Chapter 111 : Chapter 111

Chapter 111 : Great Thunder Temple

“Cough……!”

As soon as the fire butterfly, Flame Butterfly, that landed on Yeon Jeok-ha's shoulder fluttered its wings, the hellish fire demon exploded.

If it were a general fire art, he would have struck it away by channeling blood qi, but my flames were different.

The flame, a mix of the poison qi from the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand and the pure yang qi of the Extreme Yang Body, used the Seventh Blood Lord's blood mist as fuel to burn even more fiercely.

Yeon Jeok-ha's eyes rolled back.

The flames covered his entire body in an instant.

Having roamed the Outer Regions as the Seventh Blood Lord and faced countless experts, this was the first time he had encountered such grotesque and destructive energy.

And that was the last thought of the Seventh Blood Lord, Yeon Jeok-ha.

The scene where the battle ended.

Moyong Geum walked past the frozen skeleton soldiers and spoke cautiously.

“You are amazing.”

Seol Ye-rin shook her head.

“I smell something burning from above. Perhaps a hellscape even worse than here has unfolded? What about the damage situation?”

“A few carriages were broken, but the escort goods are fine.”

“That is a relief.”

At that moment, I lightly flew from the top of the cliff and landed next to Seol Ye-rin.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, what about you, Small Snow Squad Captain?”

“No problems.”

I stared at the frozen skeletons.

“Are the skeletons that came out from under the carriage wheels also Jiangshis?”

At Seol Ye-rin's question, I nodded and pointed to the top of the cliff.

“I heard he was a guy called the Blood Lord of the Blood Cult, calling himself the Blood Bone Lord. He was a guy who handled bones. The bones he controlled have all turned to ash now, so you do not have to worry.”

“Sigh, really, Young Master burns everything wherever he goes.”

Wi Ji-yeong approached, dusting off the dirt from her clothes.

“Anyway, these bone guys were really persistent. I was scared to death because they kept crawling even when their limbs were cut off.”

“For saying that, you wielded your dagger well, didn't you?”

“I cannot lose to skeletons!”

Wi Ji-yeong responded to Baek Mu-yong's rebuke.

“Ah, Miss Seong. Can I help you with anything?!”

Seong Sang-ah, who was calmly organizing the medicine box from the side, smiled and nodded.

“Fortunately, everyone does not seem to be seriously injured, but since the Blood Cult's energy is mixed with poison qi, you must drink a cup of detoxification tea later.”

“I will deliver it!”

“Young Master Moyong, will there be more attacks like this on the way to the Great Thunder Temple?”

Seol Ye-rin looked at Moyong Geum with concern.

Moyong Geum folded his fan with a snap and answered with a serious expression.

“I did not know the Blood Cult was moving. The problem is that this area is already within their range. But do not worry. The Great Thunder Temple is not far away.”

“They are persistent guys. Since they failed once, they might send a more persistent guy.”

Moyong Geum gave a bitter smile at my indifferent reply.

“That is why we must hurry even more. Once we enter the sanctuary where the Great Thunder Temple's influence reaches, even the Blood Cult guys will not be able to move rashly. Come, come! Abandon the broken carriages and transfer to the spare carriages I prepared!”

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At that time, the Great Thunder Temple.

The Abbot of Great Thunder Temple, Beop Jeong, was deep in meditation.

Great Thunder Temple is a holy ground of the West and a place where the essence of Buddhism is gathered.

This place, boasting majestic dignity with stone Buddhas that have withstood a thousand years and the Scripture Pavilion where tens of thousands of Buddhist scriptures are stored, should normally have the ceaseless scent of subtle incense and the sound of monks chanting.

But now, what pierced Abbot Beop Jeong's nose was not the scent of incense.

‘It is fishy.’

It was a very faint, but never negligible, blood scent.

Abbot Beop Jeong slowly opened his eyes.

His eyes were filled with a bright gleam.

“Ji Myeong, come in.”

Beop Jeong's low voice echoed inside the Dharma Hall.

The door opened quietly, and a monk wearing a neat Buddhist robe entered and pressed his palms together.

It was Ji Myeong, a disciple expected to be the next leader of Great Thunder Temple.

“Did you call, Abbot?”

“The energy of the temple is chaotic. I heard that over thirty monks have gone missing recently. How is the investigation going?”

Ji Myeong answered calmly with his head bowed.

“It seems they lost their way due to the fickle weather of the high mountain areas. We sent people to nearby villages, so there will be news soon.”

“Lost their way.....”

Abbot Beop Jeong's gaze lingered on the tip of Ji Myeong's sleeve.

It was a very fleeting moment, but Beop Jeong did not miss the blood-red glint that flashed and disappeared in Ji Myeong's eyes.

The shadow of the Blood Cult had already cast deep inside Great Thunder Temple.

No, perhaps the suspicion that even his most trusted disciple might have been encroached by that darkness weighed heavily on Beop Jeong's qi center.

‘The underground Blood Pond is fluctuating.’

Deep underground in Great Thunder Temple, the demonic qi sealed during the war with the Heavenly Demon in the past was trying to awaken again.

‘Amitabha.’

He knew that now, the original power of the Great Thunder Temple alone was not enough to clear away the darkness of the Great Thunder Temple.

So.

“Ji Myeong, where is the merchant guild coming from the Central Plains?”

“They say they have just arrived at the entrance of the sanctuary.”

“Right, is the rumor true that figures from the North Sea Ice Palace are accompanying them?”

At Beop Jeong's question, Ji Myeong's eyelids trembled slightly.

Ji Myeong maintained a calm tone with his head still bowed.

“Yes, Abbot. It is said that the Young Palace Head of the Ice Palace and a man called her fiancé are together. However.....”

“However?”

“I received a report that the man's energy is unusual. It is said he destroyed the Poison Palace in Namman and burned the group of the Blood Cult interfering with missionary activities in an instant.”

When the word ‘missionary activities’ came out of Ji Myeong's mouth, Beop Jeong's eyes became sharp.

Seeing that gaze, Ji Myeong immediately corrected his words.

“...They say he repelled the Blood Cult's attack. They said the flames were so hot that the top of the cliff turned into a pile of ash.”

Beop Jeong quietly rolled his prayer beads.

A man with energy hotter than the sun and a woman with energy colder than the Ten Thousand Year Cold Snow.

Those standing at the extremes of Yin and Yang were trying to step into this Great Thunder Temple where the fishy smell of blood vibrated.

“Welcome them politely. The gates of Great Thunder Temple are always open to those who seek enlightenment.”

“.....I understand. I will carry it out as you wish.”

When Ji Myeong withdrew, Beop Jeong burst into the cough he had been suppressing.

“Cough!”

A dark red lump of blood splattered onto his white sleeve.

“Now... you are not even hiding it.”

Beop Jeong looked at the tea Ji Myeong had served.

Already, more than half of the monks of Great Thunder Temple were caught in the Blood Cult's evil arts, becoming sentinels guarding the underground Blood Pond with their eyes dyed red.

Beop Jeong began to wait for the Murim merchant guild approaching while squeezing out his fading inner qi.

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At that time, the entrance to the sanctuary.

The spare carriage Moyong Geum provided soon reached the pass overlooking the huge golden roof of Great Thunder Temple.

“Wow, it is really flashing! Is that all real gold?”

Wi Ji-yeong, who stuck her head out the carriage window, opened her mouth wide.

But my expression, sitting on the carriage roof and facing the wind, was not that bright.

The fact that the Blood Cult ambushed us right in front of the Great Thunder Temple and acted as if it was nothing meant that perhaps the Great Thunder Temple was also under the influence of the Blood Cult.

-Heh heh, it smells foul already even before going inside.

-Hmm? But, it seems a bit different from when I came before.

At the Demon Queen's words, I made a puzzled expression.

‘Have you also been to the Great Thunder Temple?’

-Would the North Sea Martial God be called the North Sea Martial God for nothing? Visiting the Outer Regions once was a natural thing in my time. I even met the Abbot of Great Thunder Temple once, and he begged me to please stop coming.

What on earth did the Demon Queen do at Great Thunder Temple?

‘Could their perception of the Ice Palace be bad?’

-I do not know, it was such a long time ago.

-Heh heh, it was a long time ago.

Seeing this, it seemed the Sword Venerable also had memories.

A thought suddenly occurred to me.

‘By any chance, did the Ice Emperor also visit the Great Thunder Temple?’

-It is a tradition.

Maybe I could get information about the Ice Emperor, Seol Cheon-u.

I lightly jumped down from the carriage roof and examined the party.

At that moment.

I saw Cheon Deung-jin's face staring at Great Thunder Temple with a pale complexion.

“Miss Cheon, why is your expression like that? It is exactly the expression of being dragged to a slaughterhouse.”

“……You can feel it too, right, Young Master? The energy here is incredibly twisted.”

Cheon Deung-jin's voice trembled thinly.

“Huh?”

The energy is twisted?

Cheon Deung-jin is sensitive to energy.

In other words, it means that bad energies are really wafting from the Great Thunder Temple.

At that moment, Seol Ye-rin also got off the carriage and gently grabbed my sleeve.

“Young Master, the air is too heavy. It feels like the surroundings are already dead even before my coldness touches them.”

It seems even Seol Ye-rin feels the death qi.

I tightly held Seol Ye-rin's cold hand and softly raised the yang qi in my qi center.

“It is warm.”

“Yeah.”

“Oh? Someone is coming out!”

At Moyong Geum's shout, my eyes flashed purple.

The huge main gate of Great Thunder Temple was slowly opening, and beyond it, a monk was appearing to welcome the party.

Great Thunder Temple's huge main gate, the Mountain Gate, opened with a magnificent sound.

The energy emitting from beyond it looked holy on the outside, but my senses were constantly becoming sharper.

“Amitabha. You went through a lot of trouble coming a long way.”

The person who appeared accompanied by dozens of monks was a middle-aged monk wearing a neat Buddhist robe.

He was wearing a gentle smile, but in my eyes, his footsteps were terribly heavy.

“I am Ji Myeong of Great Thunder Temple. I received the Abbot's order to welcome the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild and the precious guests from the North Sea.”

Smirk.

Ji Myeong's smile met me.

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Chapter 112 : Teacup

Bizarre blue veins were bulging on the clasped knuckles of the monk who called himself Ji Myeong.

Although he was wearing a benevolent smile on the outside, in my eyes, the fishy killing intent hidden behind that smile was clearly visible.

“Monk Ji Myeong... It is an honor that the Abbot called us personally. But Monk, does the temple normally smell fishy like this?”

At my fastball-like question, Ji Myeong’s eyelids trembled slightly.

There was a moment of agitation among the monks he brought along, but Ji Myeong soon regained his composure and answered.

“Ho ho, it might be unfamiliar to outsiders as we are burning rare incense from the high mountain areas. Since you are coming from the Central Plains, the Abbot paid special attention.”

“Incense... It seems like exactly this scent would be produced if the smell of burning bones and rotting blood were mixed.”

At my casually thrown remark, Ji Myeong’s eyes momentarily burned red and disappeared.

Seol Ye-rin, standing beside me, tightened her grip on my sleeve and was wary of the surroundings.

Beneath Seol Ye-rin's feet, invisible cold air was spreading out, thinly freezing the ground.

-Heh heh, Third Young Master, these people... their breathing sounds are not consistent. As if they are possessed by something.

I nodded at Seol Ye-rin's telepathy.

The monks' complexions were all pale, and the flow of their qi and blood was twisted.

"...I am starving to death! Can't you give us food first?"

When Tae Un-seo, who failed to grasp the atmosphere, brought up the topic.

Ji Myeong smiled benevolently.

"Of course. We have prepared an offering with all our sincerity, so please go inside."

Moyong Geum sweated cold sweat and looked at me for a cue.

Even with his merchant's sense, he felt that this place was unusual.

However, we couldn't just turn back after coming all this way.

"Big Brother, let's go inside for now. Wouldn't the misunderstanding be resolved once we meet the Abbot in person?"

I looked back at Cheon Deung-jin.

Cheon Deung-jin was still staring inside the Great Thunder Temple with fearful eyes.

I lightly tapped her shoulder.

"Let's go inside first."

I strode through the Mountain Gate first.

Seol Ye-rin and the Small Snow Squad members followed behind, and finally, Ji Myeong smiled benevolently and closed the door.

Bang—!

The sound of the door closing echoed in the mountain foot like the sound of a giant trap's cover closing.

Inside the Great Thunder Temple, on the way to the guest hall for VIPs.

I deliberately slowed down and examined the surroundings.

Befitting a thousand-year-old temple, magnificent stone pagodas and pavilions were lined up, but in every shadow, unpleasant evil qi was coiled up.

-Heh heh, do you see those stone statues standing in the corner?

'Yes?'

-Those are not stone statues. They are Jiangshis hardened by the Blood Cult's secret art, disguised as stone statues.

At the Sword Venerable and Demon Queen's explanation, my eyes narrowed.

Why is a story about the Blood Cult's secret art coming out in the Great Thunder Temple?

If that's the case, it seemed that more than half of the Great Thunder Temple had already fallen into the hands of the Blood Cult.

Ji Myeong guided the party to a guest hall located next to a huge nine-story pagoda.

"The Abbot has entered deep Samadhi now, so let's meet after the sun sets. Please rest comfortably here until then."

When Ji Myeong withdrew, I immediately unfolded a qi membrane around the room to block sound.

