf jumped on Heuk Jeon’s body.

“Uk! W-What!?”

He struggled underneath the Ghost Wolf. Meanwhile, I switched the Desert Eagle to shotgun mode, barely holding myself back from collapsing on the ground.

Kiiik—

It only took two seconds for the gun to change form.

This was the reason I attacked with the awl first. Two seconds was a rather long time.

“...Come back.”

I called the wolf back.

I could see several deep wounds on his body. The Ghost Wolf’s only flaw was its stamina and vitality. Exhausted, the Ghost Wolf jumped back inside me.

“A-Arggh, fucking hell.”

Heuk Jeon glared at me hatefully, his previous leisurely attitude nowhere to be seen. Although he was trying to raise his magic power, it was near impossible with the effect of Awl of Weakening.

“Try eating this.”

Now our positions were swapped.
I shoved the barrel of the shotgun at him.

“This might hurt if it doesn’t end quickly.”

“.....”

But right when I was about to pull the trigger...

[12 hours have passed since the first cadet completed the Tower climb. The exam is now over.]

The exam ended, thus saving Heuk Jeon’s life. Immediately, a blinding light engulfed me. I could feel myself being transported to another place.

I laughed.

Who knew someone could be even luckier than me?

Heuk Jeon was it? I would inevitably run into him again, so I could deal with him then.
...I should tell Boss.



After the exam, I came back to the waiting room alone, staring at my smartwatch.

“...Oho.”

[Your understanding of Stigma’s magic power increases.]

[A new function, ‘Idea Imprint’, has been added.]

[Idea Imprint – store Stigma’s magic power as a special idea. You can store a total of two ideas. Magic power cost for stored ideas are halved.]

“Interesting.”

Stigma received a new ability, obviously because of my use of Stigma during my fight with Heuk Jeon. I immediately knew what technique I needed to store.

The short distance teleportation I used in the previous fight.

Although moving a mere 50 meters used two and a half streaks of Stigma, I couldn't say it was too costly, as teleportation was an ability that could only be gained through Gifts.

"Hey, Kim Hajin!"

"Hajin!"

I was tapping on the smartwatch keyboard when I heard two people calling my name. I raised my head. Chae Nayun and Kim Suho were running toward me.

"Ah, w-what happened to your face? How did you become so ugly? Are you okay?!"

Chae Nayun rubbed the injuries on my body with a worried face. But... was she worried about me or making fun of me? It was a bit insulting.

"I wouldn't be here otherwise."

"Was that bastard really an exam overseer? Did you clear the stage?"

I ignored Chae Nayun and turned to Kim Suho. Chae Nayun must have told him what happened as Kim Suho looked just as worried as Chae Nayun.

At that moment, Chae Nayun found a deep cut on my waist.

"Wha! What's this, it's so deep... I can see inside your skin!"

I was the one who was hurt, so why was she so anxious?

I calmly stared at Chae Nayun, who was rubbing my arms, shoulders, sides, and thighs.

"Oh right, Kim Suho, the potion."

"Ah, I almost forgot. Here, Hajin, it's a potion for external injuries."

Kim Suho handed me a potion.

“Huh? Oh... no, it’s fine.”

I slowly took a step back. I didn’t really want to apply such a painful potion. Not to mention, external injury potions were especially painful.

“Ah, don’t run away.”

However, Chae Nayun snatched my hand, then opened the potion and wet a gauze with it.

“Ah, wait.”

The wet gauze touched my wound.
An excruciating pain sundered through my body.

“Ahuk, ah, hey, go easy on me.”

“...Come on, it’s not that bad.”

Chae Nayun smiled, although I really was in pain.
When Chae Nayun finished treating me, my smartwatch suddenly rang.

[Your body has memorized 1.5% of emergency recovery potion’s injury recovery medicinal effect.]

Oh right, recovery potions were a type of medicine too.
For some reason, I’d forgotten about it until now.
...I questioned my own intelligence.

“There. By the way, what happened to Princess?”

“Rachel? She’s... oh, there she is.”

In the distance, Rachel was crying while desperately speaking to an instructor. I could hear her say, ‘please find Kim Hajin!’

Wiing—

My smartwatch rang again. It really was working overtime toda...

My face became as stiff as a plank of wood.
This time, it wasn't an alert. It was a message.
A serious one, at that.

[I talked with the other members about the request you made.]

The sender was Boss.
As soon as I saw the first line of her message, my heart dropped a beat.

"Hey, I need to go to the restroom."

"Huh? But there's no restroom nearby— ah, hey, where are you going!?"

Avoiding Chae Nayun and Kim Suho, I went to the most isolated place I could find and sat down. After looking around to make sure I was alone, I checked the rest of Boss' message.

[The result. 5 yes, 5 no.]

An even split.

I clenched my teeth. As I thought, killing Chae Jinyoon was something even the almighty Chameleon Troupe hesitated to do.
However, Chameleon Troupe had a total of 11 members, excluding the empty seat.

[But I have yet to decide.]

As I thought, Boss was the one who didn't vote.

[Yes, Boss.]

I sent her a short message and waited for her reply. However, she didn't reply for a while. I didn't know whether she was simply slow at typing or actually trying to keep me on my toes.

As I was getting impatient, Boss' reply finally arrived.

[Little Apprentice.]

[You've already killed several people. But you were on missions, and they were all evil people who deserved to die.]

[Your request is different than your missions. This time, you said you wanted to kill

someone yourself. No matter what the reason may be, if you commit murder out of your own will, a heavy weight will be placed on your conscious.]

“.....”

The tone of her message was solemn. Though, I had a strong hunch that she was only pretending to be kind.

But... as someone who used to write for a living, I couldn't help but notice a small mistake that ruined the serious atmosphere.

[Will you be able to endure it?]

[Um, Boss, I'm sorry to say this, but it's 'conscience', not conscious.]

[If you can]

Boss' message was cut mid-sentence.

I couldn't help but think I made a mistake, but it was already too late.

Then again, this was probably better than making a similar mistake in person.

[?]

Boss returned a single question mark.

[Ah, I'm sorry.]

Although I quickly apologized, Boss seemed to be sulking as she didn't reply back.

Feeling a bit anxious, I called Boss.

Thankfully, she picked up immediately.

“Hello?”

—... What is it?

She sounded unenthusiastic.

I sighed out of relief and apologized once again.

Chapter 123

Chae Jinyoon (1)

“Sorry, I’m in the middle of an exam, so we’ll have to discuss the details later.”

—Fine. Also, just so you know, it was a typo, not a grammatical error. I was a bit offended by you pointing it out. I was going to fix it...

By the time I finished consoling Boss and set up an appointment to meet later...

“Kim Hajin, is Kim Hajin here?”

One of the instructors walking around the waiting room called my name.

“Ah, yes.”

“...You’re here?”

When I ended the call in a hurry and raised my hand, the instructor made a surprised face.

“Kuhum, Rachel is looking for you. Looks like you two got separated during the exam. Tell her not to make such a big deal out of it. This isn’t England, so she can’t order us around...”

I bowed.

“I apologize.”

The instructor clicked his tongue and reported to the higher ups.

“All cadets are accounted for.”

Then, he quickly left.

Next, I tried to look for Rachel, but I didn’t need to.

She was standing behind the instructor who left.

“.....”

She was staring at me silently with her eyes glistening with tears.

Feeling like I made her worry for nothing, I felt a bit sorry. I should have looked for her first.

Soon, Rachel opened her mouth.

“I was looking for you. You should have told me you were okay...”

“Ah, sorry. There was a matter I had to tend to.”

Rachel sighed. Then, she murmured in a barely audible whisper.

—Thank goodness.

Her sincerity hit me with quite a bit of damage. Thankfully, it was an indirect attack. Otherwise, my heart would have skipped more than just a beat.

Rachel asked.

“So, what happened in that last stage...?”

“Well, I won.”

“Eh? Wow, really? Against a member of Dark Moon...”

She suddenly stopped mid-sentence and looked around. She then continued in a softer voice.

“Against a member of Dark Moon Society?”

“Yeah, I beat him up.”

“Ah!”

To be honest, I barely turned the situation around after suffering several lacerations. But Rachel didn't have to know that.

“Wow...”

Rachel looked awestruck with her mouth half-open and her eyes shining like jewels. When I shrugged, Rachel nodded, fully accepting the situation.

“From today, I’ll have to call Hajin-ssi Master.”

“...Yes? Ah, no, you don’t need to do that.”

I wanted to refuse a master-apprentice relationship that would shatter after a single proper one-on-one fight.

...No, I felt like I could win against her once. Rachel has probably never fought against someone with so many tricks up their sleeve.

“Master.”

“Please, you don’t have to.”

I scratched my neck, feeling a bit embarrassed.

“...Cadet Rachel, Cadet Kim Hajin.”

At that moment, Kim Soohyuk approached us.

“Ah, Instructor Kim.”

“What’s going on?”

The instructor of Veritas class was trustworthy and honorable, unlike the rude instructor from before.

Rachel and I explained everything that happened in the tower’s final exam room to Kim Soohyuk.

With a serious face, Kim Soohyuk said he would report it to the academy, but Cube’s executives would likely have little reaction to it.

Since Rachel and I were the only witnesses, there were many excuses Cube executives could make.

More than likely, they would say that was how the stage was, or that we misunderstood the instructor’s intention.

“Anyways, well done.”

Kim Soohyuk pat our shoulders and turned back.
I asked Rachel who was standing next to me.

“...What are you going to do now, Rachel-ssi?”

“Me? I’m going back to England tonight... Master.”

With a teasing smile, Rachel added the word Master.
I took special care to not look at her smile.
Rachel was the type of person who would change the more she opened up her heart.
The way she was changing right now was too fatal for my heart.

I returned a small smile, and feeling my smartwatch vibrate, I looked down.

[Hajin Hajin.]
[I learned how to text. Hayang helped me.]
[But when are you coming back, Hajin? I want to see you.]

Nowadays, Evandel was way too into the smartwatch I got her. She even learned how to look up videos on YouTube. She would probably learn how to order food soon.

‘...Let’s hurry home and eat with Evandel.’



The first week of winter break.
Inside a nameless Dungeon in Baekdu Mountain Range’s Upper Sword Mountain.

“...Whew~ good work, Hajin.”

I was sprawled on the ground, hearing Kim Suho’s praise.

“Wow, my hands are still shaking. Wasn’t that super fun?”

Although Kim Suho was reflecting on our previous battle with a bright smile, I was too shaken to do anything.
The boss of this Dungeon was a venomous snake called Jor.
It was an intermediate-rank grade-1 monster that spat out black venom.

The strategy I came up with was simple.

As a sharpshooter, I would be the support, and as a warrior, Kim Suho would charge in.

Things mostly went according to plan. Kim Suho marched forward, cutting down its venom, and I shot Jor's eyes from the back.

However, the damned monster began to rampage after losing its sight. Shooting its venom everywhere, it attacked without caring for its own safety. If I didn't have the detox medicinal effect memorized, I would have died in vain.

"Is this urn the reward?"

"Yeah, that should be it. That was what Jor was protecting, right?"

I forced myself to get up.

"But what is it?"

"I'll have to appraise it first."

When I put my hand out, Kim Suho gave the urn to me without a hint of hesitation.

===

[Jar of Greed]

A jar full of greed.

When you put an item inside, a random greed will adhere to the item.

===

This was one of the randomization items I created.

It was easy to use. You just had to put an item in it and let it sit for about ten days. Although no one knew what crazy effect would be added to the item, with my luck, I wasn't too worried.

"You can take this one."

Kim Suho suddenly spoke up.

"...Mm? What do you mean?"

"Isn't it obvious? I took Misteltein, so you should take this one."

“But still...”

I knew that this jar could be used twice.

“It’s fine. I’m happy with the combat experience I gained today... Oh right, if you feel bad about taking it, then let’s go on a trip together.”

I didn’t reply to Kim Suho. I just lay down and pretended to sleep.
Kim Suho laughed, and time passed by in silence.

Wiing—

The silence was broken by the vibration of a smartwatch.
It wasn’t mine.
Then it should naturally be Kim Suho’s.
I turned my head and saw Kim Suho typing earnestly.
Seeing this, I felt like I knew who the sender was.

“Yun Seung-Ah again?”

“.....”

Kim Suho flinched.
I couldn’t help but laugh.
Although this wasn’t my intention, Yun Seung-Ah and Kim Suho ended up getting close a lot earlier. In the original story, Yun Seung-Ah couldn’t even text Kim Suho, because Chae Nayun constantly kept a watchful eye.

“You guys going out?”

“Huh? N-No, how could someone like me go out with Senior Seung-Ah.”

“...If you aren’t worthy, then no one is.”

Kim Suho’s looks alone were more than enough to make girls fawn over him.

“Anyways, Hajin.”

“You’re good at changing the subject.”

