

# MYST, MIGHT, MAYHEM

## Chapter 16

The second young master, Mok Eun-pyeong, had grand ambitions.

From a young age, he not only mastered the sword techniques of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, but also the fist techniques of the Hwe Beichang family, his mother Lady Jang's maternal family, demonstrating his exceptional martial arts talent.

Therefore, he was confident that he would naturally become the next leader of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

The eldest legitimate son, Mok Yeong-ho, was greedy and indulged in Desires, lacking the qualities of a successor, so Mok Eun-pyeong believed that the order of succession would naturally fall to him.

However, that was a miscalculation.

'Mok Yu-cheon.'

The leader's favor was with him, the youngest son.

It was understandable, as he possessed innate martial arts talent, mastering all the martial arts of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor at the mere age of fourteen and reaching the level of a first-rate expert.

As Mok Yu-cheon stood out, the leader kept delaying the decision on the succession.

Mok Eun-pyeong was certain that the leader's heart was swayed towards him.

'I can't miss this opportunity.'

He considered the leader's life being in danger as an opportunity.

Fortunately, Mok Yu-cheon was the son of a lowly concubine and had no power around him.

Unless the leader directly declared him as the successor, he was in a position where it would be difficult for him to become the leader with his own strength.

Therefore, the key was to eliminate the other candidates for succession.

'If I only consider them, no one can match me.'

Both of them were the epitome of incompetence.

The eldest young master, Mok Yeong-ho, only knew how to indulge in Desires, while the third young master, Mok Gyeong-un, was an incompetent coward.

However, behind Mok Yeong-ho was the First Madam, Lady Seok.

As she was from the Jinhua Seok family, she held considerable power.

Moreover, there were still many old fools among the retainers who advocated for the priority of the eldest son.

'Mok Gyeong-un...'

Among the brothers, the one who was inferior in all aspects except for his face that resembled a courtesan's companion had been coveting the position of successor for some time.

The First Madam looked down on him and paid no attention to him, but Mok Eun-pyeong was different.

'Was it Guard Gam?'

He had an escort who was beyond his station.

He was called Guard Gam, and when Mok Eun-pyeong first saw him, his martial arts skills were extraordinary enough to request the leader to make him his escort.

So, out of curiosity, he investigated his background and discovered quite an interesting fact.

No, it should be called a fact that required caution.

Because of this, Mok Eun-pyeong came to believe that he shouldn't carelessly let his guard down around the third young master, Mok Gyeong-un.

However, an unexpected event occurred.

Was the Luck is on my side ?

"You want to become my man?"

Mok Eun-pyeong barely managed to calm the corners of his twitching mouth.

The man kneeling on one knee in front of him, paying his respects, was none other than Mok Gyeong-un's escort warrior, Guard Gam.

The man he had wanted so much had come to him on his own.

At a very opportune moment.

"Please accept me, Young Master."

Seeing Guard Gam like this, Mok Eun-pyeong stroked his chin and spoke.

"Accept you... It's quite tempting."

At Mok Eun-pyeong's words, Guard Gam inwardly thought that it was a good start.

Guard Gam, who had planned to observe the leader's condition and the surrounding situation before making a decision, ultimately chose the second young master, Mok Eun-pyeong.

The eldest, Mok Yeong-ho, was too influenced by the First Madam, and the youngest, Mok Yu-cheon, had nothing but his own martial prowess.

'Although he's cunning, he's actually easier to handle this way.'

Therefore, he chose Mok Eun-pyeong as an alternative to the dead real Mok Gyeong-un.

Mok Eun-pyeong was cunning and suspicious, but Guard Gam was confident that he would accept him due to his greed for talent.

However,

"But you know, the timing is quite exquisite."

"Pardon?"

"As you know, I have a high regard for Guard Gam. But for you to ask me to accept you right before the succession competition, it makes me suspicious."

'As expected.'

At Mok Eun-pyeong's words, Guard Gam slightly nodded his head.

He had already guessed that Mok Eun-pyeong, who was naturally skeptical, wouldn't believe him right away.

"I understand. However, I have a reason why I can no longer serve Young Master Mok Gyeong-un."

"A reason why you can't serve Mok Gyeong-un?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I can't tell you right away."

At those words, Mok Eun-pyeong scoffed.

What was the point of not revealing the reason why he couldn't serve him anymore?

While Mok Eun-pyeong found it absurd, Guard Gam smiled brightly and said,

"That's because it's one of Mok Gyeong-un's weaknesses, so it's difficult for me to tell you right away. If you accept me, I can tell you as much as you want."

"Ha. Are you negotiating with me now?"

"Please understand my situation."

"Understand... Then, let's consider what you just said as something for the future. Can you tell me about his other weaknesses?"

"Of course."

"What are they?"

"Young Master Mok Gyeong-un currently cannot use martial arts at all."

"What?"

One of Mok Eun-pyeong's eyebrows twitched with interest.

"Is that true?"

"There's not a shred of falsehood."

"Did he suffer from a mental disorder?"

"...You could say it's similar."

In fact, since he was a fake, he couldn't have learned martial arts in the first place.

However, he couldn't publicize the fake Mok Gyeong-un's death by revealing this fact, so he glossed over it.

"Ha!"

At Guard Gam's words, Mok Eun-pyeong's face brightened.

That was to be expected, as the Yeon Mok Sword Manor was a martial arts family.

If the person who was to become the leader of a group that cultivated martial arts couldn't use martial arts, it was no different from losing the qualification to be the leader.

"You're saying that he lost his martial arts."

He already lacked talent in martial arts, but if he couldn't use martial arts at all, the situation was different.

He didn't even have the qualifications to participate in the succession competition.

To Mok Eun-pyeong, who couldn't hide his joy, Guard Gam said,

"If you accept me, I can provide you with even more useful information."

At his words, Mok Eun-pyeong pretended to contemplate for a moment, then smirked and said,

"I thought Guard Gam was playing the role of Huang Gai at the Red Cliffs."

Desperate strategy.

In the Battle of Red Cliffs, there was a story of Huang Gai, a retainer of Sun Quan of the Wu Kingdom, pretending to be tortured and falsely surrendering to Cao Cao of the Wei Kingdom.

Mok Eun-pyeong had thought that Guard Gam might be a spy sent by Mok Gyeong-un, knowing that he had coveted him for a long time.

In response, Guard Gam chuckled and said,

"I'm embarrassed to say this about my former master, but Young Master Mok Gyeong-un doesn't have the capacity to even think of such a strategy."

"Hahaha. That's probably true."

"Then will you accept me?"

“Of course. How can I let go of such a talented person?”

At Mok Eun-pyeong’s words, Guard Gam bowed his head in gratitude.

“Thank you for accepting me.”

“No, I should be the one thanking Guard Gam for making the right decision for the Yeon Mok Sword Manor. But I’m sorry to ask you for a favor right after you’ve joined me.”

At those words, Guard Gam tapped his chest and spoke heartily.

“Please give me any order.”

For now, he had to make a good impression on Mok Eun-pyeong.

However, unexpected words came out of Mok Eun-pyeong’s mouth.

“I thought Guard Gam, who was once an assassin, would be more than capable of doing it.”

‘!?’

Guard Gam’s expression stiffened.

He had suspected it, but he didn’t expect Mok Eun-pyeong to have investigated his past.

He knew Mok Eun-pyeong was cunning, but he had considered him still a novice, so it seemed he had let his guard down.

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Late in the hour of the zhu hour (11 PM to 1 AM).

It was a time when everyone was asleep, and even the escort warriors guarding the front of the infirmary were dozing off.

-Clatter!

‘Oho.’

When he opened the medicinal herb drawer labeled ‘O-yang,’ a hidden entrance was revealed.

Perhaps because it was a secret space, it didn’t make as much noise as he had worried.

Mok Gyeong-un entered the hidden entrance with a lamp in hand.

-Crunch crunch!

He quietly descended the underground stairs.

The stairs extended quite deep, more than he had expected.

'It's deep.'

It wasn't just one floor, but it went down more than two floors deep, which made him suspicious.

It was quite deep for a space created to hide the leader's seal and a secret manual.

When he had entered to a depth of about three floors,

A cavity about one-third the size of the infirmary came into view.

'Ah!'

In the cavity, there were four entrances that looked like stone doors.

And above the stone doors, the characters “甲乙丙丁[1]” were engraved.

[Medicinal... Hall... Underground... (丁, jeong)... stone... door... inside...]

Mok Gyeong-un recalled what the leader had said.