"Squad Leader Baek, Vice Captain. From now on, one guy watches the roof, and one guy watches the end of the courtyard. Ji-yeong, you verify again with Moyong Geum if anything got mixed into the merchant guild's luggage."

"Yes, Captain!"

The Small Snow Squad members began to move agilely.

I sat at the table and looked at Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin.

"Miss Cheon, that evil qi you felt earlier... where is it being felt?"

"...I feel a vibration as if a huge pool of blood is sloshing deep underground. It is a disgusting energy."

I took out the Blood Bone Token I had collected from the Seventh Blood Lord, Yeon Jeok-ha, from my bosom.

The Blood Bone Token resonated with the air of the Great Thunder Temple and was emitting a faint red light.

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Deep underground in the Great Thunder Temple, a secret room hidden beneath the Scripture Pavilion.

This place, which should normally be full of Dharma power suppressing demonic energy and the essence of Buddhism, was currently filled with a thick blood-colored mist.

At the end of the underground passage connected behind the huge Buddha statue, the Abbot of Great Thunder Temple, Beop Jeong, was gasping for breath while sitting in the lotus position.

"……Cough."

Dark red fresh blood gushed out from between Beop Jeong's lips.

His white Buddhist robe had long been stained with hideous bloodstains.

Beop Jeong clutched his chest with a trembling hand.

Right next to his heart, the Blood Cult's forbidden evil art, the Blood Snake Worm, was wriggling and gnawing at his qi and blood.

It seems what he drank through the tea wasn't just poison.

'Ji Myeong…… Why did you choose this path?'

Beop Jeong's gaze headed beyond the iron bars of the secret room.

There, his disciple Ji Myeong, whom he had raised like a son all his life, was looking down at him with a cold glint in his eyes.

"Amitabha……. Abbot, you still do not break your stubbornness."

Ji Myeong's voice coming from outside the iron bars had none of his former gentleness, filled only with damp energy like a crawling snake.

"When the Blood Pond is completed, this sanctuary will become a true Buddhist Pure Land. A land of eternal immortality, purified by blood."

"Foolish…… guy. Blood is life, but the moment you covet that blood…… it is merely the path of a hungry ghost."

Beop Jeong barely raised his inner qi to answer.

However, the poison qi of the Blood Snake Worm had already spread throughout his body, and Beop Jeong's body was now in a state where it was difficult to even move a finger.

Ji Myeong smiled fishily and looked back.

There, a Blood Pond filled with human blood was sloshing inside a huge pit.

The vengeful spirits of the monks who died unjustly rose up as bubbles.

"The guests from the North Sea have arrived. The Extreme Yin Body and Extreme Yang Body..... If their blood is added to this Blood Pond, how will it change?"

"You..... Dare to bring devils into the sanctuary.....!"

At Beop Jeong's shout, Ji Myeong sneered coldly.

"Abbot, you just watch. How powerlessly the Buddhism you believed in burns. Ah, and the 'hope' you are waiting for will probably cool down coldly in the dining hall tonight."

As Ji Myeong moved his steps to head to the guest hall, only heavy silence and a fishy blood scent remained in the secret room again.

Beop Jeong did not stop clasping his hands even in his fading consciousness.

He felt a faint but intense energy, hot like the sun, felt from the direction of the guest hall.

'This flame is... the flame of the Demonic Cult.'

The flame emitted by the Heavenly Demon he had met just once in his life.

That flame was being felt.

Beop Jeong began to send a request for rescue towards the outside with his last remaining inner qi.

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Inside the guest hall, I looked down at the Blood Bone Token vibrating in my bosom.

This item taken from the Seventh Blood Lord was resonating with the blood qi flowing underground in the Great Thunder Temple and emitting an unpleasant pulse.

It was then.

‘……Save me.’

What was heard from the empty air was not a voice.

A thin thread of thought, as if squeezed out forcibly, directly struck my eardrum.

It was a minute telepathy that an ordinary martial artist wouldn’t have noticed, but to me, who led spiritual helpers, it was clear like the sound of thunder.

-Heh heh, for an Abbot of Great Thunder Temple, he is quite good. To not lose his mind even in this state.

-This is definitely the energy of the Great Thunder Temple’s Chief Monk. It is felt from very deep underground.

My eyes flashed purple.

“Miss Cheon, Miss Seol. I heard it from my father. There is a passage underground in the Great Thunder Temple where demonic qi sealed during the war with the Demonic Cult in the past flows. It seems the bastards dug that up and are using it as a Blood Pond.”

“Young Master, then isn’t the Abbot in danger?”

Seol Ye-rin asked.

I nodded and stared outside the door.

“It is not just dangerous. He might have already been done in by that guy earlier. That guy named Ji Myeong, the sound of his footsteps hasn’t been that of a human since earlier.”

At that moment, a polite voice was heard from outside the guest hall door.

“The meal preparation is finished. Young Palace Head. Please come out.”

It was Ji Myeong.

I sent a signal with my eyes to Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin, then nonchalantly withdrew the qi membrane and opened the door.

Outside the door, Ji Myeong was wearing a benevolent smile with his two hands clasped.

But the eyes of the monks lined up behind him had no focus, and their skin was pale like paper.

“I am starving to death, so this is great. Monk, what are we eating for dinner? You surely aren’t giving us only greens, right?”

Ji Myeong's eyelids trembled slightly.

"Buddhism forbids killing, but for the precious guests, we have specially prepared tea full of spiritual energy and mushroom dishes. We will escort you to the dining hall next to the Scripture Pavilion."

Our party headed to the dining hall under Ji Myeong's guidance.

Food neatly arranged was placed on the table, but in my eyes, purple Blood Snake Worms rising above the food were clearly visible.

"Wow, it looks really delicious. Ji-yeong, do you want to try eating first?"

"Yes? No, no! I will eat after watching Young Master eat. For some reason, my stomach doesn't feel good today!"

Quick-witted Wi Ji-yeong waved her hand and backed away.

I smiled fishily, sat down, and lifted the teacup.

Inside the tea water, terrible poison qi was swirling.

Ji Myeong stared at me with expectant eyes.

With this one cup of tea, he could imprison even the Abbot of Great Thunder Temple.

"Monk, the tea seems a bit cooled. May I heat it up myself and drink it?"

"……Do as you please."

Black-purple flames soared from my palm.

As the water in the teacup boiled up in an instant, a bizarre scream was heard only by me.

The Blood Snake Worms hiding inside the tea burned to death by my Extreme Yang Qi and turned into black smoke.

I drank that tea water in one go.

"Mmm, it is good. Monk, would you like a cup too?"

Ji Myeong's expression was distorted in an instant.

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Chapter 113 : Blood Pond

I put down the empty teacup and smiled fishily.

At the bottom of the teacup, the remains of the burnt-to-death Blood Snake Worms were stuck as black powder.

"Why are you looking at me like that? The tea from the offering hall tastes quite excellent. Though it was a bit uncomfortable to drink because there were too many solid bits."

Ji Myeong's facial muscles, which had been benevolent, twisted grotesquely.

The fact that I was fine after swallowing the Blood Snake Worms meant that the opponent had not only already seen through this poisonous plot but also possessed inner qi strong enough to chew and swallow the poison itself.

"...You bastard, what is your identity?"

"I am just the Small Snow Squad Captain escorting the Young Palace Head."

"Just an escort?"

"Yes, the Young Palace Head's escort has one thing to ask the monk."

I slowly stood up from my seat.

The wooden floor where my footsteps touched was charred black and spewed out steam.

"Where did you lock up the Abbot?"

"Kikik, kihihihi!"

Ji Myeong no longer hid his true intentions and laughed, making a rasping sound.

As his red eyes were blatantly revealed, the energy of the surrounding monks also turned ferocious all at once.

"I don't know how on earth you noticed the strangeness, since you shouldn't be able to sense the blood qi. Fine! Since you are a life that will be offered as a sacrifice to the Blood Pond anyway, I will cut off your breath right now!"

As Ji Myeong waved his sleeve, dozens of Dharma wheels imbued with pitch-black demonic energy rushed toward me.

Crackle—!

However, before the Dharma wheels could reach me, a huge ice wall blocked the entire guest hall.

Seol Ye-rin's Ice Art exploded, instantly freezing the air inside the dining hall.

"I am the only one who can lay a hand on the Third Young Master. Do not stain him with your disgusting smell."

Seol Ye-rin's blue hair fluttered as if blown by a strong wind.

As Seol Ye-rin flicked her finger, ice fragments became arrows and pierced the shoulders and chests of the monks.

"Miss Seol, can I leave this place to you?"

"Don't worry. I will turn all these fake monks into ice statues for you."

Before I could even hear Seol Ye-rin's answer, I stomped hard on the ground.

A fire fist struck the ground hard.

Boom—!

The secret passage leading to the basement of the Scripture Pavilion revealed itself with a roar.

A terrible smell of blood surged up like a fountain, but I threw my body into that darkness without hesitation.

-Keulkeul, the blood qi is getting thicker.

-You have to be careful. It's enough to bewitch a monk of the Great Thunder Temple; the Blood Pond is no different from the Blood Cult's bedroom.

Engraving the advice of the Demon Queen and the Sword Venerable, I sprinted through the underground tunnel.

Numerous skeleton stone statues were lined up on the walls, and they opened their eyes and crawled out whenever I passed by.

"Don't be bothersome. I'm busy to death."

Purple flames stretched out from my hands like whips.

The burning flames wrapped around the skeletons at once, turning them into a pile of ash.

When I reached the end of the passage, a huge underground hollow appeared.

There was the 'Blood Pond' that Ji Myeong had mentioned.

The Abbot of the Great Thunder Temple was nowhere to be seen.

Should I say there was a substitute?

A pond filled with the blood of monks who died unjustly, and a giant man sitting in the blood foam with flashing red eyes located in the center was visible.

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The giant man, the Sixth Blood Lord, Blood Eye Ghost Ma Seok-du, slowly opened his eyes inside the swamp of blood.

Ma Seok-du's body shape was twice as huge as an ordinary man.

Blood vessels protruded grotesquely over his copper-colored skin as if thousands of earthworms were squirming, and a forbidden symbol of the Blood Cult was branded red on his shaved scalp.

Ma Seok-du had been devouring the original qi of the monks rising from the Blood Pond until just now.

The blood imbued with the Buddhist Dharma of the Great Thunder Temple was sweeter than any spiritual medicine, and it fattened his demonic art.

"...A precious guest has arrived."

When Ma Seok-du opened his mouth, a turbid voice that sounded like scratching iron rang through the underground hollow.

As Ma Seok-du raised his body from the pond of blood, thick bloody water flowed down like a waterfall between his massive muscles.

Ma Seok-du stared at the uninvited guest who interrupted his meal.

A man in black wrapped in purple flames. The energy he exuded was something hot and sharp that directly opposed the damp blood qi of this place.

'Is it this guy? The one said to have turned the Seventh Blood Lord into a handful of ash.'

Ma Seok-du's red eyes shimmered.

When he heard the news that the Seventh Blood Lord Yeon Jeok-ha had died, he sneered.

Because he thought that the guy who was only good at petty tricks handling bones had finally failed his mission.

However, looking at the momentum the man in front of him was exuding, he seemed to understand why Yeon Jeok-ha had collapsed powerlessly.

"Even if that guy Yeon Jeok-ha was a disgrace to us Blood Lords, your blood that defeated a fellow Blood Lord will be quite useful."

Ma Seok-du reached out his huge hand and grabbed the blood water on the Blood Pond.

Then, the blood that was liquid instantly coagulated and transformed into a huge axe with sharp spikes, the Blood Demon Axe.

"I am the Sixth Blood Lord, Ma Seok-du. I will tear out your heart and offer the hot Yang blood inside it to this Blood Pond."

Ma Seok-du kicked off the ground and shot forward.

It was an abnormal speed unbelievable for such a huge frame.

The Blood Demon Axe wielded by Ma Seok-du tore through the air and fell over Hyeokryeon Yeom's head.

Kwooong—!

The floor of the underground hollow collapsed with a huge impact, and a massive cloud of dust rose.

Ma Seok-du smiled fishily.

It was a power that would have left not even bones behind if hit directly.

However, the voice heard from beyond the dust was still calm as could be.

"You are worth your size after bathing in the monks' blood. But what to do? My blood is a bit hot, so you will get indigestion if you drink it."

Splitting the dust cloud, a blackish-purple flame flew aiming for Ma Seok-du's face like a whip.

Ma Seok-du flashed his Blood Eyes and glared at that flame.

Blood Eye Axe Art.

Blood Flow Freezing.

The red wave emitted from Ma Seok-du's eyes collided with Hyeokryeon Yeom's flame.

If it were an ordinary flame, it would have been extinguished on the spot, but Hyeokryeon Yeom's flame burned even more fiercely using Ma Seok-du's demonic qi as fuel.

Fwoosh!

The expression of the Sixth Blood Lord hardened upon seeing that flame.

'...He is not an ordinary guy?'

Ma Seok-du wiped the saliva gathered at the corner of his mouth and smiled with madness.

The stronger the prey, the greater the pleasure when drinking its blood.

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Kwoong!

The underground hollow vibrated once again.

The grotesque wave emitted from Ma Seok-du's Blood Eyes tried to suppress my flame.

As the bastard's blood qi became thicker, the firepower of the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand burned even more furiously.

"Putting strength in your eyes won't solve everything. If you strengthened your body with the monks' blood, you should have played a bit more elegantly, Sixth Blood Lord."

