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Immediately after hearing Killer King and Dansu's opinions, Kyung Sein's interactions with the group drastically decreased.

The reason was clear.

Lee Dansu and Killer King had begun working on individual scenarios, following the suggestion of the new 'Kim Dokja'.

"I heard a 'Sungyu Fruit' might open in Scenario Area 37. I'm planning to go there and see."

"Should I come with you?"

"No, Lee Dansu and I decided to go together. You stay here and watch over Yerin."

Perhaps it was out of consideration for Kyung Sein.

Watching Killer King and Lee Dansu depart, Kyung Sein suddenly remembered Ji Eunyu's words.

「"Just because we've read the same story doesn't mean everyone will agree."」

Ji Eunyu had left the group early and begun acting independently. When Kyung Sein asked if she really had to leave, if they couldn't carry out the scenarios together, Ji Eunyu only gave her a vague answer.

「"If you made everyone think the same way, then it wasn't a good story in the first place."」

Kyung Sein often pondered what that meant. Of course, there was no easy answer. She could only speculate that perhaps, Ji Eunyu, as an editor, could see something different from everyone else.

「While everyone else was making their own choices, she was the only one stuck here.」

If she had been an editor, a reader who had read the same book a hundred times, or even someone with a special story— would she have made a different choice?

She pondered it, but couldn't figure it out.

Of course, humans can't truly become strangers.

"Sein-ssi."

She turned around, startled, and Kim Dokja was standing there.

"I'm sorry. It seems I surprised you."

"No."

"May I sit down?"

"Please."

The two sat on a bench in front of the manor and watched the crowds pass by. People moving materials through the alleyways, moving and moving again.

"Move slowly!"

After the outbreak of the Fear Realm, the existing ruling structure of Murim completely collapsed.

The giant trees that formed the axis of Murim died, and the giant breakwaters collapsed.

The incarnations, having lost their center of gravity, scattered and sought out other scenario areas.

Of course, some incarnations still remained in Murim. Those who struggled to rebuild the ruined Murim and reclaim the landscape they remembered.

"Move here! This way!"

Looking at such people, the businessman would often feel a strange sensation. Would all that sweat and toil bring back the Murim they longed for? Even if Murim were to revive, even if countless trees were planted in this world and a forest were to be recreated—would it really be appropriate to call that world a Murim?

"Why have you come?"

"Do you need a particular reason to visit your comrades?"

A person with the same face as the 'Kim Dokja' she remembered. Kyung Sein thought as she looked at the man's face.

Perhaps someone who could get closer to 'others' than anyone else in this world, someone who mercilessly understood 'others' and sometimes used that as a weapon in battle.

Perhaps Kim Dokja had come to her this time to use that weapon.

"What did your companions say?"

Kyung Sein repeated to herself. She didn't know what kind of sweet talk he had given the others, but she would never be fooled. She was firm, as if she were building a [Fourth Wall].

"Did they tell you to try to persuade me because I don't recognize you as Kim Dokja?"

But what Kyung Sein overlooked was that his opponent was more adept at breaking the [Fourth Wall] than anyone else in the world.

"Do you hate me, Sein-ssi?"

Instead of answering, Kyung Sein averted his gaze. I hate you. She wasn't sure if that was the appropriate expression.

"I respect your feelings, Sein-ssi. I'm not Sein-ssi, so I can't fully understand your hostility towards me, but…"

Kim Dokja paused, then looked up at the distant sky.

"Do you like novels?"

"I do."

"Then, shall we talk about them for a moment?"

"No."

"Then you can just listen. Because I like talking."

Kim Dokja grinned and began to tell his story without permission.

"There's a novel I used to like."

Naturally, Kyung Sein knew what it was. Kim Dokja was talking about 'Ways of survival'.

"I don't remember everything clearly anymore, but I definitely liked that novel. I especially admired its protagonist."

Kyung Sein was about to say she knew what it was, but held back and kept her mouth shut.

"The protagonist in that novel regresses time and time again. He lives a hellish life over and over again, simply to see the end of the world."

Why? Even though it was a story she clearly knew, hearing it from Kim Dokja's own mouth, it sounded new. Kim Dokja continued.

"Of course, someone who was an ally in the last round becomes an enemy in this round. In some rounds, all the companions love the protagonist, but in others, they all betray him."

Kyung Sein listened intently, forgetting to respond.

"When I first read that passage, I hated the companions who betrayed the protagonist."

"…"

"It was painful to see my ignorant companions follow someone other than the protagonist. I hated them for protecting the new character who had taken the protagonist's place, without even knowing the protagonist's history or what he had sacrificed for them."

Kyung Sein wondered which round the Yoo Joonghyuk he had been talking about was, but she realized this conversation wasn't just about the 'Ways of Survival'.

"It's okay if I'm not Sein-ssi's Kim Dokja."

Meeting Kim Dokja's calm eyes, Kyung Sein was speechless.

"If you don't want to call me 'Kim Dokja', then you don't have to. That's your right, Sein-ssi."

Just by meeting his gaze, Kyung Sein felt as if he could read her every thought.

Feeling faintly dizzy, Kyung Sein asked,

"What do you want from me?"

"Sein-ssi, you just need to find the ending you want. I will, too."

"What ending do you desire?"

"For all 'Kim Dokja's' to return to their proper place."

Kyung Sein stared blankly at Kim Dokja. The man had the face of the 'Kim Dokja' she envisioned. For a moment, Kyung Sein felt an inexplicable wavering.