Since he had said it was inside the Jeong stone door among the four passages, there was no need to examine the other passages first. He could just enter that one.

Mok Gyeong-un approached the Jeong (丁) stone door.

When he opened the stone door, a straight tunnel passage was revealed.

'About twenty steps?'

That was roughly the distance.

Mok Gyeong-un, who was about to step inside, put his raised foot back on the ground and stopped.

It was because he suddenly noticed something on the ceiling of the tunnel passage.

'What is that?'

On the bumpy ceiling of the tunnel passage, there were holes large enough to insert two or three fingers if he reached out his hand.

If there was only one, it might not have been noticeable, but they were located at regular intervals along the passage, extending all the way inside.

Puzzled by this, Mok Gyeong-un surveyed his surroundings.

He noticed a few fist-sized stones on one side of the cavity.

‘Just in case.’

Mok Gyeong-un picked up a stone and tapped it on his hand, then threw it inside the passage.

-Clack!

Before the stone could even roll on the ground,

-Whoosh whoosh whoosh!

At that moment, sharp spears shot out from the right and left sides of the floor.

If he had entered without knowing, his legs or thighs would have been pierced by the spears.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un raised one corner of his mouth.

‘Interesting.’

Did they install such traps because they were afraid that someone might steal the seal and the secret manual?

It seemed quite excessive for that purpose.

Was the seal and the secret manual really inside?

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been staring into the tunnel, clenched and unclenched his hands repeatedly.

‘I’ll know when I see it.’

For now, he had to go inside to find out.

Mok Gyeong-un bit the handle of the lamp with his mouth and, without hesitation, jumped up towards the holes visible on the tunnel ceiling and inserted three fingers.

-Grab!

An ordinary person would find it difficult to support their body with just two fingers, but it wasn't a challenging task for Mok Gyeong-un.

-Swish! Grab!

Mok Gyeong-un reached out his left hand to the hole in front and inserted his index and middle fingers.

In this way, Mok Gyeong-un moved about two steps along the ceiling.

'I was right.'

As expected, his guess was correct.

If he inserted his fingers into the holes on the ceiling and moved without touching the ground, the tunnel's traps wouldn't be triggered.

Realizing this, Mok Gyeong-un advanced without a moment's hesitation, inserting his fingers into the holes on the ceiling in front of the passage.

-Grab! Grab! Grab!

After moving about 20 steps like that, the tunnel passage ended, and a space of about 7 pyeong (approximately 23 square meters) came into view.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes flickered with interest as he entered.

'What is this?'

Inside, there were several sacks, and the surroundings were filled with numerous traces.

'Footprints?'

In the deeply worn-out parts of the floor, there were numerous footprints, and there were also many traces of impacts on the walls.

Mok Gyeong-un walked over and looked inside the sacks.

There were small pellets inside, and after sniffing them, Mok Gyeong-un realized what they were.

'Pill for Abstaining from Grains (Bigeokdan)[2]?'

Bigeokdan.

It was a pill made by mixing pine pollen and various grains, used by Taoist practitioners for closed-door cultivation in places like caves.

It was meant to supplement the minimum amount of grain energy, but depending on the combination, it could also help expel toxins from the body.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had extensive knowledge of medicinal herbs, had often eaten bigeokdan made by his grandfather as a snack.

‘Why are there sacks of bigeokdan here?’

It seemed to be for the purpose of staying here for a long time.

Had someone been practicing martial arts or something here alone?

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been fiddling with the bigeokdan inside the sack, soon turned his gaze elsewhere.

On one side of the wall, there was something like a display case, and inside it were several wooden boxes.

‘Is that it?’

Mok Gyeong-un approached it and opened one of the eye-catching wooden boxes.

When he opened it, a book was inside.

[Ignited Wood Sword Formation] –see notes at the end of this chapter for explanation

‘Is this the secret manual?’

Mok Gyeong-un took out the book and flipped through it quickly.

Inside, numerous sword techniques and movements were described in detail.

Although he hadn’t learned martial arts, he could at least tell that this was swordsmanship.

‘Is this it?’

He wasn’t sure if this was exactly the secret manual that the First Madam was after.

In the first place, he had no idea what the martial arts of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor were, so there was nothing he could do about it.

Mok Gyeong-un opened another wooden box.

-Click!

When he opened the box,

[Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Technique] – see notes for explanation

A book titled Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Technique was inside. Mok Gyeong-un took it out, flipped through it quickly, and nodded his head. It seemed to be a pair with the Ignited Wood Sword Formation in front, and it contained detailed descriptions of breathing techniques and qi circulation methods for gathering and controlling internal energy.

'I should take this too.'

Mok Gyeong-un opened the other boxes in order. The other boxes didn't contain any books related to martial arts, but there were a few unexpectedly interesting items.

However, the leader's seal was still nowhere to be seen.

'This is the only box left.'

There was nothing else around.

So Mok Gyeong-un took out the box that was near the floor.

But unlike the other wooden boxes, this box had an old paper with patterns drawn on it attached to the opening part.

Judging from the paper torn in half, it seemed to have been attached as a sign not to open the box.

Mok Gyeong-un opened it without much thought.

He naturally thought that the leader's seal would be inside, but,

'!?'

Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head.

Inside, there was no manor master's seal that should have been there, but an old book surrounded by a red rosary, emitting an extremely pungent smell.

But what was surprising was that the cover of the book,

'Is this... human skin?'

No matter how he looked at it, it seemed to be made of human skin.

If an ordinary person had realized that this was made of human skin, they might have been frightened, but Mok Gyeong-un showed a quite intrigued expression.

'What could this be?'

He was about to reach out his hand at that very moment.

-Swoosh!

At that instant, something appeared like smoke, penetrating through the ceiling.

It was none other than the Demonic Monk.

Mok Gyeong-un had made him keep watch above, just like with Guard Go Chan, so his appearance meant that someone was approaching the infirmary.

-...

As expected, the Demonic Monk was trying to say something.

But when the Demonic Monk saw the item inside the wooden box in Mok Gyeong-un's hand,

-!!!!

He trembled all over,

-Thud!

He down himself on the floor and began to perform something like a bow with a face full of reverence.

## Chapter 17

The Demonic Monk, a wandering spirit and a monster, bowed with fear and reverence.

As he showed this unexpected reaction, Mok Gyeong-un looked at the book inside the wooden box with curious eyes.

A bizarre book made of human skin.

Why was the Demonic Monk reacting like this upon seeing this book surrounded by a rosary?

Unconsciously, Mok Gyeong-un reached out his hand towards the book inside the wooden box.

And the moment his fingertips touched it,

-Thump!

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed.

‘...A heartbeat?’

In an instant.

In a fleeting moment, he felt a heartbeat.

It was as clear as a beating heart.

However, this heartbeat paradoxically did not occur because it was alive.

Rather, it was closer to death.

-Thump! Thump!

The heartbeat seemed to be getting stronger.

‘...’

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been staring intently at the book, closed the lid of the wooden box.

A strong attraction arose.

He wanted to remove the rosary and see what was inside, but it seemed difficult to do so at the moment.

The reason the Demonic Monk appeared was because someone had intruded into the infirmary.

‘An intruder.’

Mok Gyeong-un licked his upper lip as if he was disappointed.

Then he turned his gaze upwards.

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-Tap! Tap!

A black-masked figure was moving through the tiles of the building.

The masked figure spotted Guard Go Chan guarding the only passage leading to the infirmary and further suppressed his presence.

'Hmm.'

The masked figure's eyes flickered with interest.

That was to be expected, as Mok Gyeong-un had two escorts.

One of them could be considered no longer Mok Gyeong-un's man, so in reality, it was no exaggeration to say that he only had one escort left.

'But why isn't he guarding his side?'

Normally, an escort would guard right by their master's side.

But he was guarding the passage, away from the infirmary?

'It's one of two things.'

The first possibility was that the master he was guarding was sensitive, so he couldn't stay by his side.

But this didn't seem to be the case.

It didn't make sense to guard a master whose thigh had been pierced from a distance.

Then it was the second possibility, the latter one.

That was,

'Is he keeping watch?'

On the master's order, he was monitoring the surroundings to see if someone else was coming.

There was no way he would be away from his master if that wasn't the case.

The masked figure stroked his chin.

'Keeping watch in the early morning hours of the rat without sleeping...'

This was getting more interesting than expected.

His name was Jo Il-sang.

He was one of the three escorts of the second young master, Mok Eun-pyeong.

[Just in case, I need to check. Whether it's a desperate strategy or not.]

The order he received from Mok Eun-pyeong was one.