I floated my body aiming for the gap where the bastard's Blood Demon Axe was pressing down on the floor.

As I rotated my body in the air and swung both hands, purple flames covered Ma Seok-du's whole body like a net.

-Keulkeul, he is a guy with solid outer arts. Burning the outer skin is not enough.

-Be careful! A fishy cold energy is coming up from behind!

At the same time as the Sword Venerable and Demon Queen's warning fell, a sharp sound of tearing air came from behind my back.

Swoosh—!

I instinctively twisted my body. In that fleeting moment, dozens of blood-colored Dharma wheels embedded themselves in the spot where I had been standing.

Black smoke rose as the ground corroded wherever the Dharma wheels were embedded.

"...Is it Ji Myeong?"

As I turned my head, Ji Myeong appeared at the entrance of the underground passage with a grotesquely twisted smile.

The bastard's Buddhist robes were already torn here and there by Seol Ye-rin's Ice Art, and black blood vessels were squirming like earthworms over his revealed skin.

"Kihihi! The Young Palace Head is quite something. I stepped aside for a moment because I felt like my body would freeze first if I dealt with that ice girl."

As Ji Myeong unclasped his hands, a skeleton rosary dyed in blood flowed out from inside his sleeve.

"Lord Sixth Blood Lord, if we offer this guy's blood to the Blood Pond, the Blood Pond will be completed. I will help."

Ma Seok-du mumbled with a phlegmy voice as he placed the huge Blood Demon Axe on his shoulder.

"Ji Myeong, I ask again. What did you do with the Abbot?"

"That old man has already become food for the Blood Snake Worms and is scheduled to die in the underground secret room and become nutrients for the Blood Pond! Kihihi!"

At Ji Myeong's words, a fishy smile floated on my lips.

Because I gained the certainty that the bastards had kept the Abbot alive.

If he is still breathing, I just need to clean up these bothersome guys and go save him.

"A pincer attack... The level of the Great Thunder Temple is quite a sight. One fake monk bastard, and one big monster."

I condensed the purple flames residing in both hands even more intensely.

I put the corrosive power of the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand in my left hand, and the explosive firepower of the Extreme Yang Body in my right hand.

"Consider it fortunate that Miss Seol didn't follow. If she saw guys like you with her personality, she would have frozen the entire underground of the Great Thunder Temple."

As soon as I finished speaking, Ma Seok-du and Ji Myeong rushed in from both sides simultaneously.

"Die!"

Ji Myeong's blood-colored rosary cut through the air and blocked all directions, and Ma Seok-du's Blood Demon Axe fell over my head once again.

"Who will die... you will soon find out."

Explosively pulling up the power of the qi center, I kicked off the ground.

The moment the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand and the Extreme Yang Qi intertwined,

"Poison Dragon Cannon Strike!"

With my roar, the entire underground hollow was dyed in purple light.

It wasn't a simple fire art. The poison qi of the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand spewing from my left hand swallowed Ji Myeong's skeleton rosary.

Sizzle!

"W-What?!"

Ma Seok-du's Blood Demon Axe began to corrode and melt down.

"Lord Sixth Blood Lord!"

Seeing the Dharma wheels flying in again, I wore a smile on my lips.

Because the Dharma wheels Ji Myeong fired were also.

Gulp—!

Swallowed whole into the Poison Dragon's mouth.

"With this, it is the end."

Following that, purple flames tore apart the darkness of the underground hollow and collided head-on with the blood-colored blood qi.

An enormous explosion burst out from the Blood Pond in the underground of the Great Thunder Temple.

Chapter 114 : Chapter 114

Chapter 114 : Forbidden Area

Kwa-ang—!

Along with the explosion sound shaking the underground hollow, purple flames evaporated the blood water of the Blood Pond and soared up.

"Aaaagh!"

Ji Myeong screamed and flew backward.

As the flame mixed with my poison qi swept over the bastard's whole body, the Blood Snake Worms squirming inside his skin could not withstand the high heat and burst out.

Ma Seok-du was also not safe.

His huge body became a shield and took the explosion, but his proud Blood Eye Axe Art was shattered without leaving a trace.

"Keuheok! T-This can't be..."

Ma Seok-du knelt and spewed out fresh blood.

The bastard's red eyes shook with fear.

He thought the Seventh Blood Lord Yeon Jeok-ha was defeated because he was weak, but that was not the case.

I walked leisurely out of the smoke.

The purple flames remaining at the tips of my clothes made sizzling sounds and pressured the bastards.

"Unlike what I expected, the Blood Cult's Blood Lords are nothing special."

I looked down coldly and flicked my finger.

Then, the embers lingering in the air became butterflies and surrounded Ji Myeong and Ma Seok-du.

-Keulkeul, the hidden door in that corner is opening.

-Ji Myeong is trying to run away!

At the Demon Queen's shout, my gaze fixed on Ji Myeong.

Ji Myeong, with his body in tatters, was fumbling under the Buddha statue behind the Blood Pond.

"Lord Sixth Blood Lord, we must retreat for now. Even if it's just you, Lord Sixth Blood Lord, you must run away first...!"

"Where are you trying to go?"

I threw my body forward.

The moment I was about to burn Ji Myeong from the top of his head to the tip of his toes.

Ma Seok-du squeezed out his remaining inner force and blocked my path.

A blood-colored mist spewed out from the bastard's whole body like an explosion.

"For the sake of the other Blood Lords-"

Ma Seok-du's eyes were dyed red.

-It's dangerous!

-Be careful!

Following the shouts of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen.

Blood Eye Exploding Death.

As the entire body of the Sixth Blood Lord, Ma Seok-du, exploded, the Blood Pond reacted.

The blood qi of the Blood Pond and Ma Seok-du's blood qi shot toward me explosively.

***

"Captain!!"

Wi Ji-yeong, who was turning the fake monks into ice statues on the ground, screamed.

It was because the frenzied blood-colored energy spewing from the underground passage of the Scripture Pavilion dyed the night sky red.

"Third Young Master!"

Seol Ye-rin's complexion turned pale.

The vibration felt just now was not a simple collision.

It was truly a destructive energy where a massive amount of blood qi exploded all at once, sucking in all the vitality around it.

"Young Palace Head, it's dangerous!"

"Move!"

Seol Ye-rin shook off Baek Mu-yong's restraint and threw herself toward the collapsing underground passage.

The Ice Art spewing from the tip of her toes instantly froze the collapsing pile of stones, creating a temporary foothold.

Following her, Baek Mu-yong, Eun Bin, and Wi Ji-yeong fixed their grip on their weapons and followed.

"Eit, these bastards who are worse than bones dared to touch our Young Master!"

Wi Ji-yeong scattered flying daggers in all directions, executing the remnants, and jumped into the darkness.

The underground hollow was a shambles.

Due to the aftermath of the blood qi Ma Seok-du detonated, the Blood Pond revealed its bottom and dried up twistedly, and huge rocks were pouring down like rain from the ceiling of the hollow.

And in the center, where the thick blood-colored mist was coiling, stood Hyeokryeon Yeom.

"...Haa. Haa."

Hyeokryeon Yeom's clothes were tattered, and purple flames and red blood qi were mixed all over his body, burning while making grotesque sounds.

The bastard's self-destruction was threatening, but I avoided a fatal wound by wrapping my whole body in the Corpse Decay of the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand and rotting the blood qi.

"Third Young Master!"

Seol Ye-rin appeared through the dust cloud.

As soon as Seol Ye-rin confirmed Hyeokryeon Yeom's safe appearance, she let out a sigh of relief and approached Hyeokryeon Yeom's side.

"Are you okay? The energy was so ominous that..."

"...I'm fine."

It was a little dangerous.

I spat out saliva mixed with blood and reassured Seol Ye-rin.

At that moment, Eun Bin and Wi Ji-yeong, who arrived late, could not hide their astonishment.

"Hiik! Just what is that monster..."

In the place Wi Ji-yeong pointed to, Ma Seok-du, whose upper body was half blown away and had become a rag, was kneeling.

His breath had already stopped, but his body did not collapse because the unique demonic nature of a Blood Lord remained.

"What happened to Ji Myeong?"

When Baek Mu-yong asked while looking around, I pointed to the collapsed Buddha statue behind the Blood Pond.

"He ran away like a rat taking advantage of the opening."

"We must chase him. If that guy ran away with the Great Thunder Temple's treasure..."

Before Eun Bin could finish speaking, a thin golden radiance flowed out from between the pile of collapsed stones in the corner of the hollow.

"Wait."

I raised my hand to stop the group, then slowly approached the pile of stones.

There was an old monk sitting in a lotus position with even his kasaya turned into rags.

It was the 'sacrifice' the bastards had stuck in alive to maintain the energy of the Blood Pond, Abbot Beop Jeong.

"...Amitabha."

Beop Jeong's eyelids trembled, and slowly began to find the light in his eyes.

Beop Jeong looked at the martial artists of the Ice Palace surrounding him and Hyeokryeon Yeom, and wore a benevolent but sorrowful smile.

"...Thank you."

I placed my hand on the old monk's shoulder and pushed in warm yang energy.

Beop Jeong coughed and pointed to the deeper darkness of the underground passage.

"Ji Myeong, that child... went to the Forbidden Area holding the 'Spirit Bead', the holy relic of the Great Thunder Temple. Sleeping there is... the Great Demon of the West that even the past Abbot could not seal."

At those words, my eyebrows twitched.

As per the Demon Queen and Sword Venerable's advice, the real crisis was starting from now.

"Forbidden Area... There are many things that really don't suit holy ground."

The Abbot of the Great Thunder Temple, Beop Jeong, made a bitter expression.

"I am truly sorry to ask this favor in this situation. But I hope you go quickly and stop Ji Myeong before he commits any more wrongs."

"You are protecting him even after he did this?"

"Everyone makes mistakes."

Beop Jeong was a big person.

***

Ji Myeong ran madly through the underground passage thick with the smell of blood and dust.

When he felt the massive energy of the Sixth Blood Lord Ma Seok-du falling from behind his back disappear in an instant, Ji Myeong's heart pounded as if it would burst from fear.

'It doesn't make sense! To think the Sixth Blood Lord fell to just such a guy...!'

However, what was ahead of fear was mad obsession.

Inside Ji Myeong's embrace, the holy relic he stole by breaking the taboo of the Great Thunder Temple, the 'Spirit Bead', was flashing blood-red and burning his chest.

Ji Myeong reached the huge stone door at the end of the passage.

Tens of thousands of Buddhist scriptures were carved on the stone door, but they were already corroded black by the Blood Cult's evil arts.

This place was the Forbidden Area that the Great Thunder Temple had kept silent about for a thousand years, and the place where the Great Demon of the West slept.

"Haa, haa...!"

Ji Myeong inserted the Spirit Bead into the groove in the center of the stone door.

Kiiiiiing—!

When the Spirit Bead, which should have been holy, combined with the turbid blood qi flowing from Ji Myeong's palm, a scream burst out along with a creepy metallic sound.

The Sanskrit characters carved on the stone door were dyed in blood color and began to twist.

"The old man was wrong. Mercy? Patience? You can't change anything with such things! Power is the true salvation!"

Ji Myeong slashed his own wrist and sprinkled the pouring fresh blood on the stone door.

The Spirit Bead greedily sucked in that blood, and finally, the firmly closed door of the Forbidden Area began to open slowly.

What flooded in from beyond the door was neither a cold chill nor hot heat.

It was a terrible void that rejected all vitality, and demonic qi close to the primordial darkness.

"Oh... Ooooo!"

A huge shadow shimmered in the darkness.

When that existence, whose form was unclear, opened its eyes, the entire Great Thunder Temple began to vibrate as if an earthquake had occurred.

Ji Myeong watched that spectacle with madness-filled eyes while kneeling.

"Awaken! Master of the West, enemy of the Buddhist Dharma, and true ally of the Blood Cult! Bring eternal darkness to this pitiful land!"

Ji Myeong's shadow stretched abnormally long and mixed as one with the darkness beyond the door.

Ji Myeong's eyeballs were now dyed pitch black so that not even the whites could be seen.

Ji Myeong could feel it.

Because the power of the Great Demon transmitted through the Spirit Bead was flowing through his blood vessels, changing Ji Myeong into something other than human.

"Hyeokryeon Yeom... This place will be your crematorium."

The moment Ji Myeong turned his body and completely disappeared into the darkness, the door of the Forbidden Area closed again making a boom sound.

I arrived in front of the door of the Forbidden Area, leaving Abbot Beop Jeong to the Small Snow Squad members.

I realized that the fishy blood qi of Ji Myeong that was felt until just a moment ago was eaten and disappeared by the demonic qi raging like a huge storm beyond the door.

-This is no joke.

-...I feel a death qi more terrible than the Cold Snow of the North Sea. You must really be careful this time.

Even the voices of the Demon Queen and the Sword Venerable were full of tension.

I clenched my fists while staring at the firmly closed stone door.

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Beyond the stone door, a grotesque beating sound was heard from the heart of the Forbidden Area that swallowed even light.

Thump—!

It wasn't a simple heartbeat.

It was a pulse of destruction shaking the earth's veins and changing the air of the entire Great Thunder Temple like thick lead.

The black smoke flowing out from the cracks in the stone door was sucked inside for an instant, and then, breaking the silence, a huge rupture sound burst out.

Kwa-a-a-ang—!