“N-No, I’m going back to what we talked about before. About that trip.”

“...You like going on trips that much?”

“No, it’s just that I’m leaving on the 20th. We won’t see each other for almost 3 months.”

Kim Suho continued with a serious face.

“And you can also get closer to Nayun.”

“Also?”

“Yeah, Chae Nayun changed a lot. Now, she’s...”

“No, not that.”

I changed the subject.

“Huh?”

“If I also get closer to Chae Nayun, that means you, Kim Suho, are getting closer to someone too... and that’s Yun Seung-Ah.”

“N-No, it’s not like that!”

Kim Suho shot up angrily.

“Haha, it’s also not like that for me. I don’t like Chae Nayun. I never said I did in the first place.”

“Eh? Really? That’s not good.”

“Not good how?”

“Uh... nevermind.”

Kim Suho closed his mouth.

He seemed to have talked to Chae Nayun about me. Should I hack into their smartwatches later?

“Anyways, you take this jar. But you have to come on the trip.”

I smiled and nodded at Kim Suho’s generous offer.

Since I would have never been able to clear this Dungeon without him, I could at least do that much for him.



December 17th.

On a cold winter day, I left for a trip with Kim Suho, Shin Jonghak, Yoo Yeonha, Yi Yeonghan, and Chae Nayun.

Our destination was a luxury resort near Gyeongpodae. Currently, we were heading to Daehyun Group’s 5-star hotel.

To fully enjoy the trip, Chae Nayun suggested that we take a car from Seoul to Gyeongpodae.

But since none of us had a driver’s license, we had to take a limousine.

“Nom, nom.”

Although everyone was full of energy at first, only Yoo Yeonha remained awake past the 30-minute mark.

“Nom, nom.”

I watched Yoo Yeonha happily eating chocoballs.

It was one of the snacks Chae Nayun brought to liven up the trip. Although Yoo Yeonha showed no interest in it at first, she practically made a 180 once everyone fell asleep. The way she savored each chocoball was quite funny.

“.....”

Suddenly, our eyes met.

Yoo Yeonha looked at me and reluctantly gave me the box of chocoballs.

“Would you like some?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“...That’s a good choice. It’s not that good.”

As she said that, she put another chocoball in her mouth.

Thud.

At that moment, the limousine shook, and Chae Nayun’s head fell on my shoulder. Her hair’s fragrant scent tickled my nose.

“...Hm.”

Yoo Yeonha murmured to herself at the sudden turn of events. I pushed Chae Nayun’s head to the side.

But in two minutes, her head fell on my shoulder again.

She wasn’t awake, right?

When I turned back to the front after deciding to give up, I met eyes with Yoo Yeonha. For some reason, she was looking at us with a sad expression.

“What.”

“...Yes? Ah... um, I just felt bad. Nayun’s head must be heavy.”

“Mm, I guess you’re right. Her head’s too big.”

I dived Chae Nayun to check if she was awake, but there was no reaction. It seemed she really was asleep.

After another 30 minutes of driving, we arrived at our destination, a resort that made my jaw drop. In fact, even the buildings near the resort were luxurious.

Gangwondo sure lived up to its setting, where its GDP matched that of a small country.

“Follow me!”

Chae Nayun got up as soon as we arrived and guided us with a lively voice.

Our home for the next two days was a huge party room with six bedrooms.

We put our bags in our rooms and met in the living room.

“Our schedule is really tight, so make sure you don’t get lost!”

Chae Nayun shouted as she smiled joyfully. Everyone seemed to be looking forward to what she had planned.

...However, from 12:00 to 9:00, we were forced to participate in a nine-course schedule, consisting of pool, bowling, jet skiing, swimming, hot spring bathing, and other events.

I for one didn't know whether we were enjoying a trip or training for the Olympics.



11:00 P.M.

The final event of the day was a barbeque party. With Gyeongpodae's scenic view in the background, we enjoyed some of the highest quality meat.

Tssss—

Looking at the meat being cooked on the grill, I felt myself relax.

"Kim Hajin, this is stuck. Give me a hand."

Chae Nayun, who was standing next to me, tapped on my shoulder. I turned around and saw a piece of meat stuck on the grill.

"...I can do the grilling alone."

"Yeah, no."

Everyone else was sitting on the table, but Chae Nayun insisted on helping me grill.

"Oh right, I bought a motorcycle too."

"...What? Really?"

"Yep, it's parked in the parking lot. Want to go on a drive after this?"

"Do you have a motorcycle driver's license?"

"I do, but you'll need to take the wheel. I'm still inexperienced."

"Oh? What's this~?"

At that moment, Yi Yeonghan's teasing voice rang out.

"What are you two doing over there~?"

Chae Nayun frowned and glared at Yi Yeonghan.

"Shut up, Yi Yeonghan."

"Ouch, scary."

"Why don't you leave the cooking to one person? There's no reason for you to help out."

Shin Jonghak muttered somewhat annoyed. He still had the meat I gave him stacked up on his plate. It seemed he was too busy paying attention to us to eat.

"Why? It's nice to see."

Kim Suho chimed in.

Shin Jonghak glared at Kim Suho strongly.

"W-What do you mean it's nice to see? Y-You shut up too, Kim Suho."

Chae Nayun stuttered and glanced up at me.

Our eyes met for a brief moment, but we quickly dodged each other's eyes.

"K-Kuhum."

Chae Nayun let out a dry cough with a reddened face.

"Hey, don't have any strange thoughts."

"I won't."

"...Why? Did things go well with Rachel?"

She suddenly pouted and grumbled.

"What are you talking about?"

“Nevermind~”

“Oi, Kim Suho, why don’t we go back to the pool table after this? The loser has to go swim in the ocean.”

“Sure, I’m down.”

Shin Jonghak and Kim Suho planned for another match.

On the other hand, Yi Yeonghan was staring at Chae Nayun and me mischievously, and Yoo Yeonha was completely focused on looking for an opportunity to cook ramen.

Seeing them, I laughed silently.

It was the kind of atmosphere that called for soju.

The night sky full of starlight, the fond sound of crashing waves, and the people whom I now felt lonely without.

Standing alongside them, I was deeply moved.

The emotion I thought I would never feel in this world – affection.

If I had a glass of alcohol, I felt like I could really let myself go today.

Tak, tak.

Chae Nayun tapped on my shoulder.

“See, aren’t you glad you came?”

Chae Nayun had a beautiful smile.

I couldn’t deny it.

“It’s not bad.”

“Heh, I know you love it.”

Chae Nayun grinned.

At that moment, her smartwatch rang.

“Ah, let me deal with this. Hello?”

She picked up the call and put on earphones.

“Ah, yes, I’m Chae Nayun.”

I could hear the voice coming from her earphones.

“...Yes?”

She suddenly dropped the tongs she was holding.

As the voice continued to talk, her hands trembled, her breathing sped up, and her eyes widened with shock.

“He...”

She stopped there.

—Yes! Patient Chae Jinyoon woke up! Though, he’s currently sleeping...

Chae Nayun seemed to stop breathing.

What I was worried about ended up happening. Chae Jinyoon had woken up before the seed sprouted.

I closed my eyes. I needed some time to think.

But soon, Chae Nayun hung up the call and pulled on my sleeve.”

“Hey.”

Looking up at me with tear filled eyes, Chae Nayun pleaded.

“Please give me a ride.”

11:30 P.M.

Domestic Portals had closed 30 minutes ago.

Chapter 124

Chae Jinyoon (2)

The call from the hospital was hard to believe, but the doctor's hopeful voice didn't seem like a lie.

My head seemed to turn white.

I couldn't think. My head was completely blank.

Because I'd already given up after a long period of despair, I was unable to feel happiness.

"....."

The doctor's voice ringing in my ear became softer and softer. My head started to ring, and my vision turned blurry.

I slowly turned to the side.

There, I could see Kim Hajin. His perfectly average-looking face was especially vivid today.

"Hey."

Even I wasn't sure what I was thinking at the moment. But I knew that I had to go to the hospital, and this man seemed to be the only one capable of helping me.

"Please give me a ride."

Kim Hajin was looking at me with frighteningly heavy eyes. Did he overhear the call? Soon, he let out a deep sigh. But before he could respond, Yoo Yeonha asked.

"A ride? Did something happen?"

"Huh? Erm..."

As I was struggling to answer even a simple question, Kim Hajin spoke.

"Let's go. It won't take more than 20 minutes."

So he really did overhear. Because he was so reliable and trustworthy, I could smile even in this situation.

“...I thought only your eyes were good, but turns out your ears are too.”

“We can talk about that later. Where did you park your motorcycle?”

“Follow me.”

“What? What happened?”

Shin Jonghak shot up and asked. Yi Yeonghan, Yoo Yeonha, and Kim Suho also had grave looks.

I ran to the parking lot without explaining the situation to them. Kim Hajin followed me.

Soon, we were in front of the parked motorcycle.

Kim Hajin asked.

“Where’s the key?”

“Key? Ah, right...”

“.....”

Kim Hajin shook his head. I couldn’t remember where I put the keys. I was an idiot even in such a situation.

“Am I really an idiot...?”

However, Kim Hajin looked carefully at the motorcycle and breathed out a sigh of relief.

“Whew, it’s fine. This works with a smart key.”

“Smartkey?”

“Yeah.”

Kim Hajin tapped on his smartwatch a few times and the engine suddenly started.

Before I could even express my surprise, Kim Hajin pulled me up onto the back seat. An explosive exhaust sound echoed in the parking lot.

“Hold on tight.”

“Y-Yeah.”

But hold on where? Not knowing what to do, I just grabbed onto the hem of his shirt.

“Scan.”

The moment Kim Hajin murmured in a barely audible voice...

Vroooooom—

The bike shot out of the parking lot with an incredible speed, then began to speed through the road.

Even though Kim Hajin’s body was shielding me, the wind resistance was still too strong. It felt like we were going at 400 km/h.

“Hey, I’m going to— fall off—”

I tried to speak, but the sheer speed we were moving at prevented my voice from reaching him.

I didn’t have any other choice.

Right, I just didn’t want to fall off...

I slowly moved closer. I leaned my head against his back and put my arms around his waist. The only reason my face was turning red was because this was the first time I was doing something like this.

That’s how I justified myself... but Kim Hajin’s back was surprisingly large, tough... and comfy.

“Uwat!”

At that moment, the bike suddenly turned to the side.

Without a choice, really without a choice, I put more strength into my arms.



I’ve been putting it off. Although it was something I had to do, it was something I avoided thinking about.

Perhaps, I was wondering why I was in this place, having to do such a task. I might have been avoiding reality, pretending to question whether I really had to kill Chae Jinyoon.

However, I couldn't find a method to save Chae Jinyoon. And there was a duty I had to fulfill as this world's original creator.

Chwaaaaa—

A fierce wind blew against me. Under the effect of Random Consolidation System, Chae Nayun's bike sped through the road, far beyond its original capability. 400 km/h, or perhaps even higher. Even in this situation, I could clearly feel the soft sensation on my back. Because they were touching me so clearly, I had to try hard to focus on driving.

It took exactly 20 minutes to go from Gyeongpodae to Seoul. We raced crazily and arrived at Daehyun Hospital's VIP hospital.

"We're here."

I spoke to Chae Nayun who was leaning on my back. Chae Nayun didn't react in any way, so I nudged her with my shoulders.

"Uun..."

Chae Nayun opened her eyes, sobbing. Her eyes were full of tears. I spoke again.

"We're here."

"...Ah."

Chae Nayun stared at the hospital in a daze, as though she couldn't believe whether she was dreaming or not. I grabbed her hand and pulled her off the bike.

"Aah."

“You’re not dreaming. The other guys should be on their way too.”

Not even a Hero was able to run all the way from Gyeongpodae to Seoul. Even if they woke up the chauffeur and took the limousine, it would be at least an hour and a half until they got here.

We didn’t have time to wait for them to come.

“Let’s go in.”

“Um, yeah.”

“What about your father?”

“...He’s out of the country with my grandfather.”

Not even the president of Daehyun Group was able to forcibly open a closed Portal.

I walked into the VIP hospital with Chae Nayun.

The guard standing at the front entrance recognized Chae Nayun and quickly opened the door.

We walked into the outer area of the VIP hospital, where a large, luxurious garden could be seen. The number of hidden cameras and anticrime magic in this place easily surpassed three digits.

I could see a doctor and a group of nurses running out of a secondary entrance.

“Nayun-ssi...?”

They quickly ran up to us, calling Chae Nayun’s name, and were startled when they saw me. Chae Nayun scratched her neck and introduced me.

“He’s my frien... he’s an acquaintance. Can we go in?”

The way she introduced me was a bit strange.

Acquaintance?

“Ah, yes, come in.”

A middle-aged doctor with glasses and well-combed hair guided us inside.

The VIP hospital had elegant and refined décor as though it was a temple.