To find out whether Mok Gyeong-un had truly lost his martial arts or not.

If he hadn't lost them, it would mean that Guard Gam had falsely asked to be accepted, and if he really couldn't use martial arts, then the request to be accepted would be the truth.

[Shall I just check?]

[Then it wouldn't be fun. If he really lost his martial arts, give him a proper scare. Tell him not to act recklessly.]

[Hehehe. Understood.]

That's how he came here, as one of the three escorts.

Jo Il-sang's martial arts could be considered between a second-rate warrior and a first-rate expert.

He stepped forward because he was a notch above Go Chan.

-Swish! Tap!

Jo Il-sang moved in a different direction to avoid Go Chan's gaze and leaped over the wall.

After crossing the wall, Jo Il-sang climbed onto the roof of the infirmary and crawled through the gap between the tiles.

'What could he be doing that he set up a watch despite being injured?'

Was it because his injury was fake?

Or was the information that he had lost his martial arts false?

Regardless, there had to be a reason for doing so.

'Let's see what he's hiding.'

Thus, Jo Il-sang infiltrated the infirmary by entering through the gap between the tiles.

Suppressing even his breath, he quietly hung from the ceiling and observed below, and one of his eyebrows raised upwards.

'What is this?'

He saw a scene that was different from what he had expected.

In Jo Il-sang's eyes, where disappointment was evident, Mok Gyeong-un was seen reading a book with only his upper body raised on the bed, with a single lamp lit.

'He's just reading a book?'

Jo Il-sang suspiciously surveyed the surroundings.

However, there was no one inside the infirmary except for Mok Gyeong-un.

'Strange.'

He hadn't entered through the door, and Go Chan, his only escort, was keeping watch outside, so there was no way he could have noticed.

He thought someone might have informed him, but that didn't seem to be the case either.

Then...

'Could there be a secret in that book?'

That possibility couldn't be ruled out either.

Anyway, he had to make contact to confirm whether he had martial arts or not.

Jo Il-sang carefully suppressed his presence and moved along the ceiling towards the bed where Mok Gyeong-un was.

And then,

-Thud!

He jumped down.

At the same time, Jo Il-sang snatched the book that Mok Gyeong-un was reading with lightning speed.

-Snatch!

Jo Il-sang, who had snatched the book, naturally expected Mok Gyeong-un to be startled or counterattack.

However, contrary to his expectations, Mok Gyeong-un neither counterattacked nor showed any signs of surprise.

Rather, he was looking at him nonchalantly.

“Who...”

-Swish!

As Mok Gyeong-un tried to say something, Jo Il-sang aimed a dagger at his throat and whispered,

“If you don’t want to die, be quiet.”

“...”

Mok Gyeong-un closed his mouth.

Things seemed to be going well, but Jo Il-sang’s mood wasn’t like that.

‘This fellow...’

Suddenly, someone wearing a mask appeared, snatched the book, aimed a dagger at his throat, and was threatening him.

Normally, anyone would be perplexed.

No, they should show signs of fear or tension.

However, Mok Gyeong-un was looking at him with an expressionless face, without any emotional change, as if it was an everyday occurrence.

‘Judging from his reaction...’

He seemed like someone who knew in advance that he would come.

But that couldn't be.

Then, to show such a calm appearance, he must possess extraordinary martial prowess to at least protect his own life.

'!?'

Jo Il-sang's eyes narrowed.

Come to think of it, regardless of whether he had martial arts or not, when a person was startled, their body would move in some way as a conditioned reflex.

But Mok Gyeong-un didn't move at all.

'Could it be that the information about him losing his martial arts is false?'

-Glance!

Jo Il-sang turned his eyes and looked at the book he had snatched.

However, upon seeing the title of the book, Jo Il-sang's eyes trembled as if he had gone mad.

'!!!!!!!!'

It was none other than,

[Ignited Wood Sword Formation]

Among the people of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, there was no one who didn't know the name of this sword technique.

This sword technique symbolized the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

The reason was that this sword technique was a martial art that contained profound principles that only the leader of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor could master.

'Ha...'

Jo Il-sang's next action was something that even he himself hadn't planned.

Jo Il-sang grabbed Mok Gyeong-un's shoulder with the technique of Geumnasu and pressed down, pulling him.

At the same time, he struck the acupoint on the back of his head with the hand holding the dagger.

-Smack!

Mok Gyeong-un, who was struck, lowered his head.

Jo Il-sang exhaled roughly, his heart pounding and his breathing ragged.

“Haa...”

In a moment of surprise at the secret manual of Ignited Wood Sword Formation, he had struck the acupoint on the fellow’s back of the head and made him faint.

‘Was this the reason he set up a watch?’

Jo Il-sang brought his hand to the acupoint of the unconscious Mok Gyeong-un.

He had forgotten for a moment, but he also had to check whether Mok Gyeong-un had lost his martial arts or not.

-Swish!

Jo Il-sang placed his hand on the acupoint and sent his true energy into Mok Gyeong-un’s body.

‘Ah!’

There was no need for a long confirmation.

If there was even a little bit of internal energy, as soon as someone else’s true energy entered, a reactive force would occur, or there would be some kind of rejection reaction.

However, Mok Gyeong-un had none of that.

-Press press!

Jo Il-sang pressed Mok Gyeong-un’s abdomen near the danjeon.

‘It’s not there.’

He really had no danjeon.

The corners of Jo Il-sang’s mouth rose.

After examining Mok Gyeong-un’s martial arts, the second young master Mok Eun-pyeong’s request to scare him had already disappeared from his mind.

Jo Il-sang opened the pages of the secret manual Ignited Wood Sword Formation and flipped through them.

“Hehe!”

Jo Il-sang’s lips twitched as he flipped through a few pages.

He almost laughed without realizing it.

He had wondered if it might be fake, but this was undoubtedly the genuine sword techniques of Ignited Wood Sword Formation.

From the very beginning, the sword techniques were extraordinary.

‘Calm down.’

He never dreamed that this would be in Mok Gyeong-un’s hands.

The leader was already in critical condition, likely to pass away any day now, and the retainers were also very concerned about the situation as the leader’s seal and the secret manual of Ignited Wood Sword Formation, the leader’s exclusive martial art, were missing, which were important for the succession.

But now, Ignited Wood Sword Formation had fallen into his hands.

‘This is enough.’

Obtaining Ignited Wood Sword Formation was truly a stroke of luck.

If his lord, Mok Eun-pyeong, were to learn Ignited Wood Sword Formation, the leader’s exclusive martial art, even if the current leader were to die like this, the next leader would be in his lord’s hands.

‘An advantageous position.’

No matter how much the leader doted on the youngest, Mok Yu-cheon, during his lifetime, or even if the eldest, Mok Yeong-ho, was there, as long as they were a martial arts family, the retainers would eventually have to support his lord.

While he was rejoicing, at that very moment,

-Flinch!

Suddenly, a strong chill ran through his entire body, making his skin crawl.

At the same time, something pressed down on his shoulder.

'What is this?'

Startled, Jo Il-sang hurriedly tried to draw up his internal energy.

Right at that moment,

-Smack!

"Ugh!"

Someone struck his danjeon area with a fist.

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un, whom he believed he had knocked out.

'What... What kind of strength?'

Is this the strength of a fellow who has no internal energy?

It was at least above second-rate.

-Tremble!

Caught off guard and before he could draw up his internal energy, Jo Il-sang's body became stiff for a very brief moment after being struck in the danjeon.

But that brief moment worked very unfavorably for him.

"Ack!"

-Thud! Thud!

The blood vessels bulged.

The bizarre sensation penetrating through his pressed shoulder.

This sensation made him suffer and feel pain so much that it made him shudder.

Jo Il-sang gritted his teeth and tried to push away this strange sensation with his true energy.

However,

-Smack!

Not missing that moment, Mok Gyeong-un swung his fist, striking his jaw while simultaneously throwing punches at his abdomen.

-Bam bam bam bam smack!

Normally, these methods wouldn't have worked on Jo Il-sang, who was approaching the level of a first-rate expert.

But a moment of carelessness from obtaining the secret manual.

And in a situation where a sensation that caused chills throughout his body was pressing down on his shoulder, he couldn't endure the punches that relentlessly targeted only the area near his danjeon, no matter who he was.

"Argh! You... You bastard..."

"You're sturdy. Then."

-Whack!

Mok Gyeong-un grabbed the back of his head with both hands, pulled him in, and struck his face with his knee.

-Crack!

"Ugh!"

The sound of his nose and teeth breaking could be heard.