The huge stone door that had kept its place for a thousand years became powder and scattered.

What slowly revealed its appearance through the dust cloud was a huge existence beyond human common sense.

"...Ah, finally."

It was Ji Myeong's voice, but it was no longer human.

The body of what used to be Ji Myeong was abnormally swollen, and four grotesque shadow arms created by the tangling of the Spirit Bead's blood-red radiance and the Forbidden Area's demonic qi had sprouted from behind his back.

However, what caught my eye was not Ji Myeong himself.

-Keulkeul, this is the first time I've seen such a monster.

-It's a monster I haven't seen either. It seems to have hatched using a human as a vessel.

It was as the Demon Queen said. Ji Myeong had only become a vessel for that monster.

The essence of the Great Demon was descending to the present world using Ji Myeong as a medium.

Soon, black mist poured out like a waterfall and covered the floor of the underground hollow.

The stone fragments touched by the mist instantly corroded and turned into dust.

"It is the hunger of a thousand years."

A voice mixed with the will of Ji Myeong, no, the Great Demon, rang out.

When the bastard opened his eyes, purple flames burned inside his pitch-black eyeballs.

The moment I faced that gaze, I felt a creepy pressure as if my soul was being torn away entirely.

At that moment,

Woo-woong-

The divine objects of the Iron Venerable, Fighting Venerable, and Poison Venerable that I had obtained began to react.

Chapter 115 : Chapter 115

Chapter 115 : Divine Item

Woooong—!

Just as the Great Demon's eye light was crushing my soul, a violent vibration erupted from within my bosom.

It was not a simple tremor.

It was a violent rejection reaction sent by the legacies of the three Venerables I had obtained so far.

Iron Venerable's Divine Item.

Fighting Venerable's Divine Item.

Poison Venerable's Divine Item.

Three rays of light starting from my chest wrapped around my whole body.

The Iron Venerable's hardness strengthened my skeleton, the Fighting Venerable's fighting spirit exploded my suppressed momentum, and the Poison Venerable's energy began to rot the Great Demon's demonic energy infiltrating from the outside.

"...Mm?"

The eyes of the monster that had become the vessel for Ji Myeong, no, the Great Demon, were dyed with doubt.

Humans whose souls were not destroyed after facing his eye light head-on were rare even a thousand years ago.

-Kukuku, the Divine Items are quite something.

-Third Young Master, now is the time! The Divine Items are opening a path!

Along with the Cold Snow Demon Queen's shout, my eyes flashed purple.

A thrilling power filled the place where the suppressing pressure had disappeared.

Great Demon.

Why were the Divine Items reacting to this Great Demon of the Outer Regions?

"If I'm the first thing you see after waking up in a thousand years, your destiny is quite wretched too."

I kicked off the ground and soared.

The purple flame, fusing the energy of the three Venerables, stretched out like a whip and tore apart the Great Demon's mist.

"It'll be too hot to eat. You monster bastard!"

Kwa-aang—!

My fist struck the Great Demon's face head-on.

It wasn't a simple strike.

With a blow mixing the Fighting Venerable's destructive power and the Poison Venerable's corrosive power, the black mist wrapping the Great Demon's head scattered while screaming.

-Da, dare... How dare you do this to this body!

Ji Myeong's voice and the Great Demon's strange scream mixed together, shaking the cavern.

Four shadow arms that sprouted from his back rushed in to snatch me, but I twisted my body in mid-air and lightly dodged them.

At that moment!

"Young Master, I will help!"

Seol Ye-rin, who had followed before I knew it, clasped her hands and drew up her Ice Art.

Around her, the cold energy of eternal snow raged like a storm.

Seol Ye-rin covered the earth, corroded by the Great Demon's mist, with a pure white sheet of ice again.

"Miss Seol, tie up his shadow arms! I'll burn the torso!"

"Understood! Glacial Myriad Flowers!"

Huge ice flowers blooming from Seol Ye-rin's fingertips froze the Great Demon's shadow arms tightly and fixed them to the floor.

The bloody radiance of the Spirit Bead struggled to melt them, but my yang energy, which had become even purer with the protection of the three Venerables, assisted Seol Ye-rin's Ice Art and completed an absolute freezing.

I did not miss that opening.

"Flame Butterfly, Flame Fist, Flame Explosion!"

Fluttering flame butterflies and fire fists spewed out from my hands.

Soon, a huge pillar of fire shot out in a straight line toward the Great Demon's chest, the place where the Spirit Bead was embedded.

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The scene unfolding before Seol Ye-rin's eyes was unrealistic.

A huge purple pillar of fire tearing through the darkness of the Forbidden Area and shooting out.

It was truly a divine fire demon created by the resonance of the Extreme Yang Qi held by Hyeokryeon Yeom and the Divine Items of the three Venerables.

"...Ah."

An exclamation flowed out without Seol Ye-rin realizing it.

The petals of the Glacial Myriad Flowers that Seol Ye-rin unfolded were reacting to Hyeokryeon Yeom's heat and spewing pure white steam.

If it were a normal Fire Art, it would have clashed with Seol Ye-rin's Ice Art and canceled each other out, but mysteriously, Hyeokryeon Yeom's flame did not push away Seol Ye-rin's cold energy.

Rather, it was using Seol Ye-rin's ice as a support to bind the Great Demon's arms more firmly.

Kwa-a-a-ang—!

Finally, the pillar of fire struck the Great Demon's chest, the center where that bizarre Spirit Bead was embedded, head-on.

-Kkeuaaaaaak!

A strange scream erupted as if the underground cavern would collapse.

The form of darkness that had grown enlarged using Monk Ji Myeong's body as a vessel twisted desperately within the flames.

The bloody radiance spewing from the Spirit Bead was devoured by the purple flame, turning purple, and soon began to crack.

Seol Ye-rin bit her lips tightly and pushed her Ice Art even harder.

'I cannot miss him here.'

Hyeokryeon Yeom opened the path.

Now, while that monster was writhing in pain and scattering demonic energy, was the chance.

Seol Ye-rin twisted her fingers complexly and prepared one of the ultimate techniques of the Ice White Divine Art she had learned.

"Absolute Ice Wall, Closure!"

Giant ice pillars soared up from beneath the Great Demon's feet and embraced Hyeokryeon Yeom's flames.

The Great Demon's demonic energy, which tried to leak outside, was trapped in the barrier of ice and fire and condensed with nowhere to go.

Inside, Monk Ji Myeong's face could be seen.

No, rather than Monk Ji Myeong, it looked like a collection of vengeful spirits full of pain.

"Third Young Master, now is the time!"

At Seol Ye-rin's shout, the Young Master flashed his body in the air.

Hyeokryeon Yeom's two eyes, holding the light of the three Venerables, were burning purple.

Hyeokryeon Yeom used the recoil of the exploding flames to rush at the Great Demon's chest.

Hyeokryeon Yeom's hand stretched out toward the Spirit Bead.

"...It's over."

The Young Master's low voice grazed Seol Ye-rin's ear.

At that moment, not a purple flame, but a white flash clear enough to be transparent exploded from his hand grasping the Spirit Bead.

It was the moment when the power of the three Venerables combined into one to strike the essence of the Great Demon.

Pa-ji-jik, chaeng—!

Along with the sound of glass breaking, that unpleasant beating sound that vibrated the entire Great Thunder Temple stopped.

The Spirit Bead, which was red like blood, turned into powder and scattered, and the abnormal muscles and shadow arms wrapping Monk Ji Myeong's body began to evaporate like mist.

Seol Ye-rin ran toward Hyeokryeon Yeom, who was landing on the floor.

"Third Young Master!"

Within the collapsing demonic energy, the Young Master staggered and caught his balance.

The light of the three Venerables that wrapped around his whole body was fading, but Hyeokryeon Yeom's gaze alone was still bright.

At Hyeokryeon Yeom's feet, Monk Ji Myeong, who had returned to his original gaunt appearance, was lying down.

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Ji Myeong's form, which had swollen abnormally, shriveled up like a deflated leather sack.

As the terrible demonic energy that filled the Forbidden Area retreated like the ebbing tide, what remained in the center were the floor turned to ashes and the debris of the broken Spirit Bead.

"Heuk, heuk..."

The pain of my whole body tearing apart came rushing in.

The price of forcibly resonating the Divine Items of the three Venerables was not light.

My qi center fluctuated and my qi and blood twisted, but I forcibly endured and stood before Ji Myeong.

"Third Young Master! Are you alright?"

Seol Ye-rin hurriedly approached my side and supported me.

As Seol Ye-rin's cold chill touched me, the heat of my skin, which was hot enough to burn, subsided a little.

I nodded and stared at the strange light flowing out from Ji Myeong's bosom.

Kiiing-

Among the fragments of the broken Spirit Bead, a single transparent bead, with the bloody demonic energy completely purified, floated into the air.

It looked like an essence planted inside the Spirit Bead by the ancestors of the Great Thunder Temple to seal the Great Demon, and like the Divine Item of another Venerable who protected the Murim in the past.

-Kukuku, I thought the Spirit Bead was the Great Demon's vessel, but it was actually a shell sealing the Great Demon.

-Seeing the Buddhist power lingering, it seems to be the Divine Item of the previous Buddhist Venerable.

Along with the voices of the Demon Queen and the Sword Venerable, the transparent bead was sucked into my chest.

Woooong—!

In a fleeting moment, countless mandalas and Buddhist mantras flashed through my mind.

My twisted qi and blood accepted the Buddhist Venerable's pure energy.

The demonic energy and Buddhist power in my qi center fought, and the demonic energy swallowed the Buddhist power.

Ggulleong-

Following the Iron Venerable, Fighting Venerable, and Poison Venerable, I was able to grasp the fourth Divine Item.

'If Grandmaster Hye-gwang finds out about this, it will be an uproar.'

The Buddhist Venerable's Divine Item was a bead, no, prayer beads.

"...Young Master?"

Seol Ye-rin looked at me with doubtful eyes.

It was because the murderous purple energy spewing from my body had been settled into a much deeper and quieter light.

"The Spirit Bead wasn't broken. It just went to find its real owner."

I looked down at Ji Myeong, who had collapsed on the floor.

The guy was exhaling thinly while looking at the ceiling with unfocused eyes.

As the price for becoming the Great Demon's vessel, Ji Myeong's qi center was completely torn, and his qi and blood were already damaged beyond recovery.

"...Abbot, Monk..."

Ji Myeong's lips trembled as he spat out a word.

It seemed his sanity had returned only after reaching the threshold of death.

"The Abbot is safe. Atone for the sins you committed yourself outside."

I snatched up Ji Myeong's nape.

Perhaps thanks to obtaining the Buddhist Venerable's dharma power, my body was much lighter than before.

"Let's go, Miss Seol. It looks like this place will collapse soon."

Huge rocks began to fall from the ceiling of the Forbidden Area.

The underground of the Great Thunder Temple, where the Great Demon's barrier had disappeared, was collapsing, unable to withstand its original weight.

I held Seol Ye-rin's hand and flew toward the exit where light could be seen.

***

Kugugung—!

As soon as Seol Ye-rin and I stepped onto the ground, the yard of the Scripture Pavilion behind our backs caused a huge dust cloud and caved in.

The underground Forbidden Area of the Great Thunder Temple, which had endured for a thousand years, was completely buried.

"They came out! Captain!"

"Young Master!"

Wi Ji-yeong, the Small Snow Squad members, and Eun Bin, who was supporting the Abbot, cheered in unison.

I dusted myself off and tossed the tattered Ji Myeong onto the floor.

"...Ji Myeong."

Abbot Beop Jeong called his disciple's name with a trembling voice.

Ji Myeong, who had become a cripple with his qi center destroyed, turned his unfocused eyes at his master's voice, then soon shed tears of blood and pounded his head on the ground.

"I... I am sorry... This small monk was possessed by a devil..."

"Amitabha. Everything is this old man's negligence."

Beop Jeong closed his eyes with a bitter expression.

I watched that scene indifferently, then touched the Divine Item of the Buddhist Venerable, one of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens, newly wrapped around my wrist.

The Great Thunder Temple after the battle was quiet.

The blood monks who had colluded with Ji Myeong were imprisoned in Seol Ye-rin's Ice Art and taken away, and Beop Jeong began to wash away the blood poison and recover his energy thanks to the Buddhist Venerable's energy I delivered.

"Third Young Master, I truly thank you. If it were not for you, the holy ground of the West would have become an altar for the Blood Cult."

Sitting in the Great Dharma Hall, Beop Jeong clasped his hands politely.

I fiddled with the teacup and answered casually.

"No, I am just glad I could be of help. More than that."

I held out the Buddhist Venerable's Divine Item obtained from the Forbidden Area to Beop Jeong.

"I would like to ask about the origin of this."

Abbot Beop Jeong of the Great Thunder Temple, who confirmed the Buddhist Venerable's Divine Item, widened his eyes.

"This is..."

"Do you recognize what it is?"

"One of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens, the Buddhist Venerable's Divine Item..."

Beop Jeong recognized the Divine Item at once.

Woooong-

The Divine Item spewed out a cry as if it wanted to return to me again.

"Hoho, it seems the Divine Item has chosen you."

Beop Jeong said so and looked back at Seol Ye-rin.

"To say that the Buddhist Venerable's Divine Item revealed itself to the world again as soon as the Ice Palace's Young Palace Head visited the Great Thunder Temple."

From a drawer in the Great Dharma Hall, Beop Jeong brought something and placed it in front of the two.

