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Kyung Sein was the first reader I met.

A muscular man who wore a name tag with the nickname 'Judge Heewon' and claimed to be a fan of Jung Heewon. A man who changed gender with the possession and cried out at the shocking loss of muscle mass.

She was now holding onto my front and bowing her head.

"Sein-ssi."

I knew that Kyung Sein was a strong person. At first, she was afraid to catch even a single ground rat, but I still remember the moment when she stood on the front lines and became a shield for her comrades.

The last place we parted ways was the 'Recycling Center'.

I wonder how Kyung Sein has been doing.

After entering the Fear Realm, I had not heard any news from my group. Eight whole years had passed like that.

[The constellation, 'Master of Baekrokdam', donates 1 D coin for a heartbreaking encounter.]

[Some constellations were puzzled by the sudden melodrama, but donated 2 D coins!]

Kyung Sein raised her head as the message of support came from the air. Kyung Sein, who clearly looked like she was about to cry, had completely changed her expression.

"I'm sorry. As you can see, I need some coins to repair the building."

Kyung Sein smiled brightly, her tone making it unknown if it was sincere.

"Would you like to come in for a moment? We have a lot to talk about."

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"Benefactor, I'll wait outside. You two, talk comfortably."

After Namgung Myung left with his greetings, I followed Kyung Sein into the building.

<■■■ Company>'s building—the inside of the former Breaking the Sky Inspection Office was close to ruins. There were holes all over the walls, and the ceiling was so badly damaged that it was hard to tell if it was waterproof or even soundproof.

There were traces of fierce battles here and there. Swords that seemed to belong to the Breaking the Sky Sword Saint, and traces that seemed to belong to other constellations.

The most noticeable of these was the sword mark carved horizontally on the wall of the training hall. I had seen it on the examination platform and in the elevator of the Ascension Platform.

It was definitely the 'Light Sword Emperor'.

"I'm sorry. There's not much to prepare."

Kyung Sein brought out a small snack table. Two cups of tea and some wrinkled French fries.

"No. Thank you."

I remained silent, not knowing what to say, as I watched Kyung Sein sip tea with a calm expression.

I wanted to ask her how she had been, what had happened, but I didn't have the courage.

8 years. Longer than the time we had spent together—maybe even longer than the time the main story was serialized.

That time was now between Kyung Sein and me.

"Honestly, I can't believe it."

After a brief silence, Kyung Sein was the first to speak.

"Everyone thought that, ■■-ssi was already..."

Sparks lightly jumped up and down. Kyung Sein's expression changed for a moment and she changed her words.

"We believed Inho-ssi was already dead."

In a world where you can't know if someone is alive or dead if you don't contact them for a month, or even a week, it's been 8 years.

"I'm sorry."

"No. You must have had some circumstances."

There was a strange sense of resignation in Kyung Sein's voice as she spoke.

"It's always been like that."

At that moment, I felt something stirring inside me.

[The story, 'Heir to the Eternal Name', smiles sinisterly.]

Under the pretext of protecting his companions, Kim Dokja ran away, shouldering all the decisions on his own. Maybe I'm no different from Kim Dokja in the main story.

"I've been doing well. It may not seem like it, but I think I'm doing well here."

"Is that so?"

While I was escaping from the Fear Realm, I unconsciously imagined reuniting with my companions several times.

What would they be like when I met them again? How much would they have grown? What would they have been through? Is Killer King still the same?

I thought I could talk about such things without hesitation and laugh out loud.

It was an illusion.

A selfish, self-righteous, and arrogant illusion of Kim Dokja.

As I came out of the illusion, I saw Kyung Sein's face again. Her cheeks were slightly sunken, as if she hadn't been getting enough nutrition. Empty bottles of alcohol were rolling around in the corner of the living room.

Did Kyung Sein originally drink alcohol?

The questions I had swallowed inside me lingered on the tip of my lips.

What happened to the other companions? Why did Breaking the Sky Inspection fall? Why are you here alone?

Why. No more, it seems like you’re not carrying out the scenario.

I should have asked, but strangely, I didn’t have the courage. I was afraid of the past years that Kyung Sein’s powerless eyes hinted at.

"How have you been?"

Kyung Sein was the first to muster up her courage again. Her voice was squeezing as if she was solving the given scenario task.

Perhaps she misunderstood my hesitation, Kyung Sein added.

"Oh, there’s a soundproof wall here, so you can say whatever you want. The constellations won’t be able to hear you either."

I took a moment to catch my breath and then began to tell the story.

"…So, I was in the Fear Realm."

Along with the story, I went back eight years.

Escaping from the Recycling Center, parting ways with my group, being chased by giant nebulae, taking refuge in the <First Murim>, and then entering the 'Fear Realm'.

Kyung Sein listened to me with a calm face. Looking at her expression, the words coming out of my mouth somehow felt unrealistic.

I thought I did my best. I believed that I had tried to save my comrades and not let this world end in tragedy.

That's why I became an exile. I had to leave my party and enter the Fear Realm to get a scenario again.