Nevertheless, Mok Gyeong-un continued to punch the face of Jo Il-sang, who was staggering backwards.

-Smack smack!

Even to the point where blood soaked his fists, Mok Gyeong-un didn't stop.

'Cru...el...'

Jo Il-sang quickly lost consciousness like that.

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How long has it been?

Jo Il-sang, who had regained consciousness, opened his eyes with difficulty.

Upon opening his eyes, he felt like his head was going to explode.

'What is happened...?'

Having just woken up, he couldn't properly remember what had happened.

But soon, it came back to him.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been striking his face like a madman with an expressionless face.

'shit...'

He had let his guard down completely.

No, should it be called carelessness?

The first strike was indeed due to his carelessness after confirming that the fellow had no danjeon, but what followed wasn't.

'What was that sensation?'

He couldn't forget that spine-chilling sensation.

Because of that sensation, his body had become stiff, and he tried to endure it with his internal energy, but Mok Gyeong-un kept striking his danjeon and vital points, causing him to lose consciousness.

In fact, it wouldn't have been strange if he had died.

'...What is happened was that?'

Jo Il-sang was puzzled.

He had definitely confirmed that Mok Gyeong-un had no internal energy.

But if he had that level of striking power, it was no exaggeration to say that he possessed strength almost equal to his own.

'shit.'

"Haa... Haa..."

But for now, that wasn't what was important.

Jo Il-sang struggled to open his eyes, which were stuck together with dried blood, and surveyed his surroundings.

'!?'

Jo Il-sang frowned as he looked around.

This wasn't the infirmary.

Come to think of it, he had been feeling a strangely cool and damp sensation for a while, and it seemed to be some kind of cave.

-Drip! Drip!

'Huh?'

Jo Il-sang noticed drops of sweat or blood flowing from his body and rising into the air.

He wondered what kind of phenomenon this was, but it was,

'Could it be... Am I hanging upside down right now?'

Now he seemed to understand why his face felt like it was going to burst.

He thought it was because his face hurt from being beaten so much, but it was a phenomenon caused by the blood rushing to his head as he was hanging upside down.

"Haa... Haa..."

Jo Il-sang's breathing became rough.

He didn't know where this place was, but something felt unsettling.

It seemed like he needed to escape quickly.

"Phew."

Jo Il-sang focused on his breathing and tried to draw out the energy from his danjeon.

However,

'What, what is this?'

But strength didn't enter his entire body.

He wanted to concentrate, but it didn't feel like the sensation in all parts of his body except for his face had disappeared.

"Wh-why is this happening?"

A cry escaped his bewildered mouth.

-Swish!

While he was doing that, he heard someone's presence.

"Looks like you're awake."

When he looked at the place where the sound came from, he saw Mok Gyeong-un walking on the ceiling upside down.

Of course, it only appeared that way because of his inverted vision.

Surprised by the paralyzed sensation throughout his body, Jo Il-sang shouted,

"Wh-what the .... did you do?"

In response to his question, the corners of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth rose as if they would tear to his ears.

"Who knows? What could I have done?"

-Shudder!

Unlike his smile, the ominous malice itself was evident in his eyes.

Jo Il-sang felt a chill for the first time in his life.

Chapter 18

"Wh-what the .... did you do to my body?"

In response to his question, Mok Gyeong-un smiled brightly and said,

"Who knows? What could I have done?"

-Shudder!

His mouth was clearly smiling.

But his eyes, like those of a dead person, didn't move at all.

Seeing this, Jo Il-sang felt a chill for the first time in his life.

'Is this fellow... really that Mok Gyeong-un?'

The Mok Gyeong-un he knew was, without exaggeration, the most pathetic among the brothers of the Mok family.

But he never expected to see him like this.

The atmosphere was completely different.

It felt like he was facing a being that was on a different level, not an ordinary human.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un approached him and spoke.

“You seem to be trembling a lot. Well... don’t worry. If it were the usual method, I would have started by cutting somewhere, but now I’ve used Dispersion Powder.”

“Dispersion Powder?”

In response to Jo Il-sang’s question, Mok Gyeong-un pointed upwards with his finger and said,

“This is a really good place.”

“What?”

“Previously, when I needed medicinal herbs, I had to search the mountains thoroughly to find them, but with so many medicinal herbs here, I can combine them as much as I need.”

“Combining medicinal herbs? What did you do to me?”

“It’s nothing much. If you grind and mix the toxic Rosebay[1], Soul-Numbing Powder, and the roots of Trillium, you can paralyze everything except the head.”

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un spoke nonchalantly.

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un like this, Jo Il-sang swallowed his saliva with trembling eyes.

what the .... was this fellow?

Since when did he have such knowledge of medicinal herbs?

Mok Gyeong-un, who was puzzled, slightly bent his knees, met his gaze, grabbed his hair, and said,

-Grab!

“Actually, these things aren’t that important. What’s important is why the second young master, Mok Eun-pyeong, sent you.”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Jo Il-sang closed his mouth.

If he was going to tell him that, he wouldn't have worn a mask from the beginning.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

"You've become tight-lipped. Of course, since you came wearing a mask, you have no intention of talking nicely, right? What should I do?"

\*\*\*

Just a moment ago.

[...This person is Jo Il-sang, an escort of the second young master, Mok Eun-pyeong. But Young Master, what will you do with him?]

Go Chan was dumbfounded.

Jo Il-sang was a skilled martial artist approaching the level of a first-rate expert.

Did Mok Gyeong-un, who couldn't even move properly due to his pierced thigh, subdue such a person?

Just how much was this fellow hiding?

It was beyond comprehension.

[He's a man of the second young master?]

[That's right.]

[Why did he send him?]

[I don't know either. Judging from the fact that he even wore a mask, it doesn't seem to be for a good reason.]

[I guess there's no clue?]

[Even if he's the second young master, it's unlikely that he would have made a reckless assassination attempt while the leader is still alive. But I really don't know why he sent him.]

[Then I'll have to find out directly.]

[What? You don't mean you're going to torture him or something, right?]

[That would be a good method too.]

[Y-Young Master! It's better to let him go.]

[Let him go?]

Go Chan warned the puzzled Mok Gyeong-un.

[The second young master has retainers who follow him and has built his own power base. If we carelessly provoke him by mistreating his man...]

[There could be consequences, you mean?]

[...Yes. I apologize for angering you, but if we provoke him carelessly, it could become dangerous.]

[Hmm.]

'Hmm?'

Go Chan looked at Mok Gyeong-un with an uneasy expression.

Judging by his thought process, he was terrifyingly cunning, but it was unpredictable where he would go off to.

But one thing he could say with certainty.

No matter what the second young master's motive was for sending a masked night visitor, there was nothing Mok Gyeong-un could do in his current situation.

Other than enduring it.

[Well, I'll think about it.]

[...You really shouldn't touch him.]

[Yes, I understand what you're saying, Guard Go Chan.]

Right.

No matter how unpredictable he was, as long as he was aware of the current situation, he thought Mok Gyeong-un wouldn't do anything reckless to make enemies.

Unlike the First Madam, who was cautious in everything despite being arrogant, the second young master was cunning but still young and emotional.

\*\*\*

Jo Il-sang, who had been tense, seemed to have calmed down a bit as he caught his breath and spoke.

“What do you intend to do, and what can you do?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Since you know who I am, it would be better to let me go.”

“It would be better to let you go?”

“That’s right. Even if you’ve already done it, if you further harm me, do you think the second young master will stay still?”

Jo Il-sang deliberately mentioned his backing.

He didn’t know what Mok Gyeong-un’s intentions were for capturing him like this, but this was the end.

What difference would it make even if he knew his identity?

Wearing a mask was simply to handle the matter quietly.

The second young master, Mok Eun-pyeong, had a strong sense of pride, so he would never forgive anyone who touched his men.

Jo Il-sang said to Mok Gyeong-un, whose one eyebrow had raised.

“Since it has come to this, let’s make a deal.”

“A deal?”

“Yes. If you let me go and give me the secret manual of Ignited Wood Sword Formation, I will speak to the young master and ask him to leave you alone, the third young master.”

“Leave me alone means...”

“It means you will be able to live safely even if the young master becomes the leader.”

“And the price is the secret manual of Ignited Wood Sword Formation, right?”

“That’s right.”

Although he was inwardly tense due to the unfavorable situation, Jo Il-sang took a strong stance.

He thought that in such a situation, it was necessary to establish a clear hierarchy.

If he showed weakness, he thought Mok Gyeong-un would come on strong instead.