"Take it. He always said it would reach the Successor someday, but I didn't know it would be conveyed like this."

Beop Jeong held out a Dharma Treasure.

Chapter 116 : Chapter 116

Chapter 116 : Homecoming

What Abbot Beop Jeong held out was a heavy Vajra wrapped in old silk.

Though signs of age were evident, Sanskrit was intricately engraved on the surface, and a faint golden light was flowing out.

As I picked it up, the prayer beads, the Divine Item of the Buddhist Venerable wrapped around my wrist, trembled as if resonating.

"This is the Vajra left by the previous Buddhist Venerable before he entered Nirvana, saying, 'Pass this on when the cold snow of the North Sea washes away the bloody water of the Sanctuary.'"

My brows narrowed. The cold snow of the North Sea?

Does that mean the previous Buddhist Venerable foresaw Seol Ye-rin's and my visit decades, or even a century ago?

-Kekeke, Buddhist prophecies are truly terrible.

-The Vajra contains the essence of the Buddhist Venerable's secret technique, the 'Diamond Immovable Wisdom King Divine Art'.

At the Demon Queen's words, I accepted the Vajra.

In a fleeting moment, the image of a massive Wisdom King flashed through my mind, and the Buddhist Venerable's dharma power settled in my qi center fused with demonic qi, transforming into a purer form.

"The reward is quite heavy, Abbot."

A satisfied smile hung on my lips.

It was because I was able to obtain the rare martial art called Diamond Immovable Wisdom King Divine Art by acquiring the Buddhist Venerable's Divine Item.

***

The morning at the Great Thunder Temple, where traces of battle began to be erased.

"Huuuu."

I was sitting cross-legged in the yard of the Great Thunder Temple, performing qi circulation.

I was trying out the Diamond Immovable Wisdom King Divine Art I obtained through the Vajra yesterday.

-Kekeke, your martial talent is better than I thought.

For me, who had already experienced several Regressions, mastering such a chant and analyzing the flow of energy to apply it to myself was nothing.

Just then.

"Hyung-nim!"

Moyong Geum looked for me.

Moyong Geum was moving busily, repairing broken carriages and packing luggage.

"You are busy from early morning."

"Hyung-nim! Young Palace Head! I came because the preparations for departure are finished! By the way, are we returning to the Central Plains now?"

Moyong Geum shouted in an excited voice.

If rumors spread that the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild used its power to save the Great Thunder Temple, the guild's status would pierce the sky.

Moreover, since they had even won the contract for distributing relief supplies to the Great Thunder Temple, Moyong Geum was grinning from ear to ear.

At Moyong Geum's question, I gazed beyond the distant mountain range and shook my head.

"There is one more place to stop by before returning to the Central Plains."

"You mean the Potala Palace, right?"

Seol Ye-rin, who was sitting side by side with me performing qi circulation, raised her body.

"Correct."

I unfolded the map Cheon Deung-jin had given me from my bosom.

"Lady Cheon said she would show me around her hometown, so we can't just leave."

My gaze turned to Cheon Deung-jin, who was standing quietly to the side.

While happy about returning to her hometown, Cheon Deung-jin seemed somewhat anxious.

"Lady Cheon, are you okay?"

"I am worried that a problem might have occurred at the Potala Palace as well."

"If they are the ones who planted the Great Demon in the underground of the Great Thunder Temple, they wouldn't have left the Potala Palace alone."

There was a chance they avoided the Blood Cult's demonic hand thanks to Hyeokryeon Geuk making a move.

"First, let's go and check. I will prepare for departure to the Potala Palace."

"Right, we can just go and check."

"Yes, thank you."+1

-Kekeke, since you have already been there once, there is nothing to worry about, is there?

-Since the Young Palace Head is completely cured, the Potala Palace Lord would be happy if anything, so I don't think there will be any big problems... Ah.

'What is it?'

The Demon Queen examined Cheon Deung-jin.

Cheon Deung-jin was glancing at me consistently.

-It seems there might be a different problem.

The Demon Queen looked at Cheon Deung-jin and me alternately.

***

At that time.

The majestic fortress rising above the clouds of the Western Regions, the Potala Palace.

At the highest point and on the holy dharma seat, the Potala Palace Lord, Lion King Cheon Jeok-pa, opened his heavy eyes.

Cheon Jeok-pa was a man exuding an overwhelming pressure comparable to the North Sea Ice Palace Head, Seol Baek-ho.

His copper skin, thick hair reminiscent of a lion's mane, and burning gaze proved that he was the pinnacle of the Western Region Murim.

But now, unlike usual, his gaze was shaking complexly.

".....Hyeokryeon Yeom, that guy is returning?"

Cheon Jeok-pa stared at the large golden basin placed beside him.

On the clear water, the appearance of Cheon Deung-jin's party approaching this place was being reflected.

In the center was Cheon Deung-jin, the child he had personally sent to his nemesis, the North Sea Ice Palace, to save his daughter who was dying from the pain of the Fire Spirit Body in the past.

'The Third Young Master of the Demonic Cult, Hyeokryeon Yeom.'

Cheon Jeok-pa's gaze lingered on Hyeokryeon Yeom.

Because of the ill-fated relationship in the past where the First Young Master Hyeokryeon Geuk visited, planted a Jiangshi in the Fire Spirit Jade, and tried to toy with the Palace, he had tested Hyeokryeon Yeom drastically by pushing him into the underground Forbidden Area when he first arrived.

But Hyeokryeon Yeom survived ostentatiously, sorted out the soul of Flame Demon Bukgung Son, and saved Cheon Deung-jin.

Although he was wary because Yeom was a Demonic Cult member, he could not deny that he was the benefactor who saved his daughter in the end.

The door of the Dharma Hall opened roughly, and an old monk wearing red robes barged in.

It was Ja Seong, the Disciplinary Hall Master who managed the rules of the Potala Palace.

"Palace Lord! A message has arrived from the Great Thunder Temple! It says the Young Palace Head of the Ice Palace conspired with the Third Young Master of the Demonic Cult to attempt to assassinate the Abbot of the Great Thunder Temple and fled after stealing the Holy Item! Furthermore, we have obtained information that they are coming to the Potala Palace!"

Cheon Jeok-pa closed his eyes quietly instead of answering.

"The Young Palace Head of the North Sea and the Third Young Master of the Demonic Cult are returning to the Potala Palace together with our Young Palace Head."

"Are you saying our Young Palace Head also committed the act together with them?!"

"Hall Master!"

"I have understood the Palace Lord's will well, but the Disciplinary Hall's will is different."

'...He lies this easily?'

There was only one reason why the Disciplinary Hall Master could shout so confidently against him, the Palace Lord.

"Let's meet the Young Palace Head in person and listen to the story. You never know, do you?"

It was because the Disciplinary Hall Master knew the fact that the Young Palace Head Cheon Deung-jin was raised as a son while hiding the secret of being a woman in male disguise.

The current situation was a crisis shaking not only his daughter's life but also the foundation of the Potala Palace.

"……Ja Seong. Does the child reflected in that water really look like a traitor to your eyes?"

"There is evidence sent from the Great Thunder Temple!"

"What sort of!"

Cheon Jeok-pa slowly rose from his seat.

Overwhelming fighting spirit poured out explosively behind the back of the man called the Lion King.

"If you do not follow my will, I will divulge all the secrets the Palace Lord wishes to hide."

"...This is the only time I will let you have your way. Keep that in mind."

Cheon Jeok-pa's gaze stared at Hyeokryeon Yeom inside the screen shimmering in purple.

"That man is a guy who returned alive even when I shoved him into the underground Forbidden Area. I doubt your warrior monks can withstand that flame."

"I will take that as your consent."

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Meanwhile, at the entrance of the Potala Palace.

On the rugged mountain path where eternal snow was scattering, Cheon Deung-jin grabbed my sleeve carefully.

Although she was dressed as a man, her eyes looking at me contained trust for a place to rely on that could not be hidden.

"Mister…… Look over there."

At the place Cheon Deung-jin pointed to, a magnificent white fortress rising through the clouds was shimmering in gold, receiving the light of the eternal snow.

"It looks like they carved a mountain rather than built a fortress. I don't think I saw this when I came last time."

At my muttering, Wi Ji-yeong opened her mouth wide and chimed in.

"Wow... I thought the North Sea Ice Palace was fancy, but the atmosphere here is completely different. I think I would feel closer to the sky if I lived there."

However, unlike Wi Ji-yeong's bright admiration, the eyes of Baek Mu-yong standing next to her had sunk sharply.

Baek Mu-yong adjusted his grip on the sword at his waist and recited in a low voice.

"It is magnificent, but the energy in front of the fortress gate is unusual. Warrior monks are setting up a formation. That is not a posture to welcome guests."

At those words, the party's gaze turned to the bottom of the fortress gate.

Hundreds of Lama monks wearing red robes were blocking the path like a fortress wall, using giant Dharma Wheels as shields.

Cheon Deung-jin's complexion turned pale, and her fingertips trembled slightly.

"......My father would not welcome me like that. This is definitely others acting arbitrarily."

"It seems the Palace Lord is having quite a hard time."

I fingered the Vajra I received from the Abbot of the Great Thunder Temple in my bosom.

The prayer beads on my wrist were emitting a pleasant vibration in reaction to the energy of the Sanctuary at close range.

"Lady Cheon, it is your house, so we can't just sneak in like we are crossing someone else's gate, right? We should have a fiery Hazing Ceremony before entering." 29

"But Mister, they are my fellow disciples and brothers of the Potala Palace. Please....."

At Cheon Deung-jin's earnest gaze, I smiled fishily and tapped her shoulder.

"I know. I won't kill them. I just intend to dust them off a bit."

As I took a step forward, a resounding shout rang out from the top of the fortress wall.

"Halt!!"

It was the voice of Disciplinary Hall Master Ja Seong.

Wi Ji-yeong snorted at that fierce shout.

"Who does he think he is telling to stop?"

"Ji-yeong, I think you need to go and teach them a lesson."

Even Seol Ye-rin burst into a small chuckle at my sly retort.

I raised my head and felt the energy of the guy looking down at us from the highest place of the fortress.

'It seems the atmosphere has changed a little from before?'

Since Cheon Jeok-pa allowed this, it seemed a problem had occurred at the Potala Palace as well.

Purple flames began to shimmer in my qi center.

I ordered the Small Snow Squad members behind my back in a low voice. 30

"Wi Ji-yeong, Tae Un-seo. You protect the merchant guild people and Lady Cheon. Squad Leader Baek and Eun Bin, follow behind me. Lady Seol, could you open the path refreshingly?"

Seol Ye-rin raised both hands as if responding.

"Shall I cover the Western Regions with the blizzard of the North Sea?"

"That sounds good."

Crack—

The mountain began to freeze from Seol Ye-rin's ice art,

and my body shot out as if sliding on the steep slope of the snowy mountain.

The purple Flame drawn up from my qi center wrapped around my whole body, heating up the atmosphere.

My target was the Lama monks blocking the front of the Potala Palace, Cheon Deung-jin's hometown to which she had returned.

Chapter 117 : Chapter 117

Chapter 117 : Inner Thoughts

Kwaaaang—!

The Ice White Divine Art shooting out from Seol Ye-rin's hands instantly transformed the ground into a silver-white ice path, and my purple Flame exploded on top of it, creating a steam storm.

"Stop them! It's the demon's fire!"

The 'Vajra Defense Squad', the elite warrior monk corps of the Disciplinary Hall guarding the front of the fortress gate, thrust out their brass Dharma Wheels in unison.

A barrier of qi created by hundreds of spinning Dharma Wheels blocked my path, but I only grinned.

"Flame Butterfly."

The fire butterflies I frequently used flew towards the warrior monks.

Kwaang—!

Every time a butterfly collided with the Dharma Wheels, a tremendous explosion burst out.

The Lama monks who were forming a defensive formation were pushed back by the overwhelming recoil and bounced off in all directions.

"T-This cannot be! The Diamond Dharma Wheel Formation in a single blow!"

Disciplinary Hall Master Ja Seong, who was watching this from atop the fortress wall, turned ashen.

According to the news sent from the Great Thunder Temple, I should have been covered in wounds by now.

"Lady Seol, now!"

"Understood. Glacial Barrier!"

As Seol Ye-rin stomped on the ground, massive ice spikes soared up from under the feet of the warrior monks who filled the front of the fortress gate.

As per my words to avoid killing, the ice spikes only pierced the monks' robes and sleeves, firmly fixing them to the ground.

Shooshooshoo-shook—!

Taking advantage of that gap, Baek Mu-yong and Eun Bin threw their bodies forward.

The Small Snow Squad members used the hilts and spines of their blades instead of the edges to accurately hit the acupoints of the warrior monks blocking the path and knock them down.

Wi Ji-yeong guarded Cheon Deung-jin's side and threw flying daggers as a check to block any approach.

"Will you not move aside right now!!"

Cheon Deung-jin shouted, mustering up courage.

The spirit of the warrior monks, flustered by Cheon Deung-jin's voice, was dampened.

However, Ja Seong atop the fortress wall shouted with madness-filled eyes.

"Do not be deceived! The Young Palace Head is a traitor!"

Piyung, Piyung—!

Arrows poured down like rain from atop the fortress wall.

'Traitor?'

I felt like I knew why the Lama monks of the Potala Palace were attacking them.

"Did they infiltrate the Potala Palace as well following the Great Thunder Temple?"