「But was that really the best I could do?」

In the meantime, I wonder if I could have contacted my party at least once. I thought they were doing well here. They would survive and return to the scenario. I would go see them again. I thought I had a chance to tell them at least once.

"Ah."

As the story progressed, a little liveliness began to linger in Kyung Sein's somewhat dry expression.

Especially when the story of entering the Fear Realm and encountering the 'Transcendent Alliance' came up, Kyung Sein had the same face I knew from before.

"I don't know if I can say this."

"Please feel free to talk."

"That's interesting. Inho-ssi's story."

That was interesting. There was a subtle sense of pain in that expression. In this situation, I tried to tell a story 'fun', and Kyung Sein listened to it as 'fun'.

We met from the beginning with that kind of connection, and now we are here.

"But why didn't you get out right away? The fear incident was already 8 years ago…"

"I was trapped in a Time Fault for a while. When I barely got out, 8 years had passed."

Kyung Sein looked up at the ceiling with cloudy eyes as if she was estimating the time again.

"I see. That's why you haven't contacted us."

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"You weren't dead. There must have been circumstances."

It seems that I wasn't the only one who went back in time with the story.

Like air leaking out of a balloon with a loose knot, the remnants of old emotions were flowing out of Kyung Sein's mouth.

"I believed it. Even when everyone said you died, we, I, thought that way. I firmly believed that ■■-ssi… Inho-ssi couldn't have died like that."

"..."

"That's why I feel a little resentful towards Inho-ssi."

Maybe from now on, this is the 'real story' that Kyung Sein wanted to tell me.

"I'm sorry. That's all I can tell you, so I'm sorry. I don't know what you've been through. You must have been through a very difficult time that it was hard for you to talk to me about."

The story doesn't stop even if the author stops serializing. The story continues even in a world where the author is gone.

Only the readers who exist ahead of the author's imagination live the story.

"I'll try to fix it somehow."

My job from now on was to take responsibility for the history that the author didn't take care of properly.

"How?"

"I'll solve this scenario. I'll ascend together with Kyung Sein."

The key to this scenario is to leave this world through 'ascension' and leap to the next scenario.

"I'll join Kyung Sein's company."

Kyung Sein probably entered this scenario with her other colleagues. And she must have established this 'company' to carry out the scenario with them.

"Thank you for your words, but you don't have to."

"I understand you're upset. But—"

"I'm not upset, Inho-ssi."

I felt a firmness in her tone, so I paused for a moment and looked at Kyung Sein.

8 years ago, when I was at the Recycling Center, Kyung Sein called me 'Dokja-ssi.'

But now, she was calling me 'Inho-ssi.'

"Aren't you curious why the group isn't with me?"

Kyung Sein was looking at me with a face as unfamiliar as the difference in the titles.

"I'm curious."

"I know what Inho-ssi is worried about. But Inho-ssi shouldn't worry. Everyone else is safe. Killer King, Yerin-ssi... They all ascended safely and went up to the higher scenarios."

It was a story I'd always wanted to hear.

"The scenario is going well. Since 'that person' appeared, the scenario strategy has been progressing smoothly with that person as the center."

That person?

"The party is now on the verge of the end of this world."

It seemed that after 8 years, another center of gravity had appeared in the scenario that I didn't know about.

"There's no need for Inho-ssi to apologize. There were circumstances. The scenarios are nearing their end, and we don't have any problems. So it's okay."

According to Kyung Sein, this world was going better than expected.

The party was moving towards the end, and this world seemed to be avoiding the planned destruction.

It was good news.

"If there's no problem."

It had to be good news.

"Why is Sein-ssi here alone?"

Kyung Sein hesitated for a moment at my question, then muttered while avoiding eye contact.

"I just stayed here of my own free will."

I couldn't understand. Standing at the forefront of scenarios, the one who worked harder than anyone else on the scenarios was Kyung Sein. She was the one who overcame even her own fears and became a strong shield for the group.

That person voluntarily gave up the scenario?

"The reason I met Inho-ssi today was because I wanted to reminisce about the past one last time. We talked, and like when we read the novels we liked a long time ago…"

Kyung Sein slowly got up from her seat and said.

"I guess I wanted to go back to being a reader for a moment."

Kyung Sein, with a sad smile on her face, looked at me and gave a warning.

"Don't come here anymore, Inho-ssi. Thank you so much for everything."

I couldn't back down like this. There was definitely something I hadn't heard. There was a gap in the story that Kyung Sein hadn't told, or was afraid to tell.

I was about to call Kyung Sein again as I stood up.

[Today is the tax settlement due date for <■■■ Company>.]

[Pay the taxes that have been notified.]

[There are currently overdue taxes.]

[If you fail to pay your taxes, <■■■ Company> will enter the process of closing down.]

Kyung Sein frowned as she looked up into the air.

[The 'tax collector' will arrive soon to collect the overdue taxes.]

A moment later, the air rippled and a hairball-like thing poked its head out from the portal.

[Hmm, you're overdue again? You know I won't let you off this time, right?]

It was a dokkaebi I knew well.