‘In the end, he’ll have no choice but to yield.’

Ignited Wood Sword Formation was a pearl in the pig’s throat for Mok Gyeong-un.

His maternal family was ruined, and none of the retainers supported him.

If it was an item that was too much for him anyway, it wouldn’t be a bad condition at all to hand it over like this and use it to preserve his life...

-Grip!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed Jo Il-sang’s hair that he was holding.

“Huh? You?”

“Interesting. In a situation where your body may not remain intact, you trust your backing and make a reverse proposal.”

“You bastard...”

“I’ve heard enough, and from now on, I’ll start with your fingers one by one.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un took out a peculiarly shaped blade.

‘!?’

“This is a blade called Hasak, used for trimming medicinal herbs. It’s for cutting hard things, so it can easily cut fingers or toes.”

“What?”

“You can trust me because it’s been verified.”

He had used it quite a lot.

Startled by this, Jo Il-sang hurriedly said to Mok Gyeong-un,

“Y-you! Did you not understand what I said? I came under the orders of the second young master. If you harm me, he will...”

“Yes, you talk too much, so I’ll cut one and start.”

Saying that, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed one of Jo Il-sang’s paralyzed and limp wrists.

Then he inserted his right index finger into the hole of the Hasak.

Seeing this, Jo Il-sang’s face turned deathly pale.

“S-stop. Are you really insane? Like this...”

-Crunch!

At that moment, the sound of something hard being cut off was heard.

Jo Il-sang moved his head with a stiff expression and looked at something that had fallen on the floor.

It was the two joints of his index finger.

“...”

Jo Il-sang was speechless.

In the first place, he had no sensation anywhere except his head, so it didn’t hurt.

But seeing his severed finger, he was dumbfounded and at a loss for words.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smile,

“It doesn’t hurt, so it doesn’t feel real, right? That’s why when using Hasak, I usually don’t paralyze the body with Dispersion Powder and just tie them up. That way, they can feel some pain. But since you’ve learned martial arts, I had no choice.”

That’s why Mok Gyeong-un had to use Dispersion Powder.

So, to give at least a visual effect, he brought it right in front of him and cut off his finger.

“I’ve rambled on for too long. From now on, I’ll just cut one by one until you talk.”

-Grab!

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed Jo Il-sang’s second finger.

It was the middle finger of his right hand.

Jo Il-sang, whose middle finger was grabbed, was momentarily dazed, then said in a panic,

“S-stop!”

“...”

-Crunch!

Despite his plea to stop, Mok Gyeong-un cut off Jo Il-sang’s middle finger with the Hasak.

The severed middle finger could be seen twitching on the floor.

Jo Il-sang, who had to stare at it, felt like his mind was going to turn upside down.

Then, he heard Mok Gyeong-un’s voice.

“Shall we do the thumb this time?”

As soon as he finished speaking, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed the thumb and inserted it directly into the hole of the Hasak.

Seeing this, Jo Il-sang couldn’t hide his perplexity.

He was right-handed.

If his thumb was cut off here, he wouldn’t be able to do anything with his right hand anymore.

“S-sto...”

He couldn’t finish his words.

No matter what he said, this madman would cut it off no matter what.

-Squeeze!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un’s hand holding the Hasak was about to exert force.

At that instant, a voice burst out of Jo Il-sang’s mouth.

“young master Eun-pyeong sent me to confirm whether you really lost your martial arts or not!”

At those words, the force in Mok Gyeong-un’s hand holding the Hasak loosened.

It had slightly dug into the flesh of his thumb, but fortunately, it wasn't cut off.

-Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

Although his body was paralyzed, Jo Il-sang felt his heartbeat strongly.

It was strange.

He had been tortured in the past as well.

But Mok Gyeong-un's method had pushed him to the brink of death too quickly.

"Haa... Haa..."

"He sent you to confirm whether I lost my martial arts or not?"

"Th-that's right."

Jo Il-sang, whose fear had grown, didn't realize it, but his manner of speaking had become quite polite.

Regardless, Mok Gyeong-un didn't hide his puzzlement.

That was because he hadn't been exposed as a fake, so he became suspicious when he heard that Jo Il-sang had received such an order.

'Hmm.'

At this point, Mok Gyeong-un's thoughts quickly approached the truth.

'If he received such an order without being exposed as a fake, it means he obtained that information from someone. But there are only two people who know that I'm a fake.'

Guard Go Chan and Guard Gam.

Among them, Guard Go Chan had been with him continuously.

The corners of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth rose.

'He switched sides quickly.'

Mok Gyeong-un was convinced that the source of this information was Guard Gam.

His betrayal was predetermined from the beginning.

But he didn't expect him to switch sides so quickly.

Thanks to that, things had become troublesome.

'But at least he used his brain.'

In case he had to take responsibility, he must have informed them in a way that suggested Mok Gyeong-un had lost his martial arts while switching sides, so as not to expose the fact that he was a fake.

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said to Jo Il-sang,

"By any chance, was the person who told you this Guard Gam?"

Jo Il-sang's eyes slightly widened.

Until now, Mok Gyeong-un shouldn't have known that Guard Gam had pledged loyalty to his lord, so how did he guess it in one go?

'Did he suspect it from the beginning?'

Jo Il-sang, who was puzzled, soon answered.

"...That's right."

"As expected."

It didn't deviate from his expectations.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been nodding his head, stared intently at Jo Il-sang.

"Now, what should I do?"

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Jo Il-sang spoke in a pleading voice.

"P-please spare me. I will definitely keep today's events a secret. I won't tell young master Eun-pyeong, so..."

"Ah... What should I do about this?"

"Pardon?"

"I think I've inflicted too many wounds for that."

Although Jo Il-sang himself wasn't aware of it, his face was almost completely battered.

His nose bone was broken and depressed, and his cheekbones and forehead were grotesquely protruding, as if the bones had been fractured.

Moreover, two of his fingers had been cut off.

One way or another, Mok Eun-pyeong would find out and become greatly enraged.

“Y-Young Master... Even if I disappear, young master Eun-pyeong will surely seek revenge.”

“Well, probably. But you don’t need to worry about that.”

“Why?”

“Everyone seems to dread the secret manual of Ignited Wood Sword Formation, so if need be, I can use it to negotiate. Isn’t that okay?”

“...”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Jo Il-sang’s mind went blank.

It was because, as Mok Gyeong-un said, if he negotiated using Ignited Wood Sword Formation, the leader’s exclusive sword technique, even Mok Eun-pyeong, who cherished his subordinates, would likely let it pass.

Jo Il-sang, who was dazed and perplexed, hurriedly said,

“Young Master... I had no idea you were so brilliant and outstanding. So, like Guard Gam, I also want to pledge my loyalty to you.”

“To me?”

“Y-yes. Please give me a chance. I will dedicate my life to you.”

All sorts of words came out.

It was to save his life.

“You’ll even dedicate your life?”

“Th-that’s right. So please...”

“Hmm. Is that so?”

Seeing Jo Il-sang like this, Mok Gyeong-un slightly tilted his head and went somewhere.

“Young Master? Young Master?”

Feeling uneasy, Jo Il-sang called out to Mok Gyeong-un.

It didn't take long.

After a while, Mok Gyeong-un appeared with a wooden box in his hand, which had traces of something peculiar attached to it.

Mok Gyeong-un placed the wooden box under Jo Il-sang's head, who was hanging upside down.

"What's this?"

When he expressed his puzzlement, Mok Gyeong-un soon opened the lid of the wooden box.

Upon opening the lid, something that looked like an old book tied with an old rosary was revealed.

Why is he showing this to me? While Jo Il-sang was completely clueless, his eyes soon trembled.

'Could it be?'

It was because he realized that the material of the book was not paper.

To the perplexed Jo Il-sang, Mok Gyeong-un said,

"Before you woke up, I tried to read this book, but strangely, the part tied with the rosary was fixed, and no matter what I did, it couldn't be removed."

"That... How will you..."

"I saw in the Basic Writings of the School of Yin and Yang that there is something overflowing with spiritual energy that seals evil things. This rosary seems to be one of them."

"Young Master, please..."

Mok Gyeong-un ignored his words and continued his own.

"But it says that if there's another evil thing added to that sealing item, its power weakens."

"Wh-what are you trying to do?"

"Like this."

-Slice!

“Ack!”

As soon as he finished speaking, Mok Gyeong-un swiftly cut Jo Il-sang’s throat with something sharp.

The last scream was the final sound Jo Il-sang made.

