

# MYST, MIGHT, MAYHEM

Chapter 26

This was Mok Eun-pyeong's residence.

-Slurp!

Mok Eun-pyeong, who had finished his breakfast, was elegantly sipping Silver Needle(s) of the Jun Mountain, a famous tea from Hunan province.

A guard named Jeon Yang-pyeong, who had reached the level of a first-rate master, carefully spoke to him.

"Young master."

"What is it?"

"But judging from Guard Gam's reaction earlier, it didn't seem like a lie. Do you really think he was deceiving you as a last resort?"

-Tak!

Mok Eun-pyeong put down his teacup and answered briefly.

"No. It's half and half. Guard Gam must have had something he didn't know about either. Even if it was a last resort, would he do something that would raise suspicion in just a day? No matter how much of a fool Mok Gyeong-un is, he must have hidden at least one secret weapon."

"What? Then how....."

"Didn't I say I would only give him two hours and take his life if he couldn't find Jo Il-sang?"

"Yes. Didn't you want Guard Gam that much?"

Mok Eun-pyeong had always wanted to make Mok Gyeong-un's Guard Gam his own.

Even after learning that he was a former assassin, his determination remained unchanged.

Rather, he remarked that he would be even more useful.

“If you had investigated separately and shown trust.....”

“That’s not possible.”

“What do you mean it’s not possible.....”

“If I had shown unconditional trust, he would have seen me as a pushover or a fool rather than being grateful. So, it was to instill an appropriate level of tension.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you think I would easily abandon such a talented individual?”

Mok Eun-pyeong grinned.

Even if it took more than two hours, he had no intention of actually killing him.

“I should show forgiveness after demonstrating how strict and stern I am, once the truth is revealed. People are naturally more affected when you treat them harshly and then show kindness once.”

That was Mok Eun-pyeong’s way of dealing with people.

To this, Guard Jeon Yang-pyeong inwardly disagreed but pretended to be impressed and said,

“As expected of you, young master. I didn’t know you had such insight.”

“So, just wait quietly. It’s good to crush someone’s heart when they become impatient. Even if it’s just out of responsibility for losing Guard Jo, he will be more loyal.”

“You are absolutely right.”

“Flattery.”

“But please don’t push him too hard.”

At these words, Mok Eun-pyeong raised one eyebrow.

“What?”

“Didn’t you find out while investigating Guard Gam’s past?”

“Ah..... Are you talking about that?”

“Yes. Guard Gam might be from ‘that place.’ If he’s really from ‘that place,’ no matter if he’s retired, if you stimulate him carelessly, it might be dang..... no, it might become tiresome for you.”

He was about to say it could be dangerous but changed his words.

It was because Mok Eun-pyeong had quite a strong pride.

That was how dangerous it was to have someone from an assassin group as a subordinate.

Especially if they were from ‘that place.’

-Slurp! Tak!

“You said he might be. We don’t know for sure whether he is or not.”

“Yes.”

“Rather than that, think about what to do with that bastard Mok Gyeong-un. If he really touched Jo Il-sang, we absolutely cannot leave him alone.”

“.....”

Judging from his reaction, he seemed to be already upset.

Continuing the same conversation here would only make his lord uncomfortable, so Guard Jeon Yang-pyeong stopped.

It was then.

The sound of someone running in a hurry was heard.

-Knock knock!

“Young master. It’s Han-saeng.”

“Come in.”

Han-saeng.

He was one of Mok Eun-pyeong’s three guards and had the lowest martial arts skill.

Like Go Chan, he was only at the second-rate level.

That was why he was in charge of most of the miscellaneous tasks.

Mok Eun-pyeong asked Han-saeng, who was rushing in, with a puzzled expression.

“It hasn’t been long since I sent you to assess the situation, but judging from your expression and how urgently you came, something must have happened?”

“That, that’s.....”

“Speak.”

“Guard Gam has disappeared.”

“What?”

At the sudden news, Mok Eun-pyeong’s expression hardened.

What kind of nonsense was this?

Guard Jeon Yang-pyeong asked in an incredulous voice.

“What do you mean? Guard Gam disappeared?”

“That, that’s.....”

“Don’t tell me he disobeyed the young master’s order and ran away?”

“That’s not it.”

“Then what the .... are you talking about? Speak clearly!”

Pressed by Jeon Yang-pyeong, Guard Han-saeng spoke with a troubled expression.

“There’s a commotion right now.”

“A commotion?”

“Yes. The outer hall warriors are guarding, so I couldn’t get close, but I heard that Guard Gam killed three workers in the medical hall and tried to kill the third young master, but escaped after being injured.”

‘!?’

At those words, Mok Eun-pyeong was dumbfounded.

what the .... was this about?

He had told him to find his missing guard Jo Il-sang, so why would Guard Gam suddenly try to kill that bastard Mok Gyeong-un?

'Could it be.....'

Was he trying to prove his loyalty by doing that?

Or did he try to threaten Mok Gyeong-un to find out where Jo Il-sang had disappeared to?

It was difficult to guess.

Then, Guard Jeon Yang-pyeong asked in an equally absurd tone.