Walking through the hallway, Chae Nayun asked.

“How’s his condition?”

The doctor smiled.

“He’s not fully awake yet, but you’ll be able to see that he’ll wake up soon. It’s truly a miracle.”

We stopped in front of an escalator heading underground. Chae Jinyoon was downstairs.

“Excuse me, but he’s...”

The doctor glanced back and forth between Chae Nayun and me.

“Ah, it’s fine. He brought me here.”

“...Is that so?”

“Of course. Right? I know you’re tight-lipped.”

Chae Nayun’s trust brought me even more pain.

“Then let’s head down.”

We went down the escalator.

Chae Jinyoon’s room was taking up almost half the floor.

Not only was his room protected by a magic barrier, but there were also three mercenaries guarding the entrance. I could see at a glance that they were easily comparable to intermediate-rank Heroes.

“Congratulations, Young Miss.”

A particularly intimidating mercenary walked up and gave a big smile.

Chae Nayun nodded with a surreal expression.

“Y-Yes, thank you.”

“...Is he also going in?”

The mercenary pointed at me.
Chae Nayun nodded.

“Yes.”

“Hm. He’ll need the president’s permission...”

“I’ll give him the permission. Father is probably too busy working to come today anyway.”

“Kuhum.”

The mercenary opened the door, and we walked inside with the doctor.
The room’s clean, flowery air entered my nose.
It was a room with magic power density reaching the ‘propitious’ level.
A masterpiece painting hung on the wall to give the room color, and placed around the room were pictures of Chae Nayun and Chae Jinyoon.

“Ah...”

Chae Nayun muttered in a daze.
In this homely room, Chae Jinyoon was lying down at a 60-degree angle, collecting his breath. Although he was physically and mentally emaciated... he was clearly awake.

“We told him that he hasn’t woken up for four years, but it’s only been two hours since he first regained consciousness, so his memory is still hazy. Still, he should be fully recovered in a month.”

The doctor explained. However, Chae Nayun couldn’t hear his voice. Tears flowed down from her face. The doctor looked at her for a moment, then spoke.

“Then I’ll be back in a bit.”

He left and closed the door.
Silence filled the room.
Chae Nayun stared at Chae Jinyoon blankly, then said the word she wanted to speak for a long time.

“...Oppa?”

Chae Jinyoon turned his head.

Chae Jinyoon.

The kind and gentle older brother I created.

He saw Chae Nayun and stared at her silently for a long time.

Eventually, a thin smile emerged on his face... and the voice Chae Nayun has been dying to hear rang out.

“Nayun.”

Even after a part of his brain was damaged, he still remembered his younger sister’s face.

That was the kind of man Chae Jinyoon was.

“...You’ve gotten so big. I heard from the doctor, it’s been four years, right?”

Even at his gentle voice, Chae Nayun trembled, unable to move. Without a choice, I grabbed her wrist and walked towards him. Chae Jinyoon watched me with deep interest.

“Is he your boyfriend?”

“E-Eh? W-What are you talking about? He’s not.”

Chae Nayun denied it strongly but added a final word after sneaking a peek at me.

“...y-yet.”

“Yet?”

This time, I was dumbstruck.

“W-What!?”

Embarrassed, Chae Nayun pushed me away. Meanwhile, Chae Jinyoon watched us with a warm smile.



Two days later, Gangwondo.

In an empty cave chosen as our meeting place, Boss was sitting on a chair and reading a book.

Tak, tak.

Then, the clear, high-heel sounds rang out.

Jain walked out from the distant darkness, but Boss was still focused on reading.

Jain's feet stopped in front of Boss.

"Boss, Chae Jinyoon woke up."

Boss silently closed the book she was reading.

"Are you really thinking of doing this?"

"....."

Staring intently at Jain, Boss nodded.

"But will the four of us be enough? Ah, I guess it's five since Kim Hajin said he wanted to kill him with his own hands."

Jain murmured with interest.

Boss only told a few members of the Chameleon Troupe about Kim Hajin's request. Regardless of whether they would succeed or not, only Jain, herself, and a few helpers would know about what happened.

"Yes, I am."

"Hmm... well, it's true that this is the best way of roping Kim Hajin in..."

By accepting Kim Hajin's request, the Chameleon Troupe would obtain Kim Hajin's gratitude and debt. That was something that tempted even Jain. She was well aware that Kim Hajin had the potential to become one of the world's strongest Heroes.

"But don't we have too much to lose? We don't know why he wants to kill Chae Jinyoon, and more importantly, we would be turning that geezer into our enemy."

“No.”

Boss shook her head.

She already checked Chae Jinyoon’s condition the day Kim Hajin made the request. Chae Jinyoon’s magic core was destroyed. Chae Joochul was unlikely to feel sympathy towards a Hero without a magic core. Even if that Hero was his own grandson... That was the kind of man Chae Joochul was.

“He might even appreciate it since he would be able to obtain sympathy from the whole world using only his grandson’s life as the price.”

As she spoke, Boss gritted her teeth. It was a rare display of emotion.

She had quite a history with Chae Joochul. Though, he cut contact with her after Chameleon Troupe’s old boss died.

“Well, I can’t say for sure. But Boss, Kim Hajin is just too strange no matter how much I think about it.”

Jain crafted a chair out of magic power and sat down.

“Explain.”

“That money-hungry ghost refused to accept our request, even after we offered another 3 billion won.”

“Money-hungry ghost... Yoo Jinhyuk?”

“Yep.”

Yoo Jinhyuk. Although he was a hedonist who wasted his money gambling in Gangwondo, Las Vegas, and Clancy Islet, he was still the number one informant in the Korean Peninsula.

“It’s just too strange. He never hesitated to look into someone’s past, whether that be a chaebol or a Hero. So why would he be so adamant about Kim Hajin?”

Yoo Jinhyuk had refused a 500 million won offer to look into a single person’s past. Jain continued to raise the price, even going as high as 3 billion won, but Yoo Jinhyuk didn’t budge.

“This must mean he already looked into Kim Hajin’s past.”

“And?”

“He’s staying quiet because he thinks his life will be jeopardized if he does. There must be something special about Kim Hajin’s past.”

It was a logical conclusion.
Boss nodded in agreement.

“So, should we keep poking him?”

“...No, look into another information guild.”

Hearing Boss’ words, Jain grinned. Today, Yoo Jinhyuk lost a big customer. Boss was the type who easily held grudges.

“Well, information guilds nowadays all have low standards... but there is a couple of places I’ve been watching for a while.”

“Where?”

Jain turned on her smartwatch and projected a hologram.

===

[Falling Blossom]

—Naturally and elegantly, like a falling flower.

===

“One is this, Falling Blossom, a rising star in the field. It’s only been half a year since their founding, but they have great reviews and record.”

“Mm.”

Boss hummed in satisfaction.
Falling Blossom. She liked its refined, unique name.

“And the other one?”

“It’s this.”

===

[Truth Agency]

—Anything you seek is at our disposal.

===

“.....”

This time, Boss furrowed her brows. Its lame name and description were exactly what Boss disliked.

“Despite how it sounds, it has great reviews. Apparently, it’s the best information agency when it comes to finding people.”

“We’ll go with Falling Blossom.”

Boss, who liked vanity and luxury, clearly expressed her decision.

“Alright, I’ll put in a request then.”

“And next?”

“We’re good to go for Chae Jinyoon. The plan is perfect. Just ask Kim Hajin when he’s available. I’m sure that child needs time to prepare his heart~”

It was then.

Tap, tap.

The sound of footsteps rang out in the cave.

Jain immediately sharpened her five senses and stood on guard.

“...Who is it.”

“I already called him.”

“Called who?... Kim Hajin? Already?”

“Yes. It’ll be the first time you’re seeing him. Act accordingly.”

Jain looked forward with a dumbstruck face.

A black coat that reached his knees and a clean, pomade-style hair.

She liked his fashion sense, but he didn't look particularly handsome because of his average face.

He was walking through the darkness, leisurely and upright.

“...At least he walks like a model.”

Jain murmured with a grin.

Chapter 125

Chae Jinyoon (3)

Once I walked past a cave-like pathway, I could see two women sitting down on chairs. Boss and Jain.

I could feel powerful magic power emanating from the two. It was the level of magic power possessed by those who surpassed a certain threshold.

I took a deep breath and walked up to them.

Boss spoke.

“You’re here, Little Apprentice.”

“Yes.”

I bowed. However, she was looking at me with eyes asking for more. I did as she wished.

“Boss.”

“...Mmm.”

Along with a satisfied hum, black magic power flowed out of Boss' body, forming a chair. I sat down on it and stared at Jain. She was scanning me from top to bottom.

“...This is Jain. Think of her as a fellow member.”

Once Boss gave the introduction, Jain smiled and waved her hand.

“Hi hi.”

“Yes, nice to meet you.”

Other than the times I saw her in disguise, this was the first time I was meeting her. I bowed as respectfully as possible.

“You see, Hajin-ssi, I have so many questions for you.”

“...Yes, what is it?”

She likely wanted to know my motive for wanting to kill Chae Jinyoon.

“Those clothes, did you copy them from a fashion magazine?”

“...Come again?”

What kind of a question was that?

“Unlike other male cadets your age, you have excellent fashion sense.”

“.....”

To be honest, I put a lot of effort into my clothes. As an average-looking person with an average-height in his mid-20s, fashion was the only way to make myself more attractive. Since I didn't have to worry about money now, it was only natural that my clothes were better than other cadets, who rarely wore anything other than their cadet uniforms.

“I'm just a bit interested~”

“I see.”

“Jain.”

Boss leered at Jain, who narrowed her eyes and murmured, ‘okay, okay’.

“I want to know why you want to kill Chae Jinyoon.”

“.....”

I pondered. Could I tell them about the mysterious existence known as Devil's Seed? Would they believe that such a calamitous thing existed, when I had no way to prove it?

“If you don't want to tell us, you can keep it to yourself.”

However, Boss cut off my worries. Putting aside Jain who was smacking her lips disappointedly, Boss continued with a serious face.

“But the price you’ll have to pay is clear.”

Boss’ eyes flickered with a strange fervor.

“You will become our strength, not forgetting this debt and... signing this contract.”

The last part made me chuckle.

“Of course.”

“Good, then I’ll explain what’s going to happen.”

Jain immediately spoke up.

She created a triangular table with her magic power and put her arms on it.

Jain’s explanation began.



After Chae Jinyoon regained his consciousness, Chae Nayun visited him every day. Chae Jinyoon’s condition continued to improve by the day. Although he still spent more time sleeping than awake, he was recovering fast enough that he’d be able to walk in a month.

“Mm...”

Today was the fourth day since Chae Jinyoon woke up. Chae Nayun visited Chae Jinyoon with her friends, and I was among them.

“Hm...”

Chae Jinyoon scrutinized Chae Nayun’s friends, then pointed at one person.

“You’re Kim Suho, right?”

“Y-Yes, I’m Kim Suho. How did you know?”

Kim Suho widened his eyes.

“Chae Nayun used to talk about you a lot when she was in Agent Military Academy.”

Chae Nayun flinched at Chae Jinyoon’s words. She peeked at me for a moment before explaining herself.

“Y-Yeah, I said how you were a delicate-looking boy acting like a know-it-all.”

“What? Isn’t that too harsh?”

“Haha, I agree with you, Chae Nayun.”

Shin Jonghak chimed in, laughing heartily.

“Jonghak looks just as delicate as Suho though.”

“No, no, I look manly.”

Shin Jonghak reacted strongly to Yoo Yeonha’s point.

However, I couldn’t focus at all on their conversation. Their words practically entered through one ear and out through the other as I stayed seated on a chair, deep in thought.

According to the Book of Truth, the Devil’s Seed was 97% grown.

Assuming 100% was somewhere between 4 to 5 years, I only had two months or maybe even one. It was certainly not a long time.

“Why are you so zoned out?”

At that moment, Yoo Yeonha tapped on my shoulder.

I smile bitterly.

“Nothing, I’m just a bit tired.”

“Ah, you’re Hajin, right?”

Chae Jinyoon suddenly pointed at me. Our eyes met, and Chae Jinyoon’s gentle smile

entered my sight.

“Thank you for coming every day. You’re making me ashamed, really.”

“Eh? He came every day?”

Yoo Yeonha asked in surprise. Shin Jonghak made a disgruntled face, while Kim Suho shrugged with a smile.

“Of course~ he’s been coming with Nayun every day.”

“Ah, d-don’t say that, Oppa.”

Chae Nayun was only allowed to visit him once a day for about three hours. It was also when Chae Jinyoon was awake.

For the past four days, Chae Nayun pleaded that I go with her, and I agreed, thinking I could maybe talk to Chae Jinyoon privately.

“...He’s, um, Oppa’s fan.”

“My fan?”

“Yeah, he used to talk about you all the time. Right? Remember last semester?”