As if his vocal cords had been cut, only gurgling sounds came from Jo Il-sang’s mouth.

Mok Gyeong-un said with a bright smile,

“You said you could even dedicate your life, right?”

‘You... You son of a bitch...’

Who said they would dedicate their life in this way?

Jo Il-sang glared at Mok Gyeong-un with eyes full of resentment.

It was too much of a shame to lose his life like this.

-Whoosh!

The red blood flowing from Jo Il-sang’s sliced throat.

That blood poured onto the book made of human skin tied with a rosary inside the wooden box.

And it soaked the rosary and the book.

The blood of a dying man.

Blood filled with resentment.

As it soaked the book, a bizarre phenomenon occurred.

-Thump! Thump!

The heartbeat sound that could be heard without even directly touching the book grew louder.

As if it were a heart, something like blood vessels bulged on the outer surface of the book.

‘Oho.’

-Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

Soon, the heartbeat sound grew even louder and faster,

-Crack crack crack crack!

The rosaries that were tying the book began to crack.

Then,

-Crunch crunch crunch crunch!

The rosaries that were trembling as if in agony were suddenly compressed as if something had grabbed them, and they shattered.

The shattered pieces were sucked into the blood pooled inside the wooden box.

Along with that, a bizarre incident occurred in the cavity.

-Gush gush gush!

Blood began to fall like a waterfall from the entire wall of the cavity, flowing along the ceiling.

It was a sight that made one doubt their own eyes.

The corners of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth reached his ears as he watched this.

[The fifth level, Green ghost... extremely dangerous. At least ten or more diviners are required for exorcism. An old wandering spirit that has existed for over a hundred years. It can exert an enormous influence within a set radius and even cause auditory and visual hallucinations, inflicting pain.]

## Chapter 19

[The fifth level, Green ghost... extremely dangerous. At least ten or more diviners are required for exorcism. An old wandering spirit that has existed for over a hundred years. It can exert an enormous influence within a set radius and even cause auditory and visual hallucinations, inflicting pain.]

This is written in the "Synopsis of Various Philosophers: Basic Writings of the School of Yin and Yang.

And in the latter part of this, it is described:

A wandering spirit that has existed for over a hundred years loses its human qualities from that point onward and enters the realm of true monsters.

A true monster refers to the eerie and sinister supernatural beings (Imaemangnyang) [1] itself.

'Ha...'

Sealing.

It literally serves the role of trapping something.

The old rosary.

The moment it was compressed and shattered, a bizarre spectacle unfolded.

-Gush gush gush!

Blood poured down like a waterfall from the entire wall of the cavity, flowing along the ceiling and filling the surroundings with blood.

The flowing blood quickly filled the floor, making it muddy.

At this, the corners of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth reached his ears.

His anticipation heightened.

'Monster...'

This was undoubtedly a monster.

Moreover, it was an existence incomparable to the Demonic Monk.

He had hoped for something around the level of a Green ghost, but an existence beyond that unexpectedly appeared.

It was a moment when a diviner would have been perplexed.

-Thump! Thump!

'Heartbeat.'

In the cavity that was gradually filling with blood, the sound of a beating heart could be heard.

Then, a bizarre incident occurred.

In the center of the cavity where blood was flowing from all directions, a heartbeat sound emanated, and soon, a heart was formed around it.

-Whoosh!

Blood gathered around the heart.

The blood formed into one organ, then two, then three.

And bones quickly enveloped the organs, followed by muscles attaching to the bones.

-Clack clack!

Soon, pale skin emerged on the surface of the muscles.

The entire process was awe-inspiring, as if witnessing the birth of “something.”

-Gush!

The blood gushed upwards, becoming a reverse waterfall and enveloping the being whose skin was forming.

And the moment the blood waterfall was sucked into the ceiling,

-Creak

The being revealed itself.

It was a beautiful being with a pale face and disheveled long hair hanging down, despite wearing a crown.

The being, wearing a red inner garment and a black outer garment, was holding a long pipe.

Its appearance was even more natural than the Demonic Monk.

-Phew.

The being, with its red lips, took a deep puff from the pipe and exhaled smoke.

Judging solely by its appearance, it looked to be in its late teens at most, but due to its attire, it was difficult to discern whether it was male or female.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un didn't care about such things.

“Quite a grandiose entrance. May I ask who...”

Before he could even finish his words,

Mok Gyeong-un was forcibly drawn towards the being by a strong pull before he could complete his sentence.

-Gush!

The surging blood had already risen up to his thighs.

The being, holding the pipe and exhaling smoke, brought its face close to Mok Gyeong-un.

And it looked at Mok Gyeong-un from top to bottom.

“What are you doing?”

-...

The being, after staring for a while, slightly raised the corners of its mouth.

Then, it erased the previous smile and put on a serious expression, waving its hand.

At that moment,

-Whoosh! Bam!

Mok Gyeong-un's body floated up and heavily collided with the ceiling of the cavity.

Then, it fell into the cavity filled with blood.

-Splash!

Mok Gyeong-un, his entire body soaked in blood, staggered to his feet.

“Puhaa.”

Mok Gyeong-un swept his blood-soaked hair upwards.

The being, watching this sight, opened its mouth.

-Foolish mortal. Empty your soul and render your soul to me.

The voice was distinctly audible.

Unlike the Demonic Monk, whose voice was muffled and incomprehensible, the sound resonated clearly.

No, it felt more like it was echoing from various places.

Mok Gyeong-un scratched his head and said,

“Like the Demonic Monk, wandering spirits always covet the bodies of others? Can’t you do anything without someone else’s body?”

-Tsk tsk.

The being clicked its tongue and scoffed.

As the being lightly tapped the pipe in the blood,

-Gush!

The blood gushed up in several strands, then elongated like whips, binding and restraining Mok Gyeong-un’s arms and legs.

-Argh!

He exerted strength, but the restraining force was much stronger.

Mok Gyeong-un smacked his lips as if it was troublesome.

Indeed, he could understand why the “Basic Writings of the School of Yin and Yang” stated that it was extremely dangerous and required at least ten diviners.

‘What should I do?’

Although he had read the “Basic Writings of the School of Yin and Yang,” he wasn’t well-versed in sorcery yet.

At that moment, the being made a gesture of drawing a vertical line (—) with the pipe towards Mok Gyeong-un.

Then,

-Slash!

Along with a burning pain in his chest, his clothes turned red in a vertical line (—) shape.

It seemed like he had been cut, and the pain was considerable.

Nevertheless, Mok Gyeong-un’s expression didn’t change much.

As if expecting a scream of pain to burst out, one of the being's eyebrows raised.

-You're a child with strong endurance.

"I'm used to it."

-Used to it? Then can you endure this as well?

With those words, the being raised the pipe upwards.

It happened in an instant.

-Gush!

The blood that had risen up to the lower half of the body in the cavity surged upwards.

Then, in an instant, it completely filled the entire cavity with blood.

Inside the blood-filled cavity, Mok Gyeong-un's body floated.

'Ugh.'

Mok Gyeong-un held his breath.

It was no different from being submerged in water.

The being watched Mok Gyeong-un, who was unable to move, with a gleeful and smirking expression.

Its eerie eyes reminded one of the fact that this being was a ghost.

-Swoosh!

The being approached Mok Gyeong-un.

Then, it grabbed Mok Gyeong-un's chin, who was unable to move, and said,

-The emotion you're feeling now is fear...

The being couldn't finish its sentence.

What the being wanted to see was a face filled with fear, suffocating from the blood and unable to breathe.

In a confined space, unable to move, and in a situation where one couldn't even breathe, anyone would be afraid.

However, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes were staring at the being without a hint of wavering.

-You... You're peculiar. For a living human to have such eyes.

The being showed curiosity.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been holding his breath, flicked his tongue.

'This taste...'

The taste he felt on the tip of his tongue was definitely blood.

The blood that filled this cavity was much redder than crushed, ripe cornus fruits.

The sticky sensation was also the very essence of blood's stickiness.

All five senses told him that this was indeed blood.

However,

'It's different. This is nothing but death.'

Mok Gyeong-un snorted.

How much blood had he seen from those who were called concurrent killing demons?

When he touched that blood, he could feel something alive, but what he saw now felt nothing but death.

'It's not real.'

Therefore, even if it was perceived by the five senses, everything was false.

Then,

-Swoosh!

All the blood that was reflected in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes disappeared as if it had never existed in the first place.

In sorcery, this is called Enlightenment[2].

By denying the perceived recognition itself, one breaks free from all hallucinations that deceive one's own senses.

