

After Ten Millennia in Hell

Chapter 4 - Unfamiliar Earth, Familiar Scenery (1)

"Uhm... What do you mean...?" Han Seol-Ah gazed at Oh Kang-Woo disconcertedly.

It looked like she didn't know whether to get angry or thank him.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Kang-Woo said.

He let go of Seol-Ah's hand and shook his head to try to regain his rationality.

'I need to get a hold of myself.'

Since Kang-Woo had been lucky enough to find another person, he couldn't let her think he was crazy.

"I'm Oh Kang-Woo. You said that your name's Han Seol-Ah, right? Are you hurt?"

"Yes, but it isn't a big injury—Ugh!"

The pain in Seol-Ah's leg caused her to groan and fall to the ground. As she fell, a small rectangular object tumbled from her pockets.

'It's a smartphone,' Kang-Woo realized.

Kang-Woo's eyes lit up. The object was definitely something he had a faint memory of—a smartphone.

'Could this really be... Earth?'

The smartphone, the obviously Korean name 'Han Seol-Ah,' and most of all...

'I can converse with her.'

Kang-Woo wasn't talking to Seol-Ah in the language of the demons; he was using the human language he had used before falling to Hell. The fact that they could communicate meant he was indeed on Earth, and Seol-Ah was Korean.

'I'm glad I kept practicing it so I wouldn't forget it.'

In Hell, Kang-Woo had taught Korean to his underlings and forbidden them to use the demonic language, forcing them to use Korean instead.

"Are you okay?" Kang-Woo asked Seol-Ah.

Riiip!

Kang-Woo ripped apart one of his garments and used it to bind the wound on Seol-Ah's leg. This was a rare Hell-made garment, made with fabrics that were hard to get in Hell because most demons didn't understand the concept of putting clothes on.

"Ah... Yes, thank you."

A slight blush crept up Seol-Ah's cheeks as she looked up at Kang-Woo, who had turned his garment into bandages for her leg without hesitation.

Seol-Ah had been wary of him initially because he had said weird things such as "Let's get married," and "Three kids would be okay." However, Kang-Woo's warm actions melted that wariness.

"Thank you for helping me," Seol-Ah said.

If it hadn't been for Kang-Woo, Seol-Ah would've been killed by Goblins... or worse.

'I've heard that, among monsters, there are some that lust over humans,' Seol-Ah thought.

With that in mind, Kang-Woo was very much her savior, so she felt guilty for having doubted him even a little.

'I'm very grateful to him.' Seol-Ah nodded to herself, and her lips widened into a smile.

It hadn't been long since she had awakened as a Player, but she had heard many things about them, such as that they wouldn't hesitate to betray a party member for profit. Although not everyone was that selfish, it was odd for a Player to come running to help someone just from hearing them scream.

"Take it easy," Kang-Woo advised.

"Okay," Seol-Ah replied.

Seeing the smile on Seol-Ah's face, Kang-Woo smiled too. 'Good.'

It meant a lot to him that he had managed to get on her good side.

Seol-Ah was very important to Kang-Woo. Not only was she the first human he had met after returning from Hell, but she was also a great source of information for him.

'Why have monsters like this appeared on Earth?'

The Earth he was on now was too different from the one that he remembered, and Seol-Ah was the only person who could explain such things to him at present.

'First...'

Kang-Woo grabbed the phone that had fallen out of Seol-Ah's pocket, pressed the home button, and saw the information he wanted to know the most.

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'2023?'

It had been 2018 when he fell into Hell, so that meant that he was now five years in the future from that day.

'I didn't fail in controlling the time of return.'

Kang-Woo had been prepared for a time difference of ten or even twenty years. The time difference of just five years meant that he had done a better job than he had expected. However, way too many things had changed on Earth in just five years.

'It has only been five years, yet such monsters appeared on Earth during that time?'

Kang-Woo couldn't figure out what might have happened during the past five years for there to now be monsters on Earth like those Goblins that roamed freely in the forest.

'I need more information on the current situation.'

Kang-Woo turned his head around toward Seol-Ah and said, "Here's your smartphone."

"Oh, thank you very much."

"Why were you in a place like this?"

"Ugh..." Seol-Ah groaned at that question. Then she replied quietly, "I have... a situation, so I tried solo-hunting a Gate. Haha. I just awakened as a Player, yet I tried hunting in an E-rank Gate... I was stupid."

Seol-Ah was very reproachful of herself.

Meanwhile, Kang-Woo's eyes lit up. 'Gate, Player.'

'Gate' probably referred to the place where they currently were.

'And as for awakening as a Player...'

Kang-Woo remembered his status window. There had clearly been a 'Player Name' category.

"What's your current level?" Kang-Woo asked her naturally.

"I've just awakened, so I'm Level 6. But what's a high-level Player like you doing in an E-rank Gate?"