"I don't know where I should return to."

"…"

"Am I Kyung Sein, or someone else? I don't even know what kind of story I'm supposed to tell. I have no idea how the rest of the group is enduring all this."

Kim Dokja listened to her in silence. Sensing the pity hidden in his silence, or perhaps ignoring it, Kyung Sein continued,

"I'm no help anymore. My body is somewhat sturdy, but compared to Hyunsung-ssi, I'm nothing, and compared to my colleagues, I lack talent."

Kyung Sein also trained diligently. Like everyone else, she diligently honed her skills and refined her story.

However, her growth was limited. The character she possessed was initially a secondary character. Her growth potential and talent were meager.

Furthermore, she wasn't chosen by a powerful sponsor like Killer King, Lee Dansu, or Ji Eunyu.

"I'm probably not needed for the 'ending' you want to see."

The moment she said those words, Kyung Sein trembled involuntarily. Her fear of the new 'Kim Dokja' wasn't simply about maintaining loyalty to the 'Kim Dokja' she trusted.

She was scared.

"You don't have to take care of me. I just want to stay here like this. I'll stay here while I wait for the Kim Dokja I want."

That was Kyung Sein's choice. It was the only way for her, who was no better than anyone else, who might soon be discarded from the scenario, to become special.

「Kyung Sein thought this was it.」

She'd worked hard and gotten this far. If the Kim Dokja she'd been waiting for never returned, that was fine.

If she were a character, her ■■ would undoubtedly be here.

"Sein-ssi."

Kim Dokja said, looking at Kyung Sein.

"Let me correct what I said earlier. I understand you a little."

"Do you understand? What?"

Kim Dokja didn't answer. He simply stared at Kyung Sein with slightly sad eyes.

At that silent gaze, Kyung Sein unconsciously let out a sharp voice.

"How can you understand this?"

"I've had similar thoughts as you, Sein-ssi. I've also suffered from the thought that I wasn't of any help to my colleagues and was only a nuisance to the scenario."

Kyung Sein listened blankly.

"There was a time when I hated my colleagues for arbitrarily moving towards a different ending, leaving me behind. I definitely resented them for constantly pushing me back when I wanted to stay here."

"You're Kim Dokja, right?"

"You don't know what kind of Kim Dokja I am, Sein-ssi."

Kyung Sein was speechless for the first time. That was right. She didn't know what kind of Kim Dokja he was. She didn't know if he was the 'Demon King of Salvation', the 'Watcher of Light and Darkness', or the 'Prisoner of the Golden Headband'.

No, perhaps that 'Kim Dokja'—

"I, like you, Sein-ssi, am just one of countless 'Kim Dokja Fragments'."

Kyung Sein paused and asked.

"What does that mean? Could it be that you've possessed someone too?"

"No, I was born with a body. Instead, unlike you, I landed outside the scenarios."

"Outside?"

"Just a vast, endless snowfield stretching out like a vast ocean. I was born and raised there."

A vast, ocean-like snowfield.

Kyung Sein couldn't tell if that was a metaphor or not. She'd never heard of a Kim Dokja like that, nor imagined one.

Nevertheless, his story was certainly true. A small fragment, dormant deep within his soul, testified to that.

"Perhaps, if no one had taken me in, I would have starved to death there, never knowing my own name."

A tragedy told in a frighteningly calm voice.

Kyung Sein felt confused.

"That's where I first met you."

"Us?"

"Snowdrops often fall there."

*(TL: Can be both snowdrops and story fragments.)*

At some point, dark clouds began to gather in the sky. Rain began to fall lightly. Kim Dokja continued, looking up at the drizzling raindrops.

"Sein-ssi, I know what kind of life you've lived."

"…"

"I know how hard you've worked, how much you've endured to help your colleagues."

"Wait a minute."

Her heart pounded and she felt dizzy.

"Stop it."

「Maybe this person really is Kim Dokja.」

It felt as if someone was forcibly imprinting those words on her mind. She didn't want to think about it. Just thinking about it was painful.

If he really was Kim Dokja, if he was the Kim Dokja they knew—why had he only just appeared before them now?

"I'm sorry."

Kim Dokja was apologizing as if answering that question.

"I was foolish. I should have come here long ago. I should have resolved the scenarios with you myself. Instead of just watching, I should have tried to change the story myself."

Looking at those strangely bright eyes, Kyung Sein felt as if he were about to collapse at any moment.

"It's late, but I intend to change things now."

It was then that thunder rumbled. The sky opened with an unusual gale. A cluster of pure white light flickered. Through it, distant beings descended.

[The constellation, 'Flame of Purification', descends into this scenario!]

[The constellation, 'Omnipotent Sun', descends into this scenario!]

[The constellation, 'Terminator of War', descends into this scenario!]

[The constellation, 'Monarch of the Small Fries', descends into this scenario!]

Kim Dokja, already standing, stepped forward as if to protect her.

"Uninvited guests have arrived."

Constellations. And these were no ordinary constellations. A sinister aura enveloped the vast sky. These constellations were at least as powerful as narrative-grade, and even rivaled the main force of the Great Nebulae.

Kyung Sein instinctively sensed this.

Those constellations hadn't appeared here out of favor.

[Are there frag ments of the Ol dest Dream here?]

Kim Dokja smiled at the constellations' call.

"It seems they've come to find me."