While I was visiting the Ice Palace?

Come to think of it, a lot of time had passed.

Since I even went to the Southern Barbarians, it was a time when it wouldn't be strange for problems to erupt at the Potala Palace.

My eyes were dyed red with purple.

I took out the Vajra from my bosom.

The Divine Item of the Buddhist Venerable obtained from the Great Thunder Temple resonated with my demonic qi and emitted a brilliant dark light.

"Diamond Immovable."

As I raised the Vajra into the air, a dark bell-shaped barrier covered the entire group.

The moment the arrows pouring down like rain touched the golden barrier, they evaporated without a trace with a sizzling sound, like snowflakes falling on a hot griddle.

"H-How can a Demonic Cult bastard use Buddhist martial arts……!"

Ja Seong stepped back in shock.

The sight of the Demonic Cult's Third Young Master wielding the essence of the Buddhist secret technique, the Diamond Immovable Wisdom King, was truly a scene that destroyed common sense.

"Well. Lady Seol. Please freeze it."

"I intended to do so even without you asking."

Seol Ye-rin held her ice sword vertically.

The freezing that started from beneath her feet soared vertically up the fortress wall.

Kwakwakwakwa—!

In an instant, the entire fortress wall turned into a massive ice wall, binding the feet of the archers.

I did not miss that gap and kicked off the ground.

My body became a purple flame and dashed in a straight line up the fortress wall.

"D-Do not come closer!"

Ja Seong tried to resist by swinging his staff, but my hand had already snatched his nape.

The flame shooting out from my palm began to burn Ja Seong's neck.

Just then.

"That is enough!"

A massive Lion's Roar shaking the heavens rang throughout the Potala Palace.

The fog and steam that filled the front of the fortress gate scattered at once, and a man with a massive, lion-like physique landed on the edge of the fortress wall.

It was the Potala Palace Lord, Lion King Cheon Jeok-pa.

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Cheon Jeok-pa narrowed his eyes, feeling the cool chill and hot heat transmitted to his feet simultaneously.

Watching through the golden basin and facing it in person were as different as heaven and earth.

Hyeokryeon Yeom, who was retrieving his purple flame and smiling slyly.

And the North Sea Ice Palace's Young Palace Head, Seol Ye-rin, standing beside him emitting an aura like an ice sculpture.

The presence of the two was overwhelming enough to suppress even the dignity of the thousand-year-old sanctuary, Potala Palace.

'It has been less than a year. But how did his energy change so monstrously?'

Cheon Jeok-pa's gaze lingered on the prayer beads wrapped around Hyeokryeon Yeom's wrist and the Vajra at his waist.

He could feel the energy of the Great Thunder Temple.

It seemed he had visited the Great Thunder Temple, and it was clear that the guy from the Demonic Cult had obtained something there.

Cheon Jeok-pa glanced back at Cheon Deung-jin.

Although she was dressed as a man, she could not deceive the eyes of her father.

The child's complexion, which used to be pale from the pain of the Fire Spirit Body, had improved beyond recognition.

No, beyond simply becoming healthy, her eyes harbored vitality and solid trust that were not there before.

Checking who the end of that trust was directed at, Cheon Jeok-pa clicked his tongue inwardly.

'It seems that monster-like guy eventually stole even my daughter's heart.'

Cheon Jeok-pa suppressed his complex feelings with effort and looked at the burning Ja Seong.

The Disciplinary Hall Master, Ja Seong, was dying.

"Long time no see, Palace Lord. The welcome was too noisy, so I organized it a bit."

Hyeokryeon Yeom greeted him slyly while throwing Ja Seong to the ground.

Cheon Jeok-pa's eyes narrowed.

"He will suffer some burns, but he won't die. More importantly, seeing as the Palace Lord is hale and hearty, if they are attacking the Young Palace Head to this extent... is something happening at the Potala Palace as well?"

"We will talk about the details inside."

Cheon Jeok-pa looked back at Cheon Deung-jin.

"You seem to have become healthy."

"Father....."

"You suffered much during that time."

Cheon Deung-jin bit her lips.

"I have... returned safely."

"Right."

"Everyone, withdraw!"

Cheon Jeok-pa shouted towards the Lama monks of the Disciplinary Hall.

As Disciplinary Hall Master Ja Seong collapsed, they followed Cheon Jeok-pa's words with confused expressions.

Cheon Jeok-pa looked at Ja Seong with cold eyes, then moved his gaze to Hyeokryeon Yeom's party.

It seemed a large group including the Divine Physician and the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild had visited the Potala Palace.

"Excuse my rudeness."

"Not at all."

Moyong Geum exchanged greetings with the Palace Lord with a merchant's smile.

Wi Ji-yeong, who was watching that scene, spoke as if worried.

"Doesn't it feel like the cleanup isn't clean?"

"If the Captain is okay with it, then it is okay."

At Baek Mu-yong's answer standing next to her, Wi Ji-yeong nodded.

"The Young Palace Head isn't saying much either."

"Yes....."

As even Eun Bin scolded her, Wi Ji-yeong stood behind Hyeokryeon Yeom and Seol Ye-rin with Tae Un-seo, Yu So-dong, and Mu-myeong.

"Rest for now. I must catch up with the Young Palace Head whom I haven't seen in a long time."

The Divine Physician and his daughter Seong Sang-ah, Han Seol-bi, and the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild party.

After exchanging greetings with each one individually, Cheon Jeok-pa entered the Potala Palace with Cheon Deung-jin.

They were soon guided to the Guest Hall for External Guests.

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The deepest and most private bedroom of the Potala Palace.

Cheon Jeok-pa dismissed all the surrounding servants, stood with his back to the firmly closed door, and looked at his daughter.

"......Sit."

At Cheon Jeok-pa's heavy voice, Cheon Deung-jin sat opposite him carefully.

Amidst the flowing silence, Cheon Jeok-pa stared at the smoke from the incense burner on the table and asked in a low voice.

"Can you tell me what happened on the way back to the Potala Palace?"

"Yes, Father."

Cheon Deung-jin told Cheon Jeok-pa the story of visiting the Ice Palace, meeting the Young Palace Head, stopping by the Southern Barbarians, and returning to the Western Regions.

"...You ended up touring the entire Outer Region unwittingly."

"Yes."

"Right, since your body seems to have recovered, there is something I want to ask."

"Yes?"

"Hyeokryeon Yeom, what kind of existence is he to you?"

At the unexpectedly direct question, Cheon Deung-jin's shoulders flinched.

Cheon Deung-jin lowered her gaze for a moment, then faced her father with determined eyes.

"He is the benefactor who saved my life, and the person I trust most in the world."

"Trust....."

Cheon Jeok-pa's eyebrows twitched.

Cheon Jeok-pa was the very person who had pushed Hyeokryeon Yeom into the underground Forbidden Area when he first came to the Potala Palace.

The man he tried to kill just because he was of Demonic Cult blood had now returned after saving his daughter.

The problem was the fact that he brought a woman with him.

"Have you talked with the Young Palace Head?"

He meant if she had ever revealed her inner thoughts.

"I have... not."

Cheon Deung-jin lowered her head.

Cheon Jeok-pa did not miss his daughter's reaction and put on a stern expression.

"I heard that guy is already promised to be married to the Young Palace Head of the Ice Palace."

"Yes."

"Do you intend to give up?"

Blink, blink.

Cheon Deung-jin blinked her eyes as if asking what he meant.

"I am asking if you have ever revealed your inner thoughts to that guy even once."

"...I haven't."

"What is the reason you returned to the Potala Palace?"

"That is....."

Because she had no justification to stay by Hyeokryeon Yeom's side.

Cheon Deung-jin knew that fact too well.

"This father is ready to grant whatever you wish."

"I have something I am curious about too. Why did the Disciplinary Hall Master come to think of me as a traitor?"

Cheon Jeok-pa told Cheon Deung-jin about the message received from the Great Thunder Temple.

"Such....."

It seemed this wasn't the time to talk about Cheon Deung-jin having feelings for Hyeokryeon Yeom.

"The Blood Cult was moving."

"It seemed so. As soon as we were liberated from that guy Hyeokryeon Geuk's demonic hand, the hiding bastards started crawling out. In this situation, it seems we also need to strengthen our power through marriage."

"Pardon?"

"Jin-ah, before this father makes a move, how about you convey your inner thoughts without holding back at least once before that guy leaves?"

"But Mister is... with Lady Seol....."

Grin.

Cheon Jeok-pa smiled.

"Isn't it a good opportunity for the Outer Region Murim, including the North Sea Ice Palace, the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult, and the Potala Palace, to join forces?"

At Cheon Jeok-pa's words, Cheon Deung-jin's face began to turn red.

Chapter 118 : Chapter 118

Chapter 118 : Two Women

At Cheon Jeok-pa's explosive statement, Cheon Deung-jin's mind flashed white.

The union of three massive powers representing the Outer Regions.

The justification was plausible, but what had to stand at the center was ultimately her own sincere feelings.

The emotions suppressed all her life, trapped in the shackles of cross-dressing, were fluctuating as if they had been waiting for her father's encouragement.

"F-Father..... But Mister considers me just a colleague....."

"We don't know that. Affection might have developed, don't you think?"

At Cheon Jeok-pa's sharp point, Cheon Deung-jin shut her mouth.

Hyeokryeon Yeom was always like that.

While seeming indifferent, he always stood in front of her at decisive moments.

"Go. Tonight, serve tea to the Guest Hall for External Guests and check your feelings. This father will clean up the dregs of the Blood Cult rooted inside the Potala Palace in the meantime."

The cruel killing intent unique to the Lion King dwelled in Cheon Jeok-pa's eyes.

The price for Disciplinary Hall Master Ja Seong daring to cause a disturbance with a forged message from the Great Thunder Temple would never be light.

At that time, the Guest Hall for External Guests.

I was leaning against the window, looking at the night scenery of the Potala Palace.

The night sky of the Western Regions was close as if stars would pour down, and the air was sharp and cold.

-Kekeke, why are you looking at the stars on a moonlit night?

At the Sword Venerable's question, I answered.

"Since I obtained the Buddhist Venerable's Divine Item, I have now acquired four Divine Items of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens."

To resolve the instability of the Ice Crystal guarded by Chang Seong, finding the legacy of the Ice Emperor, Seol Cheon-u, was actually the priority.

And as I acquired more legacies of the Ten Venerables, I got the thought that I would be able to find the Ice Emperor, Seol Cheon-u, only after obtaining all the legacies of the Ten Venerables.

In other words, it means I have to find the other Ten Venerables as well.

My gaze scanned the inside of the Potala Palace.

I felt a disparate blood qi when subduing Ja Seong earlier.

Similar to what Ma Seok-du exploded at the Great Thunder Temple,

but a much more elaborately hidden energy permeated throughout the palace.

"What are you thinking about so deeply?"

The guest room door opened, and Seol Ye-rin entered.

Seol Ye-rin was dressed in thinner silk clothes than usual, but the cold qi that seemed to freeze the surrounding temperature was the same.

"Lady Seol, why aren't you sleeping?"

"Because I can't sleep."

Seol Ye-rin stood side by side next to me and looked at the night sky.

Seol Ye-rin's hand gently touched the tip of my sleeve.

"These days, you don't ask for my hand."

"Haha, then I can hold it now."

I grabbed Seol Ye-rin's hand abruptly.

Chiiik-

Enough for smoke to rise from the hand.

However, it wasn't as much as before.

"Did you want to hold hands?"

"I asked because I felt a chill."

"Is it warm?"

"It is warm."

"So, what is it that you really want to say?"

There was no way Seol Ye-rin would come to find me without business.

"I wondered until when I could hold this hand."

"Hm? Of course."

Just as I was about to ask why she was asking such a question.

Careful footsteps were heard from outside the guest hall.

Knock, knock.

"Mister, are you inside? It is Cheon Deung-jin. I brought some tea..... may I come in?"

Cheon Deung-jin's voice was trembling thinly.

Seol Ye-rin's eyebrows raised slightly.

-Kekeke, sparks are flying! To think the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace and the Young Palace Head of the Potala Palace are gathering in one room!

At the Sword Venerable's words, I sighed and opened the door.

As the door opened, Cheon Deung-jin, whose lines looked strangely delicate unlike her usual dignified cross-dressed appearance, was standing holding a tea tray.

"Ah..... Lady Seol was here too."

Cheon Deung-jin's gaze lingered on Seol Ye-rin's hand holding my sleeve.

In an instant, at the same time the temperature inside the guest room dropped rapidly, hot Fire Spirit energy rose like heat haze around Cheon Deung-jin.

I intuited it.

I don't know why, but tonight, a storm more terrifying than the Blood Cult's raid would begin inside this guest hall.

"……Come in for now. The tea will get cold."

My indifferent remark broke the silence in the room.

A strange current began to flow between the three people.

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Cheon Deung-jin's gait entering the room was awkward.

Where did her usual appearance of walking with her chest puffed out dignifiedly go? Her fingertips holding the tea tray were trembling slightly.

However, the place Seol Ye-rin's gaze was fixed on was not Cheon Deung-jin's hands, but that 'look' in her eyes gazing at me.

'……Dangerous.'

Instinctive warning sounds rang inside her head.

A woman's intuition was frighteningly accurate.

Those unusually soft eyes and flushed cheeks.

And that Fire Spirit energy shimmering every time she faced me was not a simple sign of gratitude.