Chae Nayun growled jokingly and put me under a headlock. Because I didn’t have the energy to play along with her jokes, I silently squirmed out of her headlock.

“...I was just joking.”

Feeling awkward, Chae Nayun poked my arm and muttered meekly.

“Hey, I was just joking.”

“Chae Nayun.”

Shin Jonghak cut in, clearly showing his displeasure.

“What.”

“Follow me outside.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Your watch.”

Chae Nayun looked down at her watch.

“Ah, I’ll be back in a moment, Oppa.”

They seemed to have received a message as they left the room, leaving me alone with Chae Jinyoon.

I stared at Chae Jinyoon in silence. Chae Jinyoon also stared back at me.

Although I finally got the chance to talk to him privately, my head was in chaos with all sorts of complicated thoughts.

After organizing my thoughts, I spoke.

“Chae Jinyoon-ssi.”

Hearing my stiff voice, Chae Jinyoon smiled gently.

“Yes, Kim Hajin-ssi?”

“...How’s your body?”

“Mm, I think I’m getting better.”

Chae Jinyoon’s soft voice rang out.

I asked another question.

“What about your head?”

“My head?”

Chae Jinyoon tilted his head.

“Yes, were you struck with a sudden urge to do something bad?”

“Huh?”

“Like suddenly having horrible thoughts, or feeling demonic energy rather than magic power from your body.”

“.....”

I could see my reflection from Chae Jinyoon’s eyes. I could see that I was afraid. But I wanted to ask.

Will you believe me if I said you will become a devil?

Can you give up your life to protect your young sister?

“...Mm, I’m not sure. Are you perhaps talking about Operation Fireflake?”

However, Chae Jinyoon was still stuck in the past.

Unable to ask the questions I wanted, I dropped my head. I clenched my teeth and tightened my grip on my chair’s arms. As I sat at a loss for words, worries rising up from the depths of my heart shook my body.

Then suddenly... Chae Jinyoon placed his hand on my head.

“I don’t know what’s troubling you so much, but...”

Thud—

At that moment, the door shot open.

“Ah, sorry Oppa... What?”

Seeing Chae Jinyoon’s hand on my head, Chae Nayun furrowed her brows.

“Hajin must have been a big fan of mine.”

“...Pft, really?”

But she didn’t think much of it and sat down next to me.

Chae Jinyoon asked.

“Where are the others?”

“I sent them back. You have to rest soon anyways.”

“Ah... that’s a shame. Did something happen?”

“Yeah, um, Master Yoo Sihyuk said he’d delay his camp for about four days. So I’m leaving on the 25th.”

Yoo Sihyuk was well-aware of Chae Nayun’s extenuating circumstance. However, Chae Nayun’s expression wasn’t all that good.

“...But Oppa, should I just not go?”

Chae Jinyoon didn’t reply. Instead, he slowly turned his head and faced me.

“I think she’s asking you, Hajin-ssi.”

“What? N-No, I’m obviously asking you, Oppa.”

“...What do you think, Hajin?”

Chae Jinyoon asked.

Yoo Sihyuk’s school was located at the peak of Baekdu Mountain.

Baekdu Mountain had one of the highest concentrations of spirit energy and mana in the world. As a result, it was impossible to reach its peak without being above a certain level of skill.

To arrive in Yoo Sihyuk’s school, you had to train your lungs forcefully. Chae Nayun, Kim Suho, and Shin Jonghak would be unable to step a foot outside of it until the end of winter break.

“...Should I not go?”

Chae Nayun turned to me and asked.

I responded resolutely.

“No, you should go.”

Chae Nayun had to leave for Yoo Sihyuk Camp.

“Eh? Ah... but it’s not the end of the world even if I don’t go...”

“Go.”

“Tsk.”

Chae Nayun’s face turned to a bulldog’s as she glared at me. Thankfully, Chae Jinyoon seemed to agree with me.

“Nayun, I agree with Hajin. If it’s because of me, you don’t have to worry. You can see me any time you want, but this might be the only chance for you to go to Yoo Sihyuk-ssi’s school.”

“...I was going to go anyways. Oh yeah, I brought a camera.”

Chae Nayun changed the topic and took out a high-quality camera from her bag. Then, she pushed it toward me.

“Here, take pictures of us.”

Chae Nayun ran next to Chae Jinyoon. Although he was taken aback at first, he soon smiled happily.

I watched them silently, then murmured.

‘...Scan.’

The number was 44, a jackpot.

What kind of photos would this camera take?

With a somber expectation, I raised the camera.

“Say cheese.”

Click.

Click.

Chae Nayun and Chae Jinyoon made all sorts of poses. Chae Nayun was hugging Chae Jinyoon in one photo, giving him a peck on the cheek in another, and leaning on his shoulder in the next.

After about thirty or so photos...

“Now you should take some with Hajin.”

Chae Jinyoon made an unexpected suggestion.

“Ah, no, I’m fine...”

“Well I insist. Nayun, go stand next to him.”

“What? No...”

“Chae Nayun.”

“.....”

As soon as Chae Jinyoon raised his voice, Chae Nayun walked up next to me embarrassed.

“Alright, say cheese~”

“C-Cheese.”

Chae Nayun bashfully made a peace sign.

Click.

Thus, the only photo of me and Chae Nayun was taken.



The visiting period ended, and it was now night time.

While Chae Jinyoon slept, Chae Nayun and I walked around the hospital’s garden.

“Kim Hajin.”

Under the faint moonlight, Chae Nayun was skipping through the garden, calling my name. Her expression could only be described as the happiest expression in the world.

“Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin.”

“.....”

“Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin, Kim Hajin.”

“What?”

“Nothing. I just wanted to thank you.”

Hearing Chae Nayun’s calm voice, I became speechless.

“...Kuhum, as if you have anything to thank me for.”

“You came here with me every day.”

Chae Nayun continued as she slowly strolled through the garden.

“To be honest, I was scared to come by myself. I love Oppa so much and I’ve been wanting to see him for so long... but it’s almost been five years since I last talked to him. I didn’t know what to say, and I was afraid what he might think about me all grown up.”

She then poked my shoulder.

“But it wasn’t awkward at all with you around.”

By the time she was done, we were at the front entrance.
My bike was parked next to a wall.

“I see.”

I retorted unenthusiastically, leaving Chae Nayun behind. Then, I got on my bike, put on my helmet, and turned the engine on.

“...Are you free on Christmas?”

When I was about to step on the gas, Chae Nayun spoke.
I turned toward her.

“That’s the day you’re leaving.”

“I want to see you before I go.”

“.....”

I didn't answer.

However, Chae Nayun continued to speak unperturbed.

"I'm leaving at 6, so I'll meet you at noon in front of the hospital."

"I'm leaving."

"...Yeah, good night."

I smiled bitterly and stepped on the accelerator.

As my bike raced through the road, I could see Chae Nayun looking at me from the side mirror.



Seocho District, Gangnam.

When I opened the door to the luxury apartment complex I bought, Evandel and Hayang greeted me.

"Hajin~"

"Meow~"

"Hey, guys."

I picked up Evandel with one arm and Hayang with the other.

Seeing them smiling as brightly as ever, I did my best to smile and asked.

"How did ordering food go?"

"It went well! We ate steak! Steak!"

"You did as I said?"

"Yeah! I told the delivery man to put the food in front of the door, then I brought it inside after he left!"

"Good job."

I put them down on the couch.

It was nice to have a big house. The spaciousness of the room gave me comfort.

“Oh right, did you take Hayang on a walk?”

“Un!”

Recently, I've been making Evandel practice going out. I made her wear a smartwatch just in case, but with Hayang as her guide, I didn't need to worry too much about her getting lost.

“Good girl.”

“Hehe, ehehe.”

I patted Evandel and Hayang. Evandel smiled brightly and enjoyed my touch. At that moment, I received a message.

[Little Apprentice, we are done with all preparations. January 3rd will be the day. Be ready.]

My face immediately stiffened up.

“Watch TV for a bit.”

I went into the bedroom and took out the Jar of Greed, which I kept outside of Evandel's reach.

As soon as I obtained the Jar of Greed, I put Aether inside it. Aether was certainly worth enough to receive an upgrade.

That was December 10th. More than ten days had passed since then.

I slowly opened the jar's lid.

It was then.

“Eh?”

My hands emitted a powerful golden light.

I've experienced this before.

This meant that 'accumulation of luck' activated.

If so...!

I quickly opened the lid.

Golden light rose up from the jar.

“Bravo.”

Aether was inside the jar, carrying a strange pink light.

...Pink?

“Wait, what?”

With a sense of foreboding, I turned on my smartwatch.

===

[Aesthetic Greed]

The desire to seek beauty has been attached to Aether.

—Its user’s invariable charm stat will increase by 0.002 points every 24 hours, up to a maximum of 1. (Note, the charm stat cannot be increased beyond 9).

—Aether will now react to beautiful things.

—Aether’s Detail Materialization becomes more exquisite.

===

“.....”

I became speechless and stood still in a daze.

From an objective standpoint, it was undoubtedly fantastic.

After all, it permanently raised an invariable stat.

Furthermore, as the charm stat was directly related to one’s physical beauty, it not only affected their outer appearance, but also their musculoskeletal balance and height.

With a full one point increase, I should grow at least 2~3cm taller.

It was a change worthy of triggering accumulation of luck.

Still...

“Why?”

Why couldn’t it have been intelligence rather than charm?

In fact, I would have been happier with an effect that increased my variable stats by 2.

“Huu...”

As regrettable as it was, there was nothing I could do about it.

Of course, it was possible to change the setting with my Gift. However, erasing an already existing functionality and adding a new one had the possibility of causing unnecessary consequences.

So I decided to be happy with what I got.

I reached out to Aether.

As though it missed me, Aether shot toward me like an arrow and coiled around my body like a snake.

Chapter 126

Chae Jinyoon (4)

December 25th.

Christmas. On this beautiful holiday celebrated by lovers and families, a huge piece of news swept through Korea.

The world's rank 1 guild, Creator's Sacred Grace, announced their Tower of Miracle campaign.

Although the announcement came late by a couple of weeks, I didn't mind too much, since the result was the same. I already bought 4 billion won's worth of their stocks, and I should be able to sell them soon.

"Are you worried?"

Currently, I was on the phone with Kim Suho while reading the guild stock chart.

[Creator's Sacred Grace +10.1%]

It was rare for a top guild's stock to fluctuate so much, but Creator's Sacred Grace's stocks were already up 10%. As I used stock market leverage, the profit I made was almost 100%.

—Not at all.

Despite what Kim Suho was saying, I could hear the concern in his voice.

Conquest of the Tower of Miracle would last for six months. Although most Tower conquests ended within three months, the Tower of Miracle was currently the world's biggest Tower. Unable to conquer this Tower with even six months, Creator's Sacred Grace would announce their defeat.

I thought about stopping them since I knew they would fail, but it was unlikely for their guild master to listen to a kid like me. After all, he refused to listen to even Yun Seung-Ah.

—She'll come back with glory.

“...I hope so too.”

Since the announcement was delayed by two weeks, they might have a chance of succeeding. Though, with the same logic, they might suffer a bigger loss.

From this point on, I couldn't be sure of the future. I might have a forest of knowledge in my head, but there were an infinite number of trees that existed in it. There was simply no way for me to know every single one of them.

—Oh, by the way, you're on your way to meet Chae Nayun, right?

I glanced at my watch.

11:59 a.m. It was a minute before the promised time Chae Nayun forced on me.

“...Why would I be?”

—What? Come on, don't be like that. She planned a lot for today.

“What?”

—Well, uh, she asked me about what you liked and what to do together that's fun. She was looking forward to today a lot, so you have to go.

It seemed Kim Suho was more worried about Chae Nayun and me than Yun Seung-Ah.

“...I'm hanging up.”

—Wait! Please, just go~ please~?

“Why are you acting cute towards me?”

It was a pretty Kim Suho-like thing to do.

With a grin, I hung up. I closed my laptop, lied down on the couch and turned on the TV.

After spending an hour just passing time...

Tididi—

The door opened, and Evandel and Hayang returned from their walk.

“We're back~!”

“Meow~”

Evandel raced to the couch as soon as she closed the door and stared at me intently. From the looks of it, she wanted something from me. Realizing that it was about time for her favorite anime to start, I handed her the remote and went into the bedroom.

“Ehew.”

I hopped down on my bed, whereupon a subconscious sigh came out. My heart throbbed with pain and I suddenly got a strong urge to smoke.

Feeling like this uncomfortable feeling would continue if I stayed still, I looked at my smartwatch reluctantly.

There weren't any messages or calls from Chae Nayun. In that case, she should have already gone home. An hour had already passed, and with her personality, there was no way she was waiting for me.

Telling myself that, I picked up the game console.

...Just like that, it became 3 p.m.