"Are you sure? Why would Guard Gam do such a thing?"

"I'm not sure either. But judging from the fact that Mok Gyeong-un's injury was serious enough to be life-threatening, it might be true. However, that's not the problem."

"If that's not it, then what is?"

"I'm sorry to say this, but....."

"Speak quickly!"

At Mok Eun-pyeong's urging, Guard Han-saeng finally parted his lips.

"It seems that Mok Gyeong-un testified to the outer hall's investigation that you, young master, instigated Guard Gam to betray him and kill him."

'!!!!'

As soon as he finished speaking, Mok Eun-pyeong's face contorted terribly.

Seeing his anger, Guard Jeon Yang-pyeong hurriedly tried to appease him.

"Young master. Please calm down. Even if that bastard Mok Gyeong-un spreads such rumors, the outer hall won't believe it."

-Bang!

At those words, Mok Eun-pyeong slammed the table and raised his voice.

"Believing it or not is not the issue. If I get involved in rumors without even being selected as the successor, how will the retainers view me?"

Mok Eun-pyeong's body trembled.

The outer hall wouldn't be able to pressure him over this incident since he wasn't even the clan leader, but they wouldn't overlook it either.

If that happened, the support of the retainers might weaken as well.

"That bastard Mok Gyeong-un!"

-Whoosh!

Unable to hold back any longer, Mok Eun-pyeong shot up from his seat.

He couldn't bear it unless he went to Mok Gyeong-un right away and confronted him.

Guard Jeon Yang-pyeong tried to dissuade him.

"Young master, please calm down!"

"Calm down? Do I look like I can calm down right now? That damn bastard backstabbed me twice, and you want me to let it slide?"

This was the second time, following the incident with Guard Jo Il-sang.

Especially this time, it really pissed him off.

"But if you go now, it will only raise more suspicion. Moreover, if the outer hall is guarding him, the eyes of the retainers will inevitably be drawn to you."

-Grind!

At those words, Mok Eun-pyeong gritted his teeth.

Although he was angry, Guard Jeon Yang-pyeong was right about this.

If he went to Mok Gyeong-un and vented his anger or harmed him, it would negatively impact the succession competition.

However, just leaving him alone was also infuriating.

How triumphant would that bastard be?

The eldest young master Mok Yeong-ho and the lady of the house might even mock him.

Seeing Mok Eun-pyeong unable to suppress his anger, Guard Jeon Yang-pyeong spoke in a low voice.

“Young master. Since it has come to this, how about mobilizing ‘them’?”

“Them?”

“I mean the group that Guard Gam belonged to.”

“.....Are you talking about that place?”

“Yes.”

“What do you mean by mobilizing them?”

“As far as I know, they have a strong pride and an iron rule regarding assassinations.”

“An iron rule?”

“Yes. Regardless of whether they have retired or not, they do not tolerate failure from an assassin of their own faction.”

“What do they do if they don’t tolerate it?”

“They said they complete the assassination by any means necessary.”

At those words, Mok Eun-pyeong’s hardened expression softened.

“Didn’t he say with his own mouth that Guard Gam tried to kill him? Then, it’s rather fortunate. We will leak this information to them.”

At Guard Jeon Yang-pyeong’s words, the corners of Mok Eun-pyeong’s mouth curled up.

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Mok Gyeong-un was sitting cross-legged with his eyes closed, as if meditating.

He was currently trying a technique called breathing techniques.

No matter how strong his recovery ability was, it was impossible for the wounds from the daggers stuck between his ribs and thigh to heal instantly.

Since it had come to this, he wanted to challenge himself to form a danjeon.

‘That way, I might be able to do something with this.’

Below Mok Gyeong-un's navel, there was a chilling and ominous energy of death gathered.

It was the energy absorbed from the dead Jo Il-sang and Guard Gam.

However, despite absorbing it, unlike the internal energy he had absorbed through the Ritual of Binding, it just accumulated in his stomach without moving.

So, he thought that if he could form a danjeon with this, it might be possible.

But,

'Is this how it's supposed to be?'

The Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Technique had a detailed description of the breathing method.

Of course, there were also methods for qi circulation and key points.

Anyway, to perform proper qi circulation, one had to accept the energy from the air through breathing and gather it near the danjeon to form a small seed.

However, something felt strange.

'Why is the energy I'm taking in through breathing dispersing?'

The energy gathered through breathing was very subtle.

It was much smaller than when he absorbed it through the Ritual of Binding, but according to the secret manual, this was normal.

So, thinking of it as collecting bits and pieces to form a mountain, he guided it below his navel.

-Swish!

However, as soon as it entered, it dispersed.

It just disappeared, as if the internal energy he had absorbed through the Ritual of Binding naturally dispersed.

'Why?'

He couldn't understand.

Was it normal for energy to disperse easily?

With no one to ask and only being able to follow what was written in the book, Mok Gyeong-un had no choice but to adhere to the instructions.

“Phew…… Phew……”

He gathered energy while reciting the key points of the method through breathing techniques.

He did this for half a day, almost until the day was about to end, but the subtle energy he gathered still dispersed as soon as it reached below his navel.