It was an expression of love, hot enough to melt even the eternal snow of the North Sea.

Seol Ye-rin subtly applied strength to the hand holding my sleeve and pulled me closer towards her side.

"Lady Cheon, tea at this late hour. The Small Snow Squad Captain was discussing important matters with me until just now."

She deliberately mixed chill into her voice.

As thin frost began to form on the floor of the guest hall,

Cheon Deung-jin flinched and put the tea tray down on the table.

"Ah..... I apologize if I interrupted. However, since Mister suffered a lot coming all the way to the Western Regions, I definitely wanted to treat him to the Potala Palace's famous tea....."

Cheon Deung-jin bowed her head and filled the teacups.

A subtle scent rose from the steaming tea, but the smell of a rival in love, thicker than that, vibrated at the tip of Seol Ye-rin's nose.

Seol Ye-rin stared intently at my face.

This dense man was just holding the teacup saying the tea scent was good.

Usually, he read killing intent like a ghost, so why couldn't he hear the sound of women's hearts colliding?

"Third Young Master, the tea is hot, so I will cool it for you."

Seol Ye-rin gently reached out her hand and wrapped it around the cup with cold qi before I even brought the teacup to my lips.

In an instant, the temperature dropped to a drinkable level.

Cheon Deung-jin's eyebrows were seen trembling.

"......Lady Seol is truly affectionate."

There was no strength in Cheon Deung-jin's voice. Cheon Deung-jin sat closely next to Seol Ye-rin, on the side of my opposite sleeve.

"However, considering Mister's constitution, warm energy will suit him better than something too cold. My warmth was helpful even when controlling the Fire Spirit Jade's energy."

'Warmth? Helpful?'

A chill settled in a corner of her chest.

During the time Seol Ye-rin didn't know, what happened between the two?

Did their bodies touch in the process of treating the Fire Spirit Body?

Seol Ye-rin applied strength to her fingers holding the teacup.

"I know the Small Snow Squad Captain's constitution better than anyone. And guarding the Small Snow Squad Captain's side is my role as the Ice Palace's Young Palace Head."

"Role..... A role that the heart does not follow only becomes a heavy burden."

Cheon Deung-jin smiled brightly and retorted.

The air in the room was now creating bizarre vibrations as freezing cold qi and burning hot fire qi clashed.

Caught in the center, I was making a troubled expression while just sipping tea, but Seol Ye-rin had no intention of backing down.

Just as there was only one owner of the North Sea, the place by this man's side had to be only one.

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The palms holding the teacup became damp.

Tension she had never felt even when wielding the heavy staff dominated her whole body.

'Lady Seol's check..... is extraordinary.'

Seol Ye-rin's eyes saying she would defend with full power.

Cheon Deung-jin also had no intention of backing down.

Didn't her father say so? To confirm directly if there was something she wanted.

Cheon Deung-jin clenched her fists tightly under the table.

The heat of the Fire Spirit Body fluctuated pleasantly near her heart.

It wasn't a painful flame like before.

It was a warm and intense power that had become a part of Cheon Deung-jin, left behind by me while purifying the poison inside her body.

"Lady Seol, could you perhaps make time for me and Mister Hyeokryeon to talk alone?"

Cheon Deung-jin leaned her body further toward me.

The unique scent of flames felt from my clothes tickled the tip of her nose.

Smelling that scent, the sensation of his firm arms that held her up in the cold underground cave vividly came to mind.

"What kind of conversation are you trying to have?"

Lady Seol Ye-rin's blue gaze deepened further.

The tea inside the guest room became cool as if it would freeze, but Cheon Deung-jin subtly raised the Fire Spirit energy and pushed away that chill.

"Mister, how is the tea? I didn't know your taste, so I picked the most precious leaves in the Potala Palace....."

Cheon Deung-jin smiled with effort to catch my gaze.

At this moment, Cheon Deung-jin was desperate.

Although she was standing before the massive mountain called the Ice Palace's Young Palace Head, she couldn't forget those indifferent yet affectionate eyes I showed her.

I put down the teacup and scratched the back of my head as if troubled.

"......The tea tastes good. But aren't you two emitting too much energy since earlier? The guest hall might collapse."

At my scolding, a corner of Cheon Deung-jin's chest stung.

She was this desperate, but I was insensitive as usual.

"Since Lady Cheon says she wants to, I was thinking of talking a bit....."

Just as Seol Ye-rin was about to raise her eyebrows at that one remark.

Breaking the silence outside the window, a very faint but unpleasant fishy smell brushed the tip of the nose.

I rose from my seat.

"It seems we will have to talk later."

Cheon Deung-jin stood next to me and awakened the Fire Spirit energy.

"I think we should. This energy..... It's from the Disciplinary Hall. It seems the bastards made the first move before Father could act."

"Rather, it worked out well."

She had to stop the dogs of the Blood Cult from occupying the Potala Palace no matter what happened.

Chapter 119 : Chapter 119

Chapter 119 : Blood Shadow Ghost

Windows and doors shattered simultaneously as Lama monks in red robes barged into the guest hall.

Their eyes were already devoid of sanity.

Pupils flushed red without any whites, and black saliva dripping from the corners of their mouths.

It was an appearance similar to the Blood Poison Demon Men I had seen in the underground of the Great Thunder Temple.

"Kuaaaah!"

I lightly waved my hand toward the monks charging in while screaming strange sounds.

"You're ruining the tea-drinking atmosphere."

Whoosh!

Purple flames blooming from my fingertips swallowed the monks standing at the front.

However, as if they couldn't even feel pain, they swung their swords even with their bodies burning.

"They have been completely encroached by the Blood Cult's evil arts."

Cheon Deung-jin bit her lip.

Sadness and anger crossed in her eyes as she watched her fellow disciples turn into monsters.

At that moment, the temperature inside the guest hall dropped rapidly.

"How dare you step in here."

It was Seol Ye-rin.

The price for touching her nerves, which had been sharpened by the subtle war of nerves with Cheon Deung-jin just a moment ago, was harsh.

Crackle!

As Seol Ye-rin lightly placed her hand on the floor, giant ice spikes soared up from the floor of the guest hall.

The burning monks were turned into ice statues in an instant.

"Third Young Master, let's continue the story later. We need to clean up first."

"……Agreed."

I clicked my tongue at Seol Ye-rin's fierce momentum.

The party left the guest hall and headed for the central plaza of the Potala Palace.

The situation was more serious than I thought.

Flames were soaring everywhere, and warrior monks belonging to the Disciplinary Hall were indiscriminately attacking ordinary monks.

"Stop! Are you all crazy?!"

"It is the order of the late Disciplinary Hall Master! Execute the traitors!"

Cheon Deung-jin clenched her fists as she looked at the plaza that had become a chaotic mess.

"Father……!"

The moment Cheon Deung-jin tried to rush out while drawing up Fire Spirit Qi, I grabbed her shoulder.

"Calm down. The Palace Lord isn't someone who goes down that easily."

It was then.

A massive roar burst out from the Palace Lord's Hall, the highest place in the Potala Palace.

"You bastards!!"

Along with a thunderous Lion's Roar, a golden wave swept through the plaza.

The rampaging warrior monks of the Disciplinary Hall were suppressed by that momentum, vomiting blood and tumbling over.

Thud!

A giant shadow landed in the center of the plaza.

A man with bronzed skin and hair fluttering like a lion's mane, the Potala Palace Lord, Cheon Jeok-pa.

In his hand was a giant Vajra, and ominous energy was dripping from its end.

"You dare dance with swords in my living room? Ja Seong, you are finally crossing the line!"

At the end of Cheon Jeok-pa's gaze, behind the group from the Disciplinary Hall, Ja Seong walked out with his burned face wrapped in bandages.

Behind him stood masters of the Blood Cult emitting a fishy scent of blood, standing like shadows.

"Kukuku... Lion King. It has been a long time. The times have changed. If you join hands with the Blood Cult, Potala Palace can rule beyond the Outer Regions to the Central Plains. Why do you refuse that power?"

"Power? I don't need the power of bastards who tried to turn my daughter into a monster!"

When Cheon Jeok-pa slammed the Vajra into the ground, the earth vibrated.

Seol Ye-rin, Cheon Deung-jin, and I saw that sight and quickly approached Cheon Jeok-pa's side.

"You're late, Palace Lord."

At my cheeky remark, Cheon Jeok-pa looked at Cheon Deung-jin and Seol Ye-rin, then let out a sigh.

"It seems the talk didn't go well."

Seeing that Cheon Jeok-pa knew Cheon Deung-jin had visited my quarters, I could roughly guess the situation.

Of course.

"Let's deal with them first rather than talking about that now."

It seemed okay to talk later.

***

On the outer wall of the Potala Palace, in the darkness where even moonlight didn't reach, a shadow emitting a fishy smell of blood landed soundlessly.

It was Ma Jo, the Blood Shadow Ghost, the Fifth Blood Lord among the Seven Blood Lords, the seven monsters assisting the Cult Leader who stood at the apex of the Blood Cult.

Ma Jo flicked his finger as if bored.

Condensed blood qi was burning black at the tips of his fingernails.

"Ja Seong, I shouldn't have trusted that old man. In the end, we'll have to secure the key to open the Sanctuary ourselves."

The men in blood robes standing like shadows behind Ma Jo gripped their weapons in unison.

They were not ordinary assassins, but Blood Shadow Assassins whose bodies had been modified by Ma Jo's Blood Art.

Ma Jo's gaze was fixed on Hyeokryeon Yeom, who was standing in the center of the plaza wrapped in purple flames.

'Is he the guy who killed the Seventh Blood Lord Yeon Jeok-ha and made the Sixth Blood Lord Ma Seok-du self-destruct?'

The Cult Leader had said to be wary of this Third Young Master of the Demonic Cult.

Especially the Buddhist Venerable's Divine Item he had obtained possessed energy that was the extreme opposite of the Blood Demonic Qi, the source of the Blood Cult.

But Ma Jo rather smacked his lips.

If he could only pollute that pure Buddhist power and turn it into blood qi, his Blood Art would be able to reach complete mastery in a single breath.

Blood Mist Step.

Stealth.

Ma Jo's figure turned into a bloody mist and scattered.

Taking advantage of the chaotic atmosphere, Ma Jo seeped into the shadow behind Hyeokryeon Yeom's back.

He didn't miss the moment when Hyeokryeon Yeom let his guard down while exchanging words with Cheon Jeok-pa.

From Ma Jo's palm, hundreds of Blood Needles, awls of condensed blood qi, rushed toward Hyeokryeon Yeom's fatal acupoints from all directions without a sound.

Swish!

"A dog of the Blood Cult can't erase that smell of blood even in death."

I extended my left hand backward without even turning my head.

Boom!

The purple flame spewing from my palm mixed with the dark energy of the Vajra to form a giant barrier.

The hundreds of Blood Needles burned and evaporated as if screaming the moment they touched the barrier.

"……Tch."

Ma Jo, revealing himself from the mist, landed lightly backward.

Cool killing intent dwelt in his red eyes.

"To approach this secretly, you look like quite a skilled assassin."

I spoke to Ma Jo without panicking at all.

"...How did you notice?"

"Well."

I slowly turned my body.

Seol Ye-rin's Ice Sword standing beside me emitted a chill that seemed to freeze Ma Jo's blood mist.

"Kukuku…… As expected, you're not ordinary. This Blood Lord is the Fifth Blood Lord, Ma Jo. I will pull out that arrogant tongue of yours and offer it as a sacrifice to the Blood Pond."

As Ma Jo spread both arms, the blood of the monks that had permeated the plaza floor soared upside down and began to turn into bizarre Blood Swords.

***

The blood that had been puddling on the floor soared into the air making a grotesque sound.

Every time the bastard wigged his finger, fresh blood became sharp sword qi and surrounded me.

-Keke, hearing he's the Fifth Blood Lord, his energy is certainly stickier than the previous guys.

-Be careful, Third Young Master. Those Blood Swords have the property of sucking away vitality. Just touching them will twist your qi and blood.

The advice of the Demon Queen and the Sword Venerable grazed my mind.

But I rather smiled fishily and adjusted my grip on the Vajra.

"For some reason, everyone says the same thing."

As I took a step forward, the frost on the floor collided with the flames and spewed out rough steam.

[Diamond Immovable Wisdom King, Dharma Fire]

The dark radiance spewing from the Vajra mixed with the purple flame and wrapped around my entire body.

Before the dozens of rushing Blood Swords could even touch my body, they evaporated, emitting a terrible burning smell.

The energy containing the essence of Buddhist Dharma was practically a natural enemy to the Blood Cult's evil arts.

"……?! To burn away my Blood Swords!"

Ma Jo's red pupils shook with shock.

The bastard tried to blur his figure and hide into the bloody mist again, but I had already grasped his location.

Because the Buddhist Venerable's prayer beads were pointing to his dirty blood qi like a compass.

"Miss Seol, cut off the retreat so not a single rat can escape."

"Leave it to me."

Seol Ye-rin swung her Ice Sword into the air.

Ice White Divine Art, Ice Dragon Seal Boundary.

A giant ice barrier surrounding the entire plaza soared up in an instant.

Ma Jo's blood qi, which tried to scatter by turning into mist, was trapped in the cold chill and hardened stiffly.

"T-This bitch……!"

Ma Jo revealed his true form and swung a dagger.

But I had already closed in right under his nose.

"You met the wrong opponent."