In the end, I left the bedroom, unable to calm my throbbing heart.

Evandel was sleeping on the couch, using Hayang as a pillow. When I carefully turned the doorknob so as to not wake her up, Evandel and Hayang got up and stared at me with sleepy eyes.

“Uh, Evandel, I'm going out for a bit. I'll bring back yummy food.”

“...Uun...”

Evandel went back to sleeping.

I quickly left the dorm. Riding the bike I had parked in the parking lot, I slowly drove to the Daehyun's VIP hospital.

“...She's still there.”

I came here, thinking ‘just maybe’, and I was right.

Chae Nayun was leaning on the hospital's wall, wearing clothes that were clearly chosen with care. Her short hair had a soft wave, indicating that she got her hair done, and she was uncharacteristically wearing a light makeup.

Looking at her, the throbbing pain in my heart grew stronger.

Swallowing a sigh, I slowly drove towards Chae Nayun.
Chae Nayun was staring at her smartwatch while pouting.
But when she heard the engine noise of my bike and looked up, she smiled brightly.

“Ah! Hey! Kim Hajin!”

Pointing at me, she ran up to me in a hurry.

“You’re freaking... I mean, you’re very late. Where were you?”

“I didn’t agree to meet in the first place.”

That was the only thing I could say. Chae Nayun leered at me once, but didn’t complain.
She just held up her watch.

“I had a lot planned for today. We were supposed to eat brunch at noon, go bowling at 1, go to a café at 2, visit a tarot fortune-teller at 3, go to an arcade at 4, go to a restaurant at 4:40...”

Hearing her recite the schedule she had planned, I lightly smacked her head.

“Uk.”

She stiffened her body and raised her head slowly.
I thought she’d react stronger, but she only looked at me confusedly and asked.

“Why’d you hit me?”

“...Who plans everything out like that? This isn’t combat training.”

“Then what do we do?”

“Let’s go on a drive. We have about two hours left.”

I spoke as I tapped on the seat behind me.

“Drive? Sure!”

Chae Nayun rejoiced. Once she got on the back seat, I stepped on the accelerator.

“Let’s go straight to the arcade. After we play games for 40 minutes, we can go to the restaurant.”

“Shut it, fool. Dates are supposed to be spontaneous.”

“...I-It’s not a date. I told you not to misunderstand— ugyak!”

I sped up to prevent her from justifying it more.

Without going to the arcade, I made a big circle around Seoul.

On this snowing Christmas day, we drove around seeing Seoul’s beautiful scenery. Although I came three hours late, we saw many things and enjoyed our time together. We stopped by a clothing shop, and by the time we left we were wearing completely different clothes than the beginning. We then ate at a restaurant, and I forced Chae Nayun to eat some pancakes.

After spending two and a half hours together, it became time for her to go, and so I drove her to the Portal Station.

[Domestic Portal Station]

“Ah... mm...”

The Portal Chae Nayun had to take was connected to North Hamgyeong Province. However, she stayed near me, hesitating to go.

“Hurry, you’re going to be late.”

Unable to look at her straight, I muttered as I stared at the Portal in the distance. Chae Nayun then nudged my shoulder.

“Hey.”

“Hm?”

“...Today was fun.”

Chae Nayun’s short and calm words made me bitter and pained me more.

“...I’m glad.”

“By the way, before I come back, don’t...”

She didn’t finish her sentence. After hesitating for a moment, she shook her head and smiled.

“Nevermind, I’ll see you soon anyways.”

With that, she put her hand out. Though small and white, her hand was crude and wrought with calluses.

With a bitter smile, I grabbed her hand. She must have liked the sensation as her cheeks turned faintly red.

“Your hand is pretty big... and soft.”

“Because I only have to pull the trigger when I train.”

“...I’m jealous. Kuhum, anyways.”

Chae Nayun let out a dry cough and let go of my hand.

“I’ll see you later.”

I smiled silently.

“Then I’m going.”

“Yeah.”

“Stay safe.”

With those last words, Chae Nayun walked to the Portal, glancing back a couple of times regretfully.



January 3rd, the third day of the new year.

In the sleeting weather, I got in a sedan parked in a desolate park.

Jain and a man I hadn't met before were sitting in the front seats, while Boss was sitting in the back.

"This is the helper I was talking about, so don't be too surprised."

"Hello."

Judging by the man's reggae style hair and black skin, he was likely Khalifa, the Chameleon Troupe's seat of Blue.

"Now that the main hero is here, everyone close your eyes and entrust yourselves to my magic power~"

Jain unleashed her magic power.

I did as she said.

Jain's magic power touched my body, and I could feel something being painted over my skin.

"Done. Here are your fake IDs."

Three minutes. It only took three minutes for us to become completely different people with Jain's Gift.

I opened my eyes and looked at the rear-view mirror. Reflected in it was the image of a nurse, not Kim Hajin.

"I don't know why you want to make things this difficult. We could have just used poison."

Jain's first idea was to use poison. However, the Devil's Seed couldn't be killed so easily. That was why I prepared the god-slaying bullet.

"The plan is simple. We'll enter Chae Jinyoon's room disguised as nurses. Then we'll bring him out and kill him in a secluded place."

Although Jain made her plan sound easy, in reality, it was extremely difficult considering the security inside the VIP hospital.

However, it was possible with Jain's 'Disguise' ability and Khalifa's 'Portal' ability.

"As for how we're going to bring him out, that's why he's here. He has the ability to

open Portals. But if the magic power undulation is too great, we'll be found out by the mercenaries outside the room and the security system. So our best bet is using a small Portal that travels only 20 km. Once you go through the Portal, the disguise I put on you will wear off. But you won't have to worry about anyone seeing you. We already have a barrier set up where you and Chae Jinyoon will stand off."

There, I would be have to face Chae Jinyoon head on.

"Once you and Khalifa leave, Boss and I will craft a fake that will stay lying in bed. Just in case a mercenary walks back in. All you need to do is finish your task and come back through the helper's Portal."

Jain's ability wore off once her target went beyond a set distance. To maintain the fake Chae Jinyoon, Jain had to stay in the hospital room.

"Now, get off and pretend like you're heading to work. Only I will be in the sedan. I'll stay close enough to maintain your disguise so don't worry. Just make sure you're not more than 4 km away."

The distance restriction of Jain's Gift was 10 km when she was disguising one person, 8 km for two, 6 km for three, and so on.

Khalifa got off first, followed by me, then Boss.

The sedan then drove off slowly.

The three of us began to follow the sedan, while maintaining an appropriate distance.



We successfully entered the VIP hospital.

I headed to the counter and waited for Jain to call me.

"Haeyeon-ssi?"

At exactly 11:00 a.m., Jain called me.

"Yes?"

"It's time to check on Chae Jinyoon-ssi's condition. Follow me downstairs."

"Ah, yes."

I followed Jain down the stairs, along with another nurse and a doctor. They were Boss and Khalifa in disguise.

We took the escalator down and arrived downstairs.

Once we were in front of Chae Jinyoon's room, Jain looked at the clipboard she was holding and spoke to the mercenary standing guard.

"11:10 a.m., it's time for a check-up."

"Yes."

The mercenary let us through without suspicion. As soon as we entered the room, we locked the door.

Inside, Chae Jinyoon was sound asleep.

Jain murmured quietly.

"CCTV."

I was in charge of dealing with the CCTV. Using my smartwatch, I temporarily stopped the CCTV. Just this took 200 SP.

"It's done."

"Good."

Jain turned to Boss.

"Boss, be careful so that the mercenaries outside don't notice."

"I know."

Boss unleashed her magic power with extreme care and created two magic power puppets. Next, Jain turned them into Chae Jinyoon and the nurse I was disguised as.

"Alright, you're up next, Khalifa."

"Okay."

Immediately afterwards, Khalifa created a small Portal.

Wooong—

This time, the undulation of magic power was stronger. We had to hurry before the mercenaries outside noticed the magic power and came in.

—W-What was that? Hello? Did something happen inside?

I put Chae Jinyoon on a wheelchair I prepared and walked into the Portal.



The Portal led to a desolate forest.

The ground was covered with sleet, and the trees nearby were all naked.

In front of me, I could see a wooden bench.

I parked the wheelchair next to it and waited for Chae Jinyoon to wake up.

All of a sudden, Chae Nayun's face began to overlap with Chae Jinyoon's. She was looking at me with a bright smile.

However, I suppressed the thoughts popping up in my head.

I needed to free myself from all thoughts and ideas.

“...Fucking hell.”

But I just couldn't do it.

I took out a white box I brought just in case.

Cigarettes.

Putting what I inadvertently quit in my mouth, I lit it with magic power.

An acrid smoke passed through my throat and invaded my lungs.

The unpleasant combination of nicotine and tar made me relax, if even just a little.

...After waiting in the cold weather and cigarette smoke for an unknown amount of time, Chae Jinyoon finally opened his eyes.

“.....”

Chae Jinyoon stared at me without being perturbed by the foreign scenery.

I stared back at him and bowed.

Chae Jinyoon spoke.

“...Kim Hajin?”

I didn't reply.

"Where are we?"

I didn't reply.

"Did something happen to the hospital room?"

I didn't reply.

Instead, I took out my gun and loaded it with the god-slaying bullet.

"Hajin?"

Chae Jinyoon's innocent voice gave me a heart-wrenching pain.

I closed my eyes and let out a deep breath. I dropped the cigarette on the ground and stomped the ember out.

Then, I finally spoke.

"Chae Jinyoon-ssi, have you heard of the Devil's Seed?"

"What?"

"...It should be something that hasn't been confirmed yet in this world."

Looking down at Chae Jinyoon, I continued.

I felt like I needed to explain why he had to die.

In a way, it was to show respect. But in truth, it was a cowardly self-justification.

"A Devil's Seed is a devil that takes over a human's body, almost like a parasite. But once the seed sprouts, the devil will take over its host's body, transforming it into its real self."

My clothes fluttered from the fierce wind. Because of the cigarette I smoked for the first time in almost a year, I could still feel the bitterness in my mouth.

I slowly raised my gun and pointed it at Chae Jinyoon's head.

"Chae Jinyoon-ssi, this seed is inside your body."

Chae Jinyoon looked at me silently.

“You will become a devil.”

My vision turned blurry.
My hands were trembling uncontrollably.

“I’m... I’m sorry.”

Holding the gun with both my hands, I did my best to stop the trembling.
After taking a deep breath, I put my finger on the trigger.

“I’m sorry, really, I’m sorry...”

However, I couldn’t help but hesitate.
Chae Nayun’s face rose up in front of me. Her smiling face overlapped with Chae Jinyoon. The feelings she had for me touched my heart once again.
Pain shook my heart, and sorrow suffocated my throat.
I was afraid.
I was afraid of the pain she would feel and the wound she would come to bear.

It was then.
Chae Jinyoon’s face contorted frighteningly. At the same time, demonic energy rose up from his body, burning the ground and stifling me. Chae Jinyoon’s entire body turned ash-black.
Chae Jinyoon, or rather the devil that took over his body, reached out toward me. From its deathly black fingers and blood-colored eyes, I could feel an undoubtable killing intent.
But even as its hand drew ever closer to my neck, I hesitated.
Due to mental exhaustion, I didn’t have the strength to pull the trigger.
My hesitation should have led to my death.
However, no danger came my way.
Silent and distant.
It was as though the world stopped.

Standing in the middle of this serene forest, I looked into the devil’s eyes. Its bloodshot eyes were frozen and unmoving, but carried a tinge of tears. Immediately, my heart sank.
The Devil’s Seed was unable to fully sprout and was being blocked by Chae Jinyoon’s will.

“.....”

Chae Jinyoon was staring me, suppressing the evil within him.
I couldn't say anything. I couldn't make the situation any better.
Chae Jinyoon's decision was clear, and I couldn't betray his conviction. I couldn't make his effort go to waste.
Clenching my teeth, I re-aimed my gun.

“This time, I won't hesitate. For me, and for you.”

...When my finger was about to pull the trigger, a small thought rose up in my head.
Chae Jinyoon, the man I created.
He was a kind, warm, selfless, and righteous... hero.

KWANG.

I pulled the trigger.
In an instant, the world seemed to get farther and farther away as a brilliant light dyed the surroundings white.
The god-slaying bullet pierced through Chae Jinyoon's forehead and destroyed the seed residing within.
His blood and brain fluid splattered all over my body. His bones pelted my skin, and a strange ringing sound reverberated in my ears.
My legs gave way, and I collapsed on the ground. All sorts of emotions swept through me. My face became wet with what could have been tears or blood.

“Ah...”

From my mouth, an indiscernible sound came out.
I couldn't tell if it was the cry of a human or a beast.

Today, I murdered Chae Jinyoon.

Chapter 127

Funeral (1)

My body felt heavy and dizziness swept through my head.

In this situation where I could barely hold on to my sanity, a strange suspicion rose up inside me.