‘…….What is it?’

Why was that?

The secret manual stated that forming a seed, no, a danjeon, was extremely difficult.

From that perspective, it was indeed difficult.

However, there was no mention of it dispersing as soon as it was gathered.

It said it would gradually disperse.

‘It disappears immediately.’

But unlike the book, it vanished right away as soon as it entered.

What could be the reason?

Was martial arts something that couldn’t be self-taught after all?

‘Hmm.’

Mok Gyeong-un glanced at Guard Go Chan, who was lying on the bed next to him as if he were dead.

He had lost his left ring finger and little finger and had fainted after undergoing a torture called ‘Severing Tendons and Breaking Bones’.

Mok Gyeong-un had asked the outer hall warriors to bring him here.

He was thinking of just letting him sleep, but he decided to wake him up.

“Guard Go Chan.”

“……”

“Guard Go Chan.”

“.....”

“Hmmm.”

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un raised his palm above Go Chan’s face.

Then,

-Slap!

Go Chan opened his eyes wide, quickly sat up, and answered hurriedly.

“Yes!”

“Wow. That’s amazing. Weren’t you sleeping?”

“I, I was sleeping.”

In fact, Go Chan had woken up about an hour ago.

After waking up, he had been keeping his eyes closed and assessing the situation, unsure of what was going on.

Thanks to that, he learned that this place was the medical hall and that Mok Gyeong-un was right next to him.

That was why he couldn’t bring himself to open his eyes.

It was a kind of escapism from reality.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un whispered.

“I had something I wanted to tell you when you woke up.”

“Wh, what is it?”

-Gulp!

Go Chan couldn’t hide his nervousness.

He felt uneasy for no reason.

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said to him.

“Contrary to my expectations, you’re quite tight-lipped.”

“.....Phew.”

Go Chan let out a sigh of relief.

In fact, he thought it wouldn’t make much difference whether he died this way or that way, but he endured it because dying at Mok Gyeong-un’s hands seemed like it would be the worst agony.

“I’m starting to like you more and more, Guard Go Chan.”

“Th, thank you.”

Fortunately.

It seemed that his choice was not wrong.

‘.....Wait a minute. Is this something to be happy about?’

He felt like he was being tamed by Mok Gyeong-un.

Realizing that, Go Chan fell into a sense of self-disgust.

Then, as if remembering something, he looked apologetic and apologized.

“By the way, young master..... I’m sorry. I was caught by Guard Gam on the way and had the item you entrusted me with taken away...”

“Ah, I got that back.”

“What?”

What did he mean by getting it back?

Mok Gyeong-un smiled at the puzzled Go Chan and whispered.

“Only you know this, Guard Go Chan. I killed Guard Gam and took it back.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Go Chan’s eyes widened.

Did he hear that correctly?

He killed Kam Hyung?

The middle-ranked assassin of the Flying Daggers Sect, one of the three major assassin groups in the Central Plains, despite being retired?

“H, how.....”

“Shh.”

Mok Gyeong-un gestured with his eyes towards the entrance of the medical hall.

Outside the door screen, there were shadows of about four warriors.

On the opposite side, there were also four guards.

They were the warriors of the outer hall of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

“They think Guard Gam attacked me and disappeared. So, Guard Go Chan, you should roughly know that as well.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Go Chan lowered his voice and whispered.

“Is it true?”

“Is there any reason for me to lie about this?”

“.....”

Go Chan swallowed his dry saliva.

Indeed, this devilish fellow wouldn’t make false claims about such matters.

‘Unbelievable..... what the .... is this guy?’

He clearly hadn’t learned martial arts.

Yet now, he even claimed to have killed a first-rate master?

It was something that couldn’t possibly happen under common sense.

No, is this even possible?

To Guard Go Chan, who couldn’t easily believe it, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“I have something to ask you.”

“Y-Yes? What is it?”

“I want to open a danjeon, but it’s not going well. I thought I had a pretty good understanding, but it seems I can’t quite grasp the contents of the secret manual.”

“.....Are you talking about the danjeon?”

Go Chan asked back with a furrowed brow.

Did this guy still want to learn martial arts?

However, Mok Gyeong-un’s age wasn’t exactly young to start martial arts.

‘Seventeen..... With waste accumulated in the blood vessels, it would be difficult to properly absorb energy even with breathing techniques.’

That was why it was best to start breathing techniques as young as possible.

Putting aside the issue of comprehension, it would naturally be difficult to form a danjeon.

Go Chan was at a loss for how to explain this.

‘Sorry for being blunt, but you’re already too late to learn martial arts.’

He couldn’t bring himself to say that.

After pondering for a moment, Go Chan said,

“C-Could you tell me what aspects are difficult for you?”

Let’s help him for now.

Explaining it verbally would only upset him anyway.

It would be better to let him experience it himself and realize that he was too late to learn martial arts.

Unaware of his thoughts, Mok Gyeong-un shared the points where he was stuck.

“.....So, no matter how much I try, the energy disperses.”

“.....”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Go Chan was momentarily stunned.

Did he hear it wrong?

He had