I was the one who knew better about assassin arts than anyone else.

For a moment, I examined the battle situation with the eyes of a shadow.

The Blood Cult naturally wouldn't know this fact.

The purple flame condensed on my fist exploded toward Ma Jo's chest.

Kaboom!

Ma Jo hurriedly put up a Blood Curtain to block it, but he couldn't kill the impact.

The bastard was pushed back dozens of jang and scraped the floor.

I glanced behind me.

The Potala Palace Lord, Cheon Jeok-pa, was swinging a giant dharma staff and rampaging like a lion against Ja Seong and the Blood Cult's assassins.

Cheon Deung-jin was also emitting Fire Spirit Qi and protecting the palace's monks.

"A lot of you came."

"Kuku, it's not just this Blood Lord. The Blood Cult will occupy this Potala Palace!"

"According to whom?"

I thought of the forces that hadn't appeared in the venue yet.

If it was those guys, they would definitely come here.

Regardless of what blocked them.

"Captain!"

"Young Palace Head!"

"Are you okay?!"

At the shout of the Small Snow Squad members that could be heard as soon as I thought of it.

I turned my gaze toward Ma Jo again.

The bastard was wiping the black blood pooling at his mouth and twisting his body grotesquely.

It seemed the blood qi spewing from Ma Jo's whole body had become twice as thick as before.

"Kukuku..... Good. Along with that arrogant flame of yours, I will dip the Potala Palace whole into a blood pond!"

Ma Jo scratched his own chest with his fingernails.

The pouring fresh blood began to mold the shape of a giant Blood Demon in the air.

"Third Young Master!"

"Young Master!"

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin approached my side.

"If we just deal with that guy, can we save the Potala Palace?"

Cheon Jeok-pa also began to look at the Fifth Blood Lord, the Blood Shadow Ghost, with a hardened expression.

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Chapter 120 : Search for the Divine Item

The image of a giant blood bird, summoned by the Fifth Blood Lord Ma Jo using his own heart as a medium, dyed the night sky in a blood-red hue.

A fishy scent of blood pierced my lungs, and the fresh blood pooling on the ground was sucked into the body of the blood bird with a grotesque pulsating sound.

"Kukuku..... I will turn this sanctuary into a massive grave!"

Along with Ma Jo's maddened shout, the giant beak of the blood bird struck down at the plaza.

Boom—!

"Young Master!"

"Third Young Master!"

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin screamed simultaneously, but I did not back down.

Rather, the Buddhist Venerable's prayer beads wrapped around my wrist began to emit a blinding golden light like the sun.

"I should have ended it back then."

I looked at the Disciplinary Hall Master, Ja Seong.

The fact that he was committing such acts alongside the Fifth Blood Lord was all because of Ja Seong.

I held the Vajra vertically and quietly recited a chant.

Diamond Immovable Wisdom King Divine Art

Wisdom King Manifestation

Purple Demonic Fire swirled with the golden dharma power, creating a massive illusion behind my back.

As the image of the Wisdom King with furious eyes and four arms appeared, the damp blood qi covering the plaza evaporated in an instant.

".....Wisdom King? How can a bloodline of the Demonic Cult use the martial arts of the Buddhist Venerable!"

Ja Seong stepped back in astonishment, but it was already too late.

Wrapped in the illusion of the Wisdom King, I kicked off the ground and soared up.

"I will purify you. Go back to hell."

My fist struck the chest of the blood bird head-on.

It wasn't a simple physical strike.

The holy energy emanating from the Buddhist Venerable's divine item began to burn away the evil blood qi, the very foundation of the blood bird, from its source.

Sizzle—!

"Kuaaaagh!"

As the blood bird, which was like his alter ego, was purified, Ma Jo vomited blood and rolled on the ground.

Not missing that opening, the Lion King Cheon Jeok-pa leaped forward, splitting the earth.

"The end of a traitor is decided by the lion's fangs! Heaven Breaking Strike!"

Cheon Jeok-pa's massive dharma staff mercilessly crushed Ja Seong's chest.

Thud—!

"Keuheok..... Pa, Palace Lord....."

"Shut your mouth! It wouldn't be enough even if I scrubbed this palace with the blood you shed!"

With Cheon Jeok-pa's fierce strike, Ja Seong rolled on the floor with his qi center destroyed.

***

Meanwhile, on the outskirts of the battlefield, the Small Snow Squad members were driving away the remnants of the Blood Cult.

"Eit, you disgusting things! How dare you disturb our Young Master!"

Wi Ji-yeong shouted as she scattered flying daggers in all directions.

The flying daggers she threw accurately pierced the joints of the Blood Shadow Assassins.

Following that, Baek Mu-yong's heavy sword cut through the air, claiming the heads of the frozen enemies one by one.

"Yu So-dong, take the left! Tae Un-seo, support the rear!"

Under Baek Mu-yong's command, the Small Snow Squad members moved in perfect order.

Their combined combat skills, tempered through the Southern Barbarians and the Western Regions, had already surpassed the level of ordinary experts.

Eun Bin also moved soundlessly through the shadows, striking the acupoints of the surviving Blood Cult members.

The dawn at the Potala Palace after the battle ended was silent.

I raised the Vajra high.

Woong—!

As a faint golden wave emanated from the Vajra and swept through the entire palace, the fishy scent of blood that had permeated every corner was washed away.

"……Third Young Master, no, Young Hero Hyeokryeon."

Cheon Jeok-pa approached, breathing roughly, and held out his hand.

Gratitude was visible in the eyes of the man called the Lion King.

"My eyes were not wrong. I, as the Palace Lord of the Potala Palace, swear that the Potala Palace will form an eternal blood alliance with the North Sea Ice Palace and with you starting today."

I clasped his hand and replied.

"Thank you. I will speak to the Palace Head about it as well."

"And about that, could you take the Young Palace Head with you? I will give you this instead."

"Pardon?"

Cheon Jeok-pa handed me a letter.

***

When Cheon Jeok-pa's shocking remark settled down with the dawn air, Cheon Deung-jin almost dropped the dharma staff she was holding.

She felt as if her heart was going to pop out of her mouth.

She had never dreamed that her father would openly tell Hyeokryeon Yeom to 'take her' like that.

Flustered, Cheon Deung-jin urgently called her father.

"……Father?"

But the Lion King Cheon Jeok-pa stared only at Hyeokryeon Yeom, pretending not to hear.

"Since the demonic claws of the Blood Cult have reached this far, it is dangerous for Jin to stay only here. Besides, aren't you the only one who can fully control this child's Fire Spirit Body? Please take this child along on your way back to the Ice Palace and let her see more of the world."

That was the justification.

The real intention lay in the conversation they had shared in the bedroom earlier.

It was her father's winning move, telling her to 'convey her true feelings without holding back'.

Cheon Deung-jin looked at Hyeokryeon Yeom with trembling eyes.

Hyeokryeon Yeom was scratching the back of his head with his usual indifferent expression.

"Well, if the Palace Lord says so, I don't mind."

That short answer, 'I don't mind', sounded sweeter to Cheon Deung-jin than any touching verse in the world.

The energy of the Fire Spirit swirled hotly inside her chest.

But that joy did not last long.

It was because of the chilly coldness she felt from the side.

"Since the Young Palace Head of the Potala Palace is joining us, the Small Snow Squad Captain's shoulders must have become very heavy."

It was Seol Ye-rin.

Her voice was calm, but a cynicism colder than eternal snow lingered within it.

Seol Ye-rin took a step closer to Hyeokryeon Yeom and met Cheon Deung-jin's gaze head-on.

"The North Sea Ice Palace does not treat guests poorly."

Cheon Deung-jin bowed her head as if in gratitude.

For now, she was happy just to be able to follow Hyeokryeon Yeom.

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As the majestic dawn light of the Potala Palace flowed down the ridges of the snowy mountains, a foreign sense of intimidation arose within the cold fog wrapping the outskirts of the sanctuary.

It was a massive energy that neither the fishy smell of blood shed by the remnants of the Blood Cult nor the pure buddhist power of the Potala Palace warrior monks could dare to approach.

An overwhelming weight that only the strong could possess pressed down on the atmosphere and was transmitted through the ground.

Two men giving off a strange atmosphere were standing there.

One had eyes as thin and eerie as a snake, while the other boasted a massive physique like a heavy boulder.

However, what represented their identity was the bizarre weapons emitting a faint glow from both their arms, the Twin Rings.

Ten Venerables under the Heavens

Twin Venerables

The people of the world called them the Twin Venerables.

Originally, they were monsters who carried out secret objectives behind the scenes of the Murim while entrusting their bracelets, one of their divine items, to the Saphaeryeon Leader Yong Il-gang.

"Is it that guy? The brat from the Demonic Cult who stirred up the Great Thunder Temple and the Potala Palace."

Gwak Wi, one of the Twin Venerables, licked his lips and laughed fishily.

His gaze was fixed on the Buddhist Venerable's prayer beads shimmering brilliantly like the sun on Hyeokryeon Yeom's wrist.

Currently, they were chasing the Holy Hand Divine Physician Seong I-han.

It was to steal the bundle of tokens, which were said to be able to shake the Murim, that the Divine Physician had collected in exchange for treating patients all his life.

"It's not just the Buddhist Venerable's divine item. I can feel the energy of the Iron Venerable, Poison Venerable, and Fighting Venerable as well. If we had the bracelets we entrusted to the Saphaeryeon Leader, they would be vibrating crazily by now."

Jang Wi, standing next to him, clashed his huge fists together.

Kwaang, along with a loud roar, the surrounding rocks turned into powder and scattered.

The Twin Venerables' bracelets held by Yong Il-gang had the ability to resonate if other divine items of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens were nearby.

Although they had lent the bracelets to Yong Il-gang as a compass, being the masters of the divine items, they could instinctively feel it.

The fact that that man named Hyeokryeon Yeom was monopolizing as many as four legacies of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

"We are the ones who chased the Holy Hand Divine Physician while evading even the pursuit of the Blood Cult. But to think we would encounter such a windfall here. If we retrieve those legacies before getting our hands on the tokens, even the Saphaeryeon Leader won't be able to shut his mouth."

Gwak Wi's fingertips seeped toward the Twin Rings at his waist.

He had taken the lives of countless experts throughout his life, but it was his first time seeing someone emitting such a foreign yet destructive energy.

The form where Purple Demonic Fire and golden dharma power strangely coexisted was destroying even the common sense of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

"If one could ascend to the rank of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens just by obtaining legacies, then who in this world wouldn't be a genius. My Twin Rings will confirm if he's a guy who's only loud on the outside or the real deal."

As Jang Wi stepped lightly on the ground, the hard rocky mountain screamed.

The fighting spirit Jang Wi emitted had already far transcended the realm of ordinary masters.

In the eyes of the Twin Venerables, Hyeokryeon Yeom appeared less like a great martial artist and more like a massive treasure warehouse full of ripe fruits.

The cold logic of the Murim, that the one who snatches it first becomes the owner, flashed in their eyes.

"Hey, Gwak Wi. When do you intend to attack?"

"Let's aim for when they enter the Central Plains."

The Twin Venerables had chased them past the Southern Barbarians and all the way to the Western Regions.

Now was the time to appear before them and take the tokens from the Holy Hand Divine Physician.

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The white fortress of the Potala Palace began to gradually fade from view.

Sitting on the roof of the rattling carriage, I took out the letter from my bosom and read it again.

Cheon Jeok-pa had given it to me, saying it was a secret letter found on Ja Seong.

A secret order sent by Hyeokryeon Geuk to Ja Seong. The word 'Zither Venerable's divine item' written in it stimulated my nerves.

-Kukuku, Zither Venerable, you say. Does that mean the stuff of that old man crazy about wind and flow has appeared in the Central Plains Sword Gate?

'Do you know him?'

-Yes, he was someone who called himself the Refined Playboy. It seems that it remains the same even after generations.

The telepathic messages of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen brushed past my ears.

I fingered the Buddhist Venerable's prayer beads wrapped around my wrist.

Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddhist.

I was already carrying four divine items.

If it is true that the Ice Emperor, Seol Cheon-u, distributed these legacies.

'If I obtain the Zither Venerable's legacy, the Heavenly Cry Zither, I might be able to gain information about Seol Cheon-u.'

At that moment, a noisy commotion erupted from inside the carriage.

"Young Palace Head, please have some tea. I don't know if the Snow Tea of the North Sea will suit your taste compared to the High Mountain Tea of the Western Regions."

"Ah, thank you. Miss Seol. But I am more curious about the tea leaves the Young Master brought from the Southern Barbarians?"

Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin. The voices of the two women were incredibly soft, but the current flowing between them was sharp enough to explode at any moment.

Watching the complexions of Wi Ji-yeong and Mu-myeong, who were traveling together inside the carriage, turn pale, I made a troubled expression.

"Hehehe, Master, where are you heading now?"

Moyong Geum of the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild looked excited, saying he had made a connection with the Potala Palace.

"Didn't you say you had something to give me in exchange for connecting the distribution channel?"

"Ah, then how about stopping by the Moyong Clan this time?"

Since I was planning to stop by various places on the way back to the North Sea anyway.

"It doesn't seem like a bad idea, I'll ask the Young Palace Head."

"Yes. I will prepare a pair of swords made of Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron for you."

At the mention of swords made as a pair, my eyes shone.

"The Young Palace Head will like that."

Naturally, the next destination for our party was decided.

The destination was Liaoning.