Was this world a novel or reality?

Suddenly, the sentences I wrote in my novel popped up in my head. The contents of my novel came to life, and Chae Jinyoon's heroic tales flashed before my eyes. The Tower of Wish, artifact scrambles, and the Tower of Miracle...

However, these things could no longer happen.

For the first time, I was overcome with the realization that I killed a person. I could hear the sound of something breaking inside me.

This world was just a novel...

It was the sound of that subconscious belief shattering.

Tsss.

Black boots descended on the sleet covering the ground. I raised my head in a daze. Boss' dark pupils entered my sight. Her body was fluttering on the snowy field.

“Take care of the corpse.”

Boss muttered. I stared at Chae Jinyoon, who was lying tragically with half of his head blown up.

He had partially transformed into a devil. Demonic energy still remained in his body, which would soon combust into a huge explosion.

Boss helped me up. In that instant, I noticed that my body was half-burnt. The thin clothes I was wearing for Jain's Disguise had burned up when I fired my gun.

Although my feet were on the ground, I couldn't stay standing. Staggering, my head fell on Boss' shoulder. Boss stood still and accepted me.

Soon, a Portal appeared nearby. Jain and Khalifa walked out from inside, and when

they saw what happened, their expressions turned grave.

At that moment, demonic energy shot up from Chae Jinyoon's corpse.
That was where my memory ended.



January 3rd, a particularly cold, dark night.

KWANG!

Chae Shinhyuk threw the door open.

Inside a resting place of corpses, he met a familiar face.

"...Hello, Chae Shinhyuk-ssi."

Forensic scientist, Kim Joongho.

They were united 11 years after the death of Chae Shinhyuk's wife.

"....."

Without sparing any time to offer a greeting, Chae Shinhyuk approached the corpse lying next to Kim Joongho.

When he saw the corpse, he clenched his teeth.

A cold corpse of a man whose face was half blown up. It was his son, Chae Jinyoon.

"Do you have any leads on the suspect?"

Chae Shinhyuk maintained his composure as much as possible.

"Not yet. An isolation barrier must have been around the scene of the crime. There isn't a single trace of the incident remaining."

Investigators nowadays had all sorts of supernatural Gifts: psychometry, cold reading, etc... However, not even the most competent investigators of Korea could find any evidence.

"Was it the Djinns?"

"...We aren't sure."

“But there’s demonic energy right here.”

Chae Shinhyuk pointed at the black energy coalesced around Chae Jinyoon’s right arm.

“Do I look like a fool?”

From Chae Shinhyuk’s reddened eyes, tears began to flow.

“...Chae Shinhyuk-ssi.”

Kim Joongho sighed softly.

He had no choice but to say what he didn’t want to say.

“This demonic energy... came from Chae Jinyoon’s body.”

“...What?”

Chae Shinhyuk’s face contorted frighteningly.

Kim Joongho stared at him with downcast eyes.

“This demonic energy came from his body, but was stopped in the middle of traveling through his veins. And that must be because he died.”

“.....”

Chae Shinhyuk was unable to understand Kim Joongho’s words.

No, he refused to accept it.

Demonic energy came from his body? That was impossible... unless Chae Jinyoon was a Djinn.

“If it is you, it should be easy to find the accursed murderer who killed your son.”

Kim Joongho continued to speak as Chae Shinhyuk stared at him with widened eyes and rough breathing.

“With Daehyun’s power, with Chae Joochul’s power, even rampaging through Pandemonium shouldn’t be difficult. However, we are no longer living in the 80s.”

Kim Joongho’s gaze fell on Chae Jinyoon’s right arm.

“...Jinyoon became a Djinn. No, this is the first time I’ve seen such an arm. This is even more elaborate than the Djinn’s Devil Transformation. You can see that it’s persisting even after his death.”

Chae Shinhyuk’s breathing became even more disheveled. Killing intent could be felt from his eyes looking at Kim Joongho.

“I can only surmise that something happened four years ago during the Djinn suppression operation... To discover the exact reason and search for the culprit, an autopsy will be necessary. However, an autopsy will reveal Jinyoon’s true state.”

Chae Shinhyuk looked down at his son.

The gaze of the father scrutinized the body of the son.

A face half blown up, an eye forever closed, a frail boney body, and... a right arm devoured by a mysterious existence.

Chae Shinhyuk slowly closed his eyes.

An emotion flowing from the depth of his heart ate away at him.

“This right arm.”

After a momentary silence, Chae Shinhyuk spoke up.

“Are you the only one who knows about it?”

Kim Joongho maintained his silence and nodded.

“Are you certain?”

“...Yes, but it is something we will have to reveal one day. For humanity.”

“.....”

Chae Shinhyuk placed his hand on his son’s cheek. His skin was already cold and dry. Caressing what felt no different than a fish, Chae Shinhyuk muttered with a somber tone.

“...I never thought I’d see the day where my son woke up.”

He thought Chae Jinyoon had died four years ago.

He was pained by the debt he couldn't pay.

But two weeks ago, when his son miraculously woke up, he felt like he was on the top of the world.

"Today, I lost my son a second time."

His son passed away too quickly, almost as though he woke up to say a final goodbye. That was enough of a heart-wrenching pain, one that Chae Shinhyuk would bear for the rest of his life.

"...But I don't want to lose him a third time. For Nayun, I want to bury him peacefully."

Chae Shinhyuk spoke, looking at Kim Joongho. Because of the deep sorrow in his voice, Kim Joongho couldn't say anything.

Tears flowed down from Chae Shinhyuk's eyes.

Kim Joongho bowed with a sigh.

"...I will do my best. I will take my leave now."

With that, Kim Joongho gave Chae Shinhyuk some time alone with his son.

"....."

In an empty room with only the coldness of steel and a corpse, Chae Shinhyuk caressed his son's face with his trembling hand.

Because of the tears clogging up his throat, he was unable to say anything.

He only had one wish.

'Son... my son... I hope you have a better father in your next life...'



It was a memory from the past.

Although lacking color and missing several bits and pieces, it was a piece of memory I dreamed often.

—Nayun.

After watching me practice archery for a long time, Oppa called my name.

—Un?

—... You can take a break if it's too hard.

He walked up to me carefully and held up my hand. When he saw my hand bleeding with blisters and cuts, he put on a sad expression, but I shook my head.

—I'm going to try even harder. I want to become an even greater Hero than Oppa.

Hearing my arrogant and daring remark, Oppa smiled and stroked my hair. His hands were warm and reliable.

—I hope you do too. By the way, you didn't forget about next week, right? We're going to an amusement park.

A trip to Korea's most famous amusement park, Foreverland. Instead of being happy, the me in my memory shook my head with a troubled face.

—Um, I can't go. I'm going somewhere else with my friends.

—... Really?

Although he looked disappointed, he quickly grinned.

—Then I guess we'll have to go some other time. Oppa is going to work now, so don't overwork yourself. You won't grow taller if you do.

—Un~ see you later, Oppa~

This morning remained so vivid in my memory for one reason.

That night, Oppa came back in a coma.

“...Ah.”

Tears flowed down from my eyes the moment I woke up. Dazzling sunlight shone through the window and poked my eyes.

Baekdu Mountain's morning had arrived. The air of Yoo Sihyuk's martial art school

was clear and refreshing. Mana phenomenon like fog and barrier were nowhere to be seen today.

I shot up and looked beside my bed.

The precious pictures I took with Oppa were lined up in frames.

“...Huhu.”

A smile emerged on my face.

After looking around the room to make sure no one was here, I took out a picture I kept hidden below them. It was the picture of me and Kim Hajin.

“It came out so well.”

I wasn't looking at this picture for any particular reason.

It was just because it came out really well.

It definitely wasn't because Kim Hajin was in it.

“Auu~”

After putting the picture back, I stretched. Smiling at the warm sunlight outside the window, I headed to the bath.

“You're here, Unni?”

As soon as I entered the bath, a small 10-year-old girl greeted me.

“Oh hey, you're up early too.”

“It's Jihae.”

“Right, Jihae.”

Yoo Sihyuk had 16 official disciples, eight male and eight female.

They received training under Yoo Sihyuk and five others.

However, Kim Suho, me, and the 10 other 'camp members' weren't included among the official disciples. We would only stay here for the winter break and disappear afterwards.

“Auu, so good.”

After taking a shower, I hopped in the hot spring. Nothing could go wrong with staying in a mana-rich hot spring.

I came out after about 20 minutes of resting.

Switching into my uniform, I went out to the front yard where morning training was held.

“Yo, Chae Nayun.”

Shin Jonghak and Kim Suho came up. They seemed to have taken a bath too. I snickered and spoke.

“Isn’t it a beautiful morning?”

“Yeah, it is.”

“I feel like I can beat you up today, so you better watch out.”

Was it because of the clear sky? I felt particularly good today. Kim Suho looked at me dumbfoundedly and laughed.

“Why are you so energetic today? Is it because today’s the letter day?”

“Eh?”

January 3rd.

It was their tenth day here.

There was one special event in today’s schedule.

“N-No, that has nothing to do with it.”

Electronics didn’t work on Baekdu Mountain, so it was impossible to communicate with the rest of the world. Although this problem could be circumvented, Master Yoo Sihyuk left things the way they were.

However, today was the day where it was possible to communicate with the outside world.

Today’s ‘letter time’ was exactly that.

“She’s right, Kim Suho, the only one she’d want to write a letter to is here, so cut the nonsense.”

“You shut up... geez.”

I smacked Shin Jonghak’s shoulder. He kept making me curse when I was in the middle of trying to fix my way of talking.

“He’s coming.”

Yoo Sihyuk was walking towards us with his hands behind his back.

“Get ready.”

We stood straight in a line.

How long would today’s training be?

10 hours? 12 hours?



...14 hours later.

The sun had long set and the hellish training had finally ended.

Currently, Chae Nayun was lying on her bed, staring at a piece of paper.

[Hi, I’m in Baekdu Mountain.]

“...That doesn’t sound right.”

She already wrote the letter to send to Chae Jinyoon.

Following her heart, 30 minutes was enough. However, she needed more time with this particular letter.

[I’m in Baekdu Mountain ㄹㄹ Training is so easy ㄹㄹ;; What are you doing? ㄹㄹㄹ]

“No, that’s not any better...”

In the end, Chae Nayun ruffled her hair and threw her pen down.

‘I should have read some books. I don’t know how to write at all!’

Chae Nayun sighed. But unwilling to give up on this chance that came once every ten days, she picked her pen back up.

While Chae Nayun was deep in thought...

Tok, tok—

Someone knocked on her door, and the door burst open.

“W-What!?”

Startled, Chae Nayun hid the letter with her body. When she raised her head slowly, she saw Yoo Sihyuk looking down at her.

“...Chae Nayun.”

His voice was low and somber.

Chae Nayun put the letter in her pocket and slowly got up.

“Yes, Master. Um, you should really knock before entering a lady’s room.”

“...Come outside for a minute.”

Yoo Sihyuk was uncharacteristically serious.

“Yes?”

“...Just come outside.”

He sounded kind, unlike his usual self.

As Chae Nayun followed him out, she racked her brain to remember if she did something wrong.



January 5th.

The day tragic news was announced was a clear day. After receiving the news from her father and mother, Yoo Yeonha quickly ended a meeting and got in her car.

Chae Jinyoon died.

Her parents didn’t tell her anything else.

Yoo Yeonha felt her head turn blank as she sat on the car seat.

Suddenly, she thought of Chae Nayun.

It was only a couple of weeks ago that she was exhilarated at her brother waking up... When she remembered this, she felt her heart sink. Even though it wasn't her business or something she experienced, she felt her heart tighten.

"...Let's get off."

Yoo Jinwoong spoke softly.

Yoo Yeonha followed her parents out of the car.

No reporters dared to besiege Daehyun's funeral home, making the venue quiet and lonely.

"...Eh?"

Yoo Yeonha stopped while trudging up to the entrance.

Under the shade of a nearby tree, she could see a familiar person.

Kim Hajin.

He was smoking a cigarette and staring at the funeral home with a complicated expression.

"Why isn't he going in?... And he's smoking?"

"Yeonha, what are you doing?"

At that moment, her mother called her.

"Ah, yes, I'm coming."

For now, Yoo Yeonha followed her mother inside.

As soon as she entered the small funeral home, she looked for Chae Nayun.

Chae Nayun was sitting in a daze. Her hollow eyes were filled with despair. To her, Chae Nayun was always bright and cheerful. It was the first time she was seeing this side of Chae Nayun.

Swallowing her sigh, Yoo Yeonha stood in front of the family of the deceased.

"Nayun."

"...Ah, Yeonha... you came."

Chae Nayun greeted Yoo Yeonha. She tried to smile cheerfully, but that made her look all the more pitiful. Her lifeless eyes seemed to ready to burst into tears. However, she was holding herself back desperately.