Seol-Ah thought Kang-Woo was a high-level Player, despite him being only Level 3.

'I guess it's obvious she would think that,' Kang-Woo thought.

He had annihilated a group of Goblins she had been struggling to deal with. If the Level she was talking about was the stat that indicated how strong someone was, then it was natural that she would mistake him for a high-level player.

"I have my reasons," Kang-Woo replied.

"Oh... I see." Seol-Ah just nodded instead of persisting with the topic, as Kang-Woo was clearly dodging her question.

It wasn't normal for high-level Players to come to a low-ranking Gate, but if Kang-Woo didn't want to tell her the reason, Seol-Ah had no right to ask any further.

"Ugh..." Seol-Ah groaned again.

"Can you stand up?"

"Yes. Thanks to your help, I think I can walk a bit."

"I'll help you."

"N-No. It's okay. I don't want to bother you anymore..."

"Refusing an offer isn't the same as being modest."

Kang-Woo grabbed her arm. Feeling a warm blush rush into her cheeks, Seol-Ah lowered her head embarrassedly.

"Which way should we go?" Kang-Woo asked.

"Th-This way."

Seol-Ah was so embarrassed that she didn't even think about why a high-level Player like Kang-Woo didn't even know where the Gate portal was and just pointed out the direction with her finger.

"Let's go, then," Kang-Woo said.

With Kang-Woo supporting Seol-Ah, they began slowly walking toward the Gate.

'Thankfully, it doesn't seem like she's suspicious of anything,' Kang-Woo thought.

There was no way Seol-Ah would know of Kang-Woo's real identity, but he wanted to avoid seeming like a suspicious person.

'She'll probably think I'm crazy.'

Kang-Woo didn't want the first woman he saw in ten millennia—a pretty one at that—to think he was crazy. The first step of his return to Earth was to integrate into society as naturally as possible.

While thinking that, he subtly changed his walking pace to match Seol-Ah's.

"This..." Kang-Woo muttered.

"We've reached the portal," Seol-Ah stated.

Whirrr.

Seol-Ah was pointing at a white Gate. It was around thirty meters tall and much bigger than the pitch-black Gate that Kang-Woo had gone through to return to Earth.

'That means this place isn't technically Earth.'

Since people had to go through a Gate to get here, that meant that this forest where monsters roamed freely wasn't actually Earth.

'Is it a place like Hell...?'

It was similar to Hell in that it was a dimension that had to be entered through a Gate.

'How is this Gate being maintained?'

Kang-Woo looked at the slightly-murky white Gate in amazement. He couldn't see any strong armaments, like the armaments of the seven princes of Hell, creating a dimensional rift.

"Kang-Woo?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Let's get out of here."

Kang-Woo returned to his senses after Seol-Ah called his name, and he walked through the Gate while supporting her. As they crossed to the other side, the weird sensation of moving through different dimensions swept over them.

Murmur.

"We're looking for party members to hunt Goblins in the E-rank Gate!"

"Recruiting tanks! Are there any tanks here?!"

"I'm a rogue... Can I join your party?"

"Oh, sorry. We don't accept rogues."

Kang-Woo and Seol-Ah could hear people shouting everywhere as they walked out of the Gate. It was as if they had arrived at a marketplace.

"Ah..." Kang-Woo felt a thrill from looking at all the people gathered around the Gate.

'Humans...'

There were humans all around him.

'I'm really back...'

Although this was an unfamiliar version of Earth, the sight of a crowd was familiar. Kang-Woo realized then that he had truly returned to Earth. All his doubts and fears disappeared, and energy spread throughout his body. Kang-Woo was so moved that his body even trembled a bit.

"Uhhh... Kang-Woo," Seol-Ah carefully called his name.

Kang-Woo turned his head to look at her.

"If it's okay with you, would you like to come to my house? I would like to at least treat you to dinner," Seol-Ah said in an apologetic tone while looking at Kang-Woo's clothes, which had been ripped to bind her wounded leg.

In reality, giving money as compensation would've been the correct choice, but she did not have the financial ability for that at the moment. Nevertheless, she didn't just want to thank the person who had saved her life and then walk away.

"...!" Kang-Woo trembled some more after he heard her words.

It was unexpected that a girl would invite him to her house... Furthermore, it was the girl whom he had just helped. This was too stimulating for Kang-Woo, who had only met girls through his imagination for the past ten millennia.

He felt as if Seol-Ah had said, 'Oppa, would you like to come over and have some ramen?'[1]

'This...'

Kang-Woo clenched his fists. Excitement was surging inside his body.

'There's a breeze.'

All sorts of different thoughts crossed his mind. He imagined a happy life in a house with Seol-Ah and three kids.

'There's a breeze!!!'

A warm spring breeze was blowing in his heart that had rotted after spending ten millennia in Hell.

1. This is the Korean equivalent of Netflix & Chill. 📺