The theory or words are easy.

However, even highly trained diviners found it difficult to escape from this.

It was because nothing was easier to deceive than human senses.

-!?

The being's eyes flickered with interest.

As time passed, it expected Mok Gyeong-un to struggle, unable to hold his breath, and show an appearance no different from other living beings.

However, he had freed himself from the hallucination on his own.

-You're more interesting than you look.

The corners of the being's red lips rose.

Then, it approached Mok Gyeong-un and tapped his shoulder with the pipe.

At that moment,

-Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un was forced to kneel on one knee on the floor.

It felt like a single tap, but judging by how his right knee had dug into the floor, one could imagine how much force was applied.

The being took a deep puff from the pipe and exhaled smoke towards Mok Gyeong-un, saying,

-Mortal. If you offer your soul to me of your own accord, I shall grant your wish.

"Wish?"

-Yes. For a boy not even in his prime to have such eyes, you must not have lived an ordinary life. Hand over your soul to me. Then, I shall dismember your enemies and make even their souls disappear.

"...You're overflowing with confidence."

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the being let out a mad laughter.

-Hahahahahahahahaha!

-Rumble rumble!

The being merely laughed, but the entire cavity was shaking.

It was a being on a completely different level from the Demonic Monk.

The Green ghost level was the realm where one had gone beyond ordinary wandering spirits and entered the domain of Imaemangnyang.

The being, who had been laughing for a while, said with a sneer,

-The only reason you can utter impudent words to me and remain unscathed is because I want to take your soul. So be grateful for the mercy I bestow upon you.

“Is this something to be grateful for?”

-You have no fear at all.

-Tap!

The being lifted Mok Gyeong-un’s chin with the pipe.

Then, as if appraising him, it said,

-At least your face is to my liking. It wouldn’t be bad since your soul is beautiful.

“You’re quite eager to covet my body.”

-Once I have decided, your soul is mine.

“And if I refuse?”

At those words, the being showed a sneer.

-Although your soul may be slightly damaged, I will take it by force.

“Someone other than you tried to do that, but there’s a failed monster right above, you know?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the being chuckled.

-You dare compare me to such a lowly ghost? If I put my mind to it, it wouldn’t be too difficult to extinguish your soul and seize your soul.

“If you’re so confident, why don’t you try taking it?”

-You’re impudent. If that’s what you desire, I shall take it by force.

As soon as it finished speaking, the being removed the pipe from Mok Gyeong-un's chin and tried to raise it above his head.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un, who had lowered his head, shrugged his shoulders.

Seeing that, the being said with the corners of its mouth raised,

-Have you suddenly become afraid?

"No. I just remembered something interesting."

-Something interesting?

In response to the being's puzzled question, Mok Gyeong-un lifted something with both hands.

The moment it saw that, the being's eyes wavered.

It was because it recognized what Mok Gyeong-un was holding without even looking.

It was the book made of human skin.

The book, soaked in the blood of the dead Jo Il-sang, seemed to have a glossy sheen unlike before.

-You...

"According to the Basic Writings of the School of Yin and Yang, the older the monster, the more it has a medium that it is connected to and dwells in. This book must be it, right?"

...You're doing a foolish thing.

"It doesn't seem like a foolish thing, judging by your cautious behavior."

-You're really making me angry.

As soon as the being finished speaking, Mok Gyeong-un's body floated in the air and crashed into the ceiling.

-Bam! Bam!

But it didn't end there.

Mok Gyeong-un's body fell heavily to the floor.

As the being flicked its hand, he rose again and this time, his head smashed into the ceiling.

-Bam!

Blood flowed from his impacted head.

The being, as if having no intention of stopping here, consecutively slammed Mok Gyeong-un against the cavity wall.

-Bam bam bam bam!

“Kuh-huk!”

Fresh blood burst out of Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth as he collided with the wall.

After a few more collisions, Mok Gyeong-un’s half-limp body floated in the air.

The being reached out its hand towards Mok Gyeong-un and said,

-Put that down immediately.

“...Cough cough... Why don’t you just take it? Why go through the trouble?”

-Foolish mortal. I’m giving you a chance.

“A chance?”

-Yes.

“...It’s not that you can’t touch it directly, is it?”

-...

The being didn’t answer Mok Gyeong-un’s meaningful question.

From its reaction, Mok Gyeong-un could be certain.

This old wandering spirit seemed unable to directly touch the book made of human skin.

If that was the case, it could have just snatched the book from the beginning, but instead, it tried to make him let go of it by inflicting pain on him.

-You’re really asking for death. Even if you have that, you can’t do anything with it. What can someone who is neither a Taoist nor a diviner do? Fine. I’ll give up on your soul. I’ll just kill you like this...

Just as the being was about to reach out its hand to do something,  
Something completely unexpected happened.

-Crunch!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un bit into the cover of the book.

-!!!!!!!

The Green ghost being couldn't hide its perplexity upon seeing this.

Until now, it had encountered countless diviners, Taoists, and monks, but none of them had ever done such a thing as sealing or burning the book.

-You! You!

It was because the evil energy of the book was so strong that it couldn't be damaged by ordinary means.

This was the same for Mok Gyeong-un.

While his body was being slammed against the cavity, he had tried to tear the book apart with brute force, but to no avail.

Then, by chance, he discovered that only the outer cover of the book was made of human skin.

'In that case...'

Mok Gyeong-un's choice was very simple.

-Chomp chomp!

Mok Gyeong-un tore off only the outer part of the book made of human skin and chewed on it in his mouth.

-Gasp!

At that moment, the Green ghost being clutched its chest, distorting its pale and delicate brows.

Chapter 20

The human skin that formed the surface of the book.

No one had ever thought of tearing it off and putting it in their mouth.

In the first place, who would put something made of human skin and exuding an eerie aura in their mouth?

It was truly a crazy act.

–Chomp chomp!

‘Tough.’

Mok Gyeong-un, who had put the human skin in his mouth and was chewing it vigorously.

Strangely, no matter how much he bit it, the human skin was too tough to damage his teeth or tear off.

However, it seemed that this wasn’t completely ineffective.

-Gasp!

The Green ghost being clutched its chest, distorting its delicate brows.

It seemed to feel some kind of pain.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un chewed the human skin even more forcefully.

-Damn mortal!

-Whoosh!

At that moment, the Green ghost’s eyes turned red like blood.

Along with that, as the Green ghost swung its long pipe, the blood of the dead Jo Il-sang that had been flowing on the floor floated into the air and began to rotate.

‘What is this?’

It was definitely not an illusion.

The sight of the blood droplets floating in the air and rotating was truly overwhelming.

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes trembled as he focused on the blood droplets.

Due to the rapid rotation, it was difficult to perceive with the naked eye, but he was somehow following it.

-This fellow...

Even the Green ghost being realized that Mok Gyeong-un was accurately observing the blood droplets.

It was surprising, considering that he was a human who hadn't even learned sorcery or martial arts.

Even if his body and reflexes completely surpassed those of an ordinary human, it was no exaggeration.

-It's useless, mortal.

The Green ghost being pointed its pipe towards Mok Gyeong-un.

At that moment, the blood droplets that were rapidly rotating inside the cavity all rushed towards Mok Gyeong-un at once.

-Whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh!

-Swoosh!

Right at that instant,

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been observing the droplets, slid on the floor the moment the Green ghost being swung its pipe, and he threw his body towards the being.

-Foolish.

He was just about to reach the Green ghost being.

A rain of blood poured down on the front of Mok Gyeong-un's upper body, penetrating his flesh.

-Stab stab stab stab stab stab stab!

Mok Gyeong-un frowned.

He felt no particular sensation from ordinary pain.

However, the blood that had penetrated his flesh was tearing through his skin like sharp hidden weapons.

The Green ghost being seemed to enjoy Mok Gyeong-un's pain as it raised the corners of its mouth.

-Is it painful? Then spit it out.

-Grab!

The Green ghost being made a gesture of clenching its fist towards Mok Gyeong-un.

Then, the blood that had penetrated his skin dug deeper into his body, stimulating Mok Gyeong-un's nerves.

"Ugh."

For the first time, a groan escaped his mouth.

The Green ghost being clicked its tongue at the sight.

Normally, with this level of pain, one should be writhing in agony and pleading for their life.

But that was all there was to it.

-Are you used to pain? Or is your endurance foolishly strong? Hah.

The Green ghost being sucked on the pipe.

Then, it exhaled a hazy smoke and stretched out the pipe as if to finish things off.

-Foolish mortal. Just die.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been in pain, muttered,

"Demonic Monk."