Yoo Yeonha understood.

That was the kind of girl Chae Nayun was.

“Yeah, wait just a minute.”

After adjusting her dress, Yoo Yeonha stood in front of Chae Jinyoon’s portrait and bowed with her family.

“Chae Shinhyuk-ssi.”

“...Oh, you’re here.”

While the two fathers talked, Yoo Yeonha walked back to Chae Nayun. She looked into her eyes and held her hands softly.

“Um, Nayun... where are the others?”

“...I didn’t tell them. I didn’t tell them, so don’t call them here.”

Chae Nayun sounded desperate. However, Yoo Yeonha thought of Kim Hajin, who was waiting outside smoking a cigarette.

“Even if you say that... that person is already outside.”

“...That person?”

Chae Nayun asked meekly.

“Kim Hajin.”

Hearing the name Yoo Yeonha mentioned, Chae Nayun fell into a daze. She sat motionless, as though she was struck with great shock.

“I, I’ll be back soon.”

Then, she walked out of the funeral home.

“.....”

Chae Nayun couldn't even walk properly. Her legs were trembling.

The way Chae Nayun staggered forward was too different from her usual energetic self.

Yoo Yeonha could only feel sorry.

Chapter 128

Funeral (2)

When I opened my eyes, I saw an unfamiliar ceiling. Rather than unfamiliar, it was more luxurious than anything else. Catholic frescoes adorned the walls and ceilings, and when I focused, the murals' colors became clearer through resonance of mana. It was quite a mysterious mechanism.

“You’re up?”

While I was staring at the frescoes in a daze, a voice rang out. Turning around, I saw Boss sitting on a chair. She sipped on her tea and looked at me.

“You slept for two days.”

“...!”

Hearing these words, I quickly raised my upper body. Many things could have happened in two days. However, Boss was calm.

“Don’t worry, the cover up was perfect.”

There were many things I wanted to ask her but couldn’t. After looking at me for a while, Boss smiled lightly.

“The funeral is starting today.”

“Ah...”

A dazed voice came out of my mouth. At the same time, memories of the moment I pulled the trigger resurfaced. Chae Jinyoon’s funeral. Did I have the right to go there?

I clenched my teeth. Suddenly, a strong urge overwhelmed me. I rummaged through my pocket, but I couldn't find my pack of cigarettes.

"Your weapon is here."

Misunderstanding my motion, Boss pointed at the shelf. My Desert Eagle was sitting on it. I carefully grabbed it. Likely because it was clad in Aether, it wasn't broken anywhere.

"...So where are we?"

As I said that, I put the Desert Eagle into Stigma's magic power. Seeing the handgun transform into a current of mana and seep into my arm, Boss widened her eyes.

"That's quite an interesting storage method."

"It's nothing much."

I shrugged. Boss grinned and continued her explanation proudly.

"This is my mansion built on an island in the East Sea. Ah, just in case you're misunderstanding, this entire island is my home."

"...Wow, that's amazing."

Since Boss liked being praised, I exaggerated a bit.

"Huhu, why don't we open the windows?"

Boss opened the windows proudly. I looked outside at the gem-like ocean, clear sky, and salty breeze.

It was indeed a scenery worth bragging about.

"...Wait, then how do we get back?"

"Hm? You don't have a Personal Portal?"

Boss was clearly bragging.
Personal Portal.

It was a system for the rich. If I remembered correctly, there was one in Busan.

“Then I’d like to head home.”

“...You can stay a bit longer.”

“There’s someone waiting for me.”

“I see.”

Boss reluctantly led me outside.

The unknown island I was on had many attendants running about. However, none of them were humans. They were puppets created by Boss’ magic power that could only perform set tasks.

Boss was living amidst puppets she created herself.

“It’s a lonely place.”

“Sometimes, you need to get used to loneliness.”

“.....”

I walked through the garden towards Boss’ Personal Portal.

After walking for about 10 minutes, enjoying the island’s beautiful scenery, I could see the so-called Personal Portal in the distance.

Although it was smaller than what Portal Stations had, it was still a high-tech magical tool that could perform as well as other Portals.

“I just have to go in?”

“Yes, it should be connected to Busan. I’ll come with you. There’s something I need to take care of in England.”

Boss made a call. Soon, the Portal was activated, and we stepped inside.

Once we arrived in Busan’s Portal Station, we went through the VIP-only path and stopped at a crossroad.

Boss’ destination was England, and mine was Seoul.

“Then I’ll see you later.”

“Yes.”

After exchanging a light goodbye, I walked away.

Closing my eyes, I felt the magic power of the Portal engulfing my body.

Shooong—

When I opened my eyes, I could see the now familiar sight of Seoul Portal Station.

I left the station without much thought, then bought three packs of cigarettes at a nearby convenience store.

Chae Jinyoon’s funeral should be held in Daehyun’s funeral home. I located it using the Book of Truth and walked there.

“.....”

I could see the silent and somber funeral home.

But I couldn’t bring myself to go in.

I also didn’t think I could break through the guards standing outside.

So, I just decided to watch from the distance. I told myself that I’d go back once my heart calmed down.

Standing under a nearby tree, I took out a cigarette. After lighting it without a lighter, I took a deep breath. A puff of smoke entered my lungs.

One, then two... I subconsciously began to smoke again and again.

“Hm?”

Then suddenly, a fourth visitor came to pay respect to the deceased.

I saw Yoo Yeonha walking into the funeral home.

Although I didn’t meet her eyes, I felt an unknown sense of foreboding. I felt like I had to leave before it was too late.

However, it already was too late.

“...Ah.”

A dazed voice came out of my mouth.

Chae Nayun walked out of the entrance. Looking around the funeral home, our eyes met.

Her eyes were filled with tears.

When I saw her face, my feet refused to move.

Tap, tap.

Chae Nayun walked towards me, wearing a mourning dress.
Her movements felt slow, and the sound of her footsteps were all too clear.

“...Kim Hajin.”

She arrived in front of me before I noticed and called my name.
Not knowing what to do, I maintained my silence.

“How did you find out? Did Yoo Yeonha tell you?”

Chae Nayun smiled forcibly. She was trying hard to pretend like she was fine.

“By the way, are you a delinquent? Why are you smoking?”

However, her forced smile made her face look all the more contorted.

“Why aren’t you answering... hey, let me have that.”

Suddenly, Chae Nayun reached out to take my cigarette.

“What? Are you crazy?”

I blurted out subconsciously. I threw the cigarette on the ground and stepped on it.
Chae Nayun didn’t look down at the cigarette. Her gaze was fixated on me.

“Does smoking make it better?”

Chae Nayun suddenly asked.
Her voice was shaking, and a stream of tears flowed down from her eyes.
Immediately, my vision turned hazy.

“...Why are you crying?”

Only when she told me did I realized I was crying.

“.....”

I wiped my tears with one hand.

Chae Nayun walked up to me one step at a time.

Soon, she was only a single step away from me. Our bodies were practically touching.

I had to push her away, but I couldn't bring myself to do so.

My heart couldn't follow what my brain was telling me to do.

Chae Nayun was crying. In front of her tears, my body was frozen and unable to move.

"What... what should I do now?"

Sobbing quietly, she lowered her head to hide her flowing tears.

Then, her forehead touched my chest.

I couldn't breathe.

Suddenly, I remembered what I thought about before.

That as long as I wasn't found out, I could maintain this relationship.

"I, I..."

But seeing Chae Nayun crying like a child, I realized that that was impossible in the first place.

"Huaaang..."

Chae Nayun put her arms around me. Our bodies touched, and she cried in my embrace.

I was in pain. It felt like my heart was going to burst. I tried to push her away, but she didn't let go. In fact, she drew even closer. The pain I felt only grew stronger by the second.

"What, what do I do about Oppa?"

She finally burst into tears. Unable to hold herself back any longer, she trembled uncontrollably.

"Oppa, Oppa, Oppa..."

Her grief-stricken sobbing became poison that seeped into my body.

"Poor Oppa... what am I supposed to do... uang..."

“.....”

I couldn't bear to watch her sorrowful trembling.
Her body weighed down on me.

I knew all too well that I had no right to comfort her. I was someone who didn't belong here... However, before I even realized what I was doing, my arms were tightened around her. Chae Nayun dug into my body, as though she was trying to fill the emptiness in her heart with me.

“If I, if I... Haaaang—”

Chae Nayun's tears wet my chest.

My tears flowed down to her shoulders.

The cold winter breeze blew against us, and the bitterness of the cigarette smoke engulfed us.

“Ah, aaah...”

Chae Nayun wasn't able to withstand her sadness. Her legs gave out, and soon, she crumbled down from the depths of her heart.

It was then that I finally found what I could say.

“...Sorry.”

That was the only thing I could tell her.

“I'm... sorry...”

**

Yoo Yeonha watched the two from a distance.

The situation was too melancholic and somber to be called a touching reunion.

“.....”

All sorts of complicated thoughts flashed through Yoo Yeonha's head.

If one day, Chae Nayun found out the truth.

If one day, Kim Hajin found out the truth.

Would their story come to a sad ending?
Or would they overcome all odds and achieve happiness?

Yoo Yeonha didn't try to come up with an answer.
She put the matter of the future to rest.

"...Eh?"

When she was about to go back to the funeral home, Chae Nayun suddenly lost strength and collapsed.

She had undoubtedly fainted.

Yoo Yeonha quickly ran up to them.

"Is she okay?!"

The moment she yelled out, her eyes met Kim Hajin's.

Yoo Yeonha shuddered inadvertently.

His eyes were frighteningly hollow.



Leaving Chae Nayun to Yoo Yeonha, I came back home.

An apartment in Seoul's Seocho District, the home where Evandel and Hayang were waiting.

Standing in front of the door, I pressed the password.

Beebeebep—

Before the door even opened, I could hear a bustling sound inside.

I didn't go inside on purpose.

—Who is it?

Hearing the password go through but the door remaining closed, Evandel murmured quizzically. I grinned and opened the door.

"I'm home."

From my perspective, not even half a day had passed since I last saw them, but from Evandel's perspective, she was seeing me for the first time in two days.

Evandel smiled brightly and ran into my embrace.

“Hajin~!”

I got on my knees and hugged her.
Evandel was light and warm.
Then, I suddenly wondered.
Did I hug Evandel? Or did Evandel hug me?
I felt something rising up from the bottom of my heart.
I shuddered at the constraining pain.

“Hajin, why were you so late? I was waiting.”

“...Sorry, something came up.”

As Evandel tried to get out of my embrace, I held her tighter.

“Ak.”

“Did you eat well?”

“Un, we ordered food. By the way, it’s getting stuffy.”

“...I’m glad. And you went out on a walk?”

I continued to ask. I loosened my arms a bit to not hurt Evandel.

“I went with Hayang. Oh right, I even built a sand castle with a new friend!”

“Really?”

I couldn’t say anything more.
Because of the lump in my throat, my voice didn’t come out.

Chapter 129

Funeral (3)

I opened my eyes to a white ceiling.

My mind felt hazy and my vision was foggy.

Was I dreaming? Or did I wake up from a dream?

The boundary between reality and dreams was ambiguous.

However, the smell of cigarette smoke on my body woke up me to the truth. The painful reality that I hoped wasn't true flooded into my mind.

I couldn't deny reality no matter how much I wanted to.

"Hng."

Chae Nayun sniffled. Letting out a sigh, she looked outside the window. Perhaps because she let out her pent up feelings, the current of emotions that seemed to be eating away at her disappeared, leaving behind calmness.

"You're up?"

At that moment, a soft voice rang out. Chae Nayun turned to the direction of the voice.

"...Master?"

Yoo Sihyuk's calm eyes were looking down at her. Chae Nayun stared at him with widened eyes.

Yoo Sihyuk sighed.

"Haa... You can come back to the mountain whenever you want. For now, take your time and rest."

Yoo Sihyuk rarely let go of disciples he accepted. Chae Nayun and Chae Jinyoon were two of the few disciples he acknowledged.

"Ah..."

Unaccustomed to Yoo Sihyuk's kindness, Chae Nayun only stared at him blankly.

"What, got a problem?"

"...No, not at all."

Chae Nayun quickly shook her head.

"Good, then—"

"Actually..."

Chae Nayun cut Yoo Sihyuk off and raised her upper body. Seeing the black mourning clothes she was wearing, she felt her heart throb, but she didn't want to waste any more time lying around.

"Once the burial ends, I'll go back up right away."

She clenched her fists.

Strong determination and conviction rose up from her heart.

Yoo Sihyuk shook his head with a concerned expression.

"No, you shouldn't push yourself..."

"I heard he was murdered."

Chae Nayun clenched her teeth.

Her father didn't explain much, only that an unknown assailant attacked Chae Jinyoon.

"...I was told so as well."

Chae Jinyoon was one of Yoo Sihyuk's beloved disciples. The chilling rage he felt was noticeable even by Chae Nayun.

"...Don't think about taking the matter into your hands, Master."

Chae Nayun looked down at her small and calloused hands.

Finally, she found something she had to do with her hands.

Furthermore, it was something only she had the right to accomplish.

“I will find him and kill him myself.”

“.....”

Yoo Sihyuk calmly looked at Chae Nayun murmuring in rage.

“Oh right.”

Suddenly, Chae Nayun widened her eyes as though she remembered something.

“Before then, please give me four days.”

“...Sure.”

“Ah, no, maybe a week is better. So um... is a week okay?”

“.....”

Yoo Sihyuk narrowed his eyes. However, he couldn't say anything to Chae Nayun, who was doing her best to hide her sorrow and show her anger.

“Just contact me whenever you're ready.”

“...Thank you, Master.”

“Hmph.”

Yoo Sihyuk got up from his seat and opened the door to leave.
Yoo Yeonha was also walking in.

“Ah, hello, Sir Yoo Sihyuk...”

“I don't need to be addressed so politely by a kid.”

“Ak.”

Yoo Sihyuk poked Yoo Yeonha's forehead before walking past her. Yoo Yeonha watched him leave with a pout, then approached Chae Nayun's bed.

“...Yeonha.”

“Hey, Nayun, are you feeling better?”

“Yeah, I feel a lot better now. By the way...”

Chae Nayun didn't finish her sentence. However, Yoo Yeonha knew what she wanted to say.

“That person went back home.”

“Ah... I see. Where's my smartwatch?”

Yoo Yeonha pointed at the shelf. Chae Nayun grabbed her smartwatch, then grinned.

“Hey, which information guilds are good nowadays?”

It was clear what she wanted to do.

Yoo Yeonha put on a serious face and spoke.

“Leave it to me.”

Yoo Yeonha announced proudly.

“I'll take responsibility and find out who did this.”

“Oh~”

Hearing Chae Nayun's exclamation of awe, Yoo Yeonha smiled.

“Since we're friends, I'll give you a 30% discount.”

“...What?”



Chae Joochul, the president of Daehyun group, had a unique hobby that was famous throughout the world.

His hobby was collecting castles, and Chae Joochul the Immortal already had over a hundred castles of various styles.

“Ho...”

In France’s Centre-Val de Loire region was a famous castle Chae Joochul purchased. This castle called Chateau de Chenonceau was built during the Renaissance and was an important landmark in the city.

As one of Chae Joochul’s favorite castles, it was naturally where he liked to stay. Currently, Chae Joochul was sitting on a throne inside the castle.

“To think this old man would lose his grandson at this age...”

Although Chae Joochul was well over 80 years old, no one other than himself would dare to call him an old man.

His abundant white hair was pushed up neatly, and his well-built body was adorned with a luxury suit.

The only thing that made him look like an old man was the cane he carried around with him.

“...Secretary Kim, what do you think I’m feeling?”

Chae Joochul placed the question on his secretary who was bowing in front of him.

“I wouldn’t dare imagine.”

The secretary answered. Chae Joochul then got up from his throne.

“You’re right.”

Chae Joochul’s apathetic eyes fell on his secretary. Unable to withstand these eyes, the secretary lowered his upper body even more.

“Shinhyuk should be holding a funeral right now.”

“Yes, President Chae Shinhyuk is handling the retrieval of the corpse and investigation of the suspect. He said he wanted to take care of it quietly.”

“...Is that so?”

Koong.

Chae Joochul’s cane knocked on the ground.

“Seeing as how my hot-tempered son is staying quiet, something must have happened to my grandson.”

Chae Joochul didn’t react coldly at his grandson’s death. Rather, he sounded apathetic. The secretary asked.

“...What shall we do?”

“Mm... no matter the situation, someone touched the Chae clan’s blood. If I let him off the hook, that won’t reflect very well on me.”

Chae Joochul’s voice lacked any semblance of emotion. He spoke calmly, as though it was the most natural thing to do.

“Call Yoo Jinhyuk.”

“Yes, understood.”

Chae Joochul smiled lightly.

Yoo Jinhyuk. Although he was a member of the Yoo clan, he was kicked out because of a great mistake he committed in the past. But because of his useful ability, Chae Joochul had kept him alive.

Since it looked like he made quite a name for himself, Chae Joochul felt it was time for him to pay back his debt.

“In that case, how shall we gauge the price?”

“...Price?”

For the first time, Chae Joochul’s expression changed, as he furrowed one of his brows. But soon, in the most relaxed manner, he rubbed his chin as though he was in thought.

“Price, you say...”

Then, he made a sinister laugh and spoke coldly.

“If he dares to ask for a price, tell him to carefully consider why he is still alive.”



Winter.

Four days had passed since Chae Jinyoon’s three-day funeral.

Currently, I was in Seoul Grand Park.

Chae Nayun said she wanted to meet me here. When she said Chae Jinyoon was buried in a memorial in this park, there was simply no way for me to refuse.

“It’s so cold...”

I could see my breath as I waited on the bench. Currently, it was 3:10 p.m.

Ten minutes had already passed since our promised time, but Chae Nayun was nowhere to be seen.

“...I shouldn’t have come.”

I murmured in regret at the poor decision I made.

At that moment, something warm touched my shoulders, and something sharp fell on my head.

“...?”

When I glanced up, Chae Nayun was pressing down on my shoulders with her hands and resting her chin on my head.

“What are you doing?”

“Sorry, were you waiting for a long time?”

“...No, not really.”

Chae Nayun sat down next to me with a smile, then leaned against my shoulder. Suddenly, she sniffed my clothes and frowned.

“You smell like cigarettes.”

“...Kuhum.”

I scratched my neck.

I’ve been addicted to smoking lately. It was worse than when I smoked in the past, which wasn’t too surprising given the situation I was in.

But what surprised me the most was that cigarettes had a temporary effect of raising the perseverance stat. A single cigarette raised it by 0.3 points for about an hour. I’ve spent some time to look for the best brand as well.

“But you better not.”

I couldn’t help but laugh as I said that. I never thought I’d say something so pretentious to a girl.

“But I’m already smoking it indirectly.”

“.....”

Without replying to her, I raised my right shoulder, which Chae Nayun was leaning on.

“Ah, ow.”

Chae Nayun was pushed away.

She glared at me with a pout, then suddenly bit my shoulder.

“Ak, what’s wrong with you?”

“Yummy.”

“Don’t say strange things.”

Chae Nayun pulled her head back. I looked at her quizzically and noticed that she was scanning my clothes from top to bottom.

“Hehe, I can see that you chose your clothes carefully.”

“No, I normally wear these.”

“Please, you’re usually only wearing the cadet uniform. By the way, they look good on you.”

We talked as though everything was normal.

Chae Nayun and I both didn’t bring up anything from that day.

“Hey, I’m... going back.”

Chae Nayun suddenly changed the topic.

“Going back where?”

“To Baekdu Mountain.”

“...Will you be okay?”

Only a week had passed since Chae Jinyoon died. When I thought about it, I became stifled for breath and my hands began trembling. I could only imagine how bad it was for Chae Nayun.

“Yeah, of course.”

Even so, she gave such a cheerful reply.

I could at least be somewhat relieved.

However, Chae Nayun seemed to have something else to say, as she poked my shoulder.

“What now?”

“So um...”

“Yeah?”

“...Wait for me for just a month and a half.”

A month and a half. That was how long Chae Nayun’s training would take.

Knowing what she was implying, I suppressed the throbbing pain in my heart and feigned a smile.

“What’s in it for me if I do?”

“...I can’t tell you that.”

“Haa.”

I sighed.

From this point on, everything was an uncharted territory.

It was a story I couldn’t imagine or write down.

I could only wonder how Chae Nayun and I would see each other at the end of this story.

“Don’t worry, I at least won’t run away until then.”

That was the only assurance I could give her.

“Really?”

It was then.

Chae Nayun wrapped her arms around my neck and pulled me in.

Her face filled my vision.

At a distance close enough for our breaths to mix and our noses to touch, Chae Nayun smiled bashfully.

“Then I can be at ease.”

With that, she placed her forehead on my chest.

After rubbing her head a few times...

“Uuu, you smell like cigarettes...”

She shot up with a frown and turned around.

Although she was trying to hide her face, I could see her bright-red ears.

“Your face is going to explode. What did you do that for?”

“W-What about my face!”

Chae Nayun stuttered.

I made a bitter smile and got up.

Standing side by side, we looked at the park's scenery.

Under the cold winter sky, the park was bustling with countless people.



The news of Chae Jinyoon's death swept through the entire world. However, Daehyun Group didn't reveal much information. As a result, only unfounded rumors and speculations existed on the web.

Naturally, none of them were even remotely close to the truth.

"Here you go, Kim Hajin-ssi."

"Thank you."

Today was January 27th.

I came all the way to the post office to receive a letter. It was because Chae Nayun didn't know my home address and sent her letters to the Seoul Post Office.

Sitting down in front of a desk nearby, I opened the letter.

Although her personality was like a man's, her handwriting couldn't be more girly.

[How are you doing? I'm doing fine.

...Well, to be honest, what happened pops into my head every time I sleep. I don't know if I can last any longer.

But what's funny is that training is just as hard, so it's actually making things okay.

Also, the food here is at the 3-star Michelin level. The ingredients are all highest quality because of how rich this place is in mana. It's super good ㄹㄹ.

Oh right, I tried smoking a cigarette. I stole one from an instructor.]

"Eh?"

I widened my eyes and continued reading.

[I can't believe you can smoke this thing. It was so bitter that I threw it away immediately.]

...Should I say I'm glad?

In any case, I was almost at the end of the letter.

[Can you write back more often? Unlike the others, I can write letters once every four days. I'll write another one then.]

When I put Chae Nayun's letter down, I could see another piece of paper behind it. It was a blank letter.

If I remembered correctly, this letter was a magical item. Once I wrote something on it, the same thing should be shown on a letter in Baekdu Mountain.

“.....”

I looked at the letter.

Before coming here, I thought over and over again.

I wasn't sure if I was I allowed to accept her letters or write to her.

I thought about just running away, disappearing from Chae Nayun's side.

However, no matter how much I thought about it, I couldn't get anywhere...

—Kyaaaaak!

At that moment, a sudden scream rang out.

I looked out the post office window.

“What?”

Monsters were climbing up from the manhole in the middle of the road.

I didn't expect to see monsters in the middle of Seoul, but I wasn't too surprised. After all, now was around the time monsters would start appearing more frequently.

“.....”

I furrowed my brows and observed the world outside.

Since Heroes would arrive soon, I knew I didn't have to take the matter into my own hands. But at that moment, I caught sight of a vicious-looking mole rat chasing after a kid.

Before I could even think, my body moved.

I left the letter behind and ran out of the post office. At the same time, I took out the Desert Eagle from Stigma.

I pulled the trigger immediately.

The bullet I fired pierced through the head of the mole rat chasing after the kid.

“Sunghyuk!”

The mother of the kid quickly ran over and took him away.

Ordinary people began to scream and run away at the sight of the monsters.

However, I walked in the opposite direction and transformed the Desert Eagle into an assault rifle.

“There sure are many of them.”

70 or so monsters had already come out of the manhole. Although they all looked different, the strongest one among them only seemed to be at intermediate-rank grade 7.

That being the case, I aimed my gun forward and fired. I didn’t need to move the gun in any way.

Curve Shot.

The bullets I fired curved in all sorts of angles, flying in all directions. It was as though each bullet was alive and chasing after its prey.

The time it took to kill 70 monsters was no more than one second.

As soon as the gunshot sounds subsided, the road became completely silent.

I infused Stigma’s magic power into the Desert Eagle and put it away.

“...Ah, don’t take pictures.”

I admonished people who were trying to take pictures. With a slightly disappointed look, they began to furiously type.

I saw something amazing in Seoul—

I saw someone killing monsters with a gun—

They were probably writing things like that.

I couldn’t stop them, and since it was common knowledge that there was a Cube cadet using a gun, I simply returned to the post office.

When I was agonizing over what to do with the letter, an interesting piece of news came up on the post office’s TV.

[Essence of the Strait’s leader, Yoo Jinwoong, let’s his daughter take on important guild matters.]

[The world’s rank 2 guild, Essence of the Strait, caught in grave arrogation. Suspected

nepotism and abuse of authority. The person in question is a 17-year-old minor?]
[Emergency. Monsters have invaded various parts of Seoul's underground system.
Although the danger level is low, civilians are recommended to stay home...]

“Ah.”

Although the timing was a bit delayed, it finally happened.

But since I already had all the ingredients to prepare a counterpunch, I wasn't too worried.

In fact, Yoo Yeonha would use this opportunity to purge or placate all opposition, paving way to her absolute rule.

“Haa...”

The more important matter was this letter in front of me.



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