-What are you babbling about?

"Demonic Monk!"

Although his pronunciation was slurred due to the human skin in his mouth, what Mok Gyeong-un shouted was none other than,

-Swoosh!

The Demonic Monk.

The Demonic Monk appeared, penetrating through the ceiling.

However, its condition seemed strangely poor.

Although it was always hazy since it was a wandering spirit, there were black spots appearing all over its body.

Seeing this, the Green ghost being chuckled and said,

-It was you?

At those words, the Demonic Monk knelt on one knee and bowed its head to pay respects to the Green ghost being.

'Why?'

Seeing that, Mok Gyeong-un couldn't understand.

Was it because it was a higher-level monster? However, that was a rule created from the perspective of diviners, as stated by the author of the "Synopsis of Various Philosophers" and "Basic Writings of the School of Yin and Yang."

It wasn't entirely accurate.

-You seem to have spiritual talent. Seeing how you're connected to a wandering spirit. But unfortunately, this damn fellow is nothing more than my subordinate.

'Subordinate?'

Regardless of their level, was it a being they knew in their previous life?

If that was the case, it was a setback.

The Demonic Monk was Mok Gyeong-un's servant, but if he couldn't control it, it would be of no use at all.

Then he would have to navigate through this situation on his own.

-Chomp!

Mok Gyeong-un chewed on the human skin in his mouth again.

-Ugh! You!

Then, the Green ghost being clutched its chest again and glared at him with a murderous gaze, swinging its pipe.

-Stab stab stab stab stab stab stab!

As it swung the pipe, the blood droplets that had penetrated his body came out.

It looked like it was showing mercy, but it wasn't.

-Whoosh!

The blood droplets that had come out of his body merged and formed a sharp thorn.

The Green ghost being made a gesture of striking the pipe downwards,

'Oh no!'

-Whoosh!

The sharp thorn aimed at Mok Gyeong-un's heart.

Mok Gyeong-un rolled his body to the side to avoid it.

-Hmph!

The Green ghost being scoffed and swung the pipe again as if he couldn't escape.

Then, the blood thorn that had been stuck in the floor changed direction towards Mok Gyeong-un.

-Whoosh!

The speed was too fast to dodge.

However,

-Thud!

'Huh?'

It was about to pierce his heart accurately, but something appeared and pushed Mok Gyeong-un away.

It was the Demonic Monk.

-You damn fool!

-...

The Demonic Monk waved its hands, not knowing what to do.

Mok Gyeong-un was also puzzled by this situation.

The Demonic Monk, who had been kneeling and bowing its head just a moment ago, suddenly helped him avoid the Green ghost being's attack.

'Why?'

While he was wondering, the Green ghost being clicked its tongue and said,

-Ho. Are you saying you'll fulfill your duty as a servant?

-...

The Demonic Monk couldn't hide its troubled expression.

Although Mok Gyeong-un didn't know the relationship between the two, he couldn't help but smirk inwardly at the sight of the Demonic Monk helping him but still being cautious.

For whatever reason, the Demonic Monk was helping him regardless of its will.

This was quite important in the current situation.

"Demonic Monk!"

-Swoosh!

At Mok Gyeong-un's shout, the Demonic Monk naturally blocked the Green ghost being's path.

Indeed, the Demonic Monk couldn't refuse Mok Gyeong-un's orders.

Then, even if the Green ghost being was of a higher level, it might be possible to make them fight...

-Thud!

Just when he thought he didn't know, the Green ghost being, who had narrowed the distance in an instant, grabbed the Demonic Monk's neck.

-Then I'll kill both of you.

-...

The Demonic Monk, whose neck was grabbed, couldn't move an inch.

Seeing how it couldn't move despite its larger stature, it seemed to be due to the difference in their levels.

Not all wandering spirits were the same.

–Chomp chomp!

Mok Gyeong-un vigorously chewed on the human skin in his mouth to allow the Demonic Monk to escape.

Then,

-Ugh! You must be desperate to die.

The Green ghost being seemed enraged as it waved its pipe with a distorted face.

Then, the scattered blood droplets floated into the air once again.

-Swish swish swish!

The blood droplets transformed into sharp thorns and rapidly rotated around Mok Gyeong-un.

This time, it seemed determined to finish him off.

In that instant, Mok Gyeong-un's thoughts flowed in a direction that the Green ghost being didn't expect even more.

–Gulp!

Mok Gyeong-un swallowed the human skin he had been chewing in his mouth.

-!?

The Green ghost being's bloody eyes wavered upon seeing this.

In the first place, there had never been anyone who put that in their mouth and chewed on it, but it was also the first time someone swallowed it.

-You crazy mortal!

The Green ghost being swung its pipe towards Mok Gyeong-un.

Then, the numerous blood droplets that had been rapidly rotating and surrounding him all rushed towards Mok Gyeong-un at once.

-Stab stab stab stab stab stab stab!

'Ugh!'

As the sharpened blood droplets penetrated, Mok Gyeong-un's body twisted.

The blood droplets not only penetrated his body and stiffened his nerves but also seemed to make his muscles move involuntarily.

-I'll tear your body to pieces and extract...

The Green ghost being couldn't finish its sentence.

No, its hand holding the pipe trembled, and soon its face distorted in agony.

-Wh-what on earth...

The Green ghost being glared at Mok Gyeong-un as if it couldn't understand.

It had been painful even when he had vigorously chewed on the human skin, but this was incomparable.

Its body, composed of a soul, ached as if cracks were forming throughout.

'It's in pain.'

Mok Gyeong-un couldn't precisely know the reason either.

However, one thing he could tell was that his stomach had become unusually hot after forcibly swallowing the human skin.

'Inside...'

The heat even made him feel as if his internal organs were burning.

Mok Gyeong-un's mouth corner rose bitterly at the pain he felt from within, which he hadn't experienced in a long time since he first tasted poison.

The pain felt from the inside was something he was already accustomed to.

But right at that moment,

-Grab!

The Green ghost being, who had been suffering, suddenly appeared in front of Mok Gyeong-un and grabbed his neck.

-You mere lowly mortal!

-Drip drip!

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes flickered with interest.

Tears of blood were flowing from the eyes of the Green ghost being, who was enraged.

Its appearance was not only spine-chilling, but its deep resentment made the term "wandering spirit" seem appropriate.

-How dare someone like you!

The Green ghost being strangled his neck with both hands.

As his breath was blocked, Mok Gyeong-un reflexively grabbed the Green ghost being's wrists to shake it off.

-Grab!

Right at that moment,

A bizarre scene appeared in Mok Gyeong-un's mind.

A grand hall entirely stained with blood, and numerous people brutally killed.

In the center of it all, someone drenched in blood, panting with a sword stuck in the floor.

That someone was the Green ghost being.

[Haa... Haa...]

The Green ghost being was in a wretched state.

It was a situation where it wouldn't be strange to die at any moment.

The Green ghost being turned its head and looked at the throne in the grand hall.

Someone was sitting on it arrogantly.

The Green ghost being stared at that being, whose face was obscured by shadows, with eyes filled with hatred.

[...]

The Green ghost being wailed at the being sitting on the throne, spitting out blood.

However, strangely, its voice couldn't be heard.

The Green ghost being, who had been furious enough to vomit blood, tightly grasped the hilt of the sword.

Then, it tore its clothes, wrapped them around its wrist to secure it, and tried to throw its body towards the one sitting on the throne.

-Thud!

[!!!!!!!!]

However, in the blink of an eye, the one on the throne had plunged its hand into the Green ghost being's chest.

Then, that being pulled something out of the Green ghost being's chest.

It was none other than,

'The heart?'

It was a beating heart.

How often does one get to see their own heart while alive?

And beyond that, how would it feel to witness one's own heart being crushed by someone else?

-Crunch!

Along with that,

-Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

A scream that seemed to tear through the eardrums pierced sharply.

Then, the illusion he had just seen disappeared, and the Green ghost being was seen with its crown removed, hair hanging down limply, and a shocked expression on its face.

'Was it... a woman?'

When wearing a crown and exuding a sharp and overwhelming aura, it was indistinguishable, but looking at its current appearance, it definitely appeared to be a woman.

But why was the Green ghost being reacting like this?

While he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un could see a red thread-like thing coming out of his body, connected to her.

'What is this?'

That wasn't all.

The thread was also connected to the Demonic Monk.

'Could it be?'

He had a rough idea of what this was, but the Green ghost being grabbed its hair and screamed,

-Aaaaah! For me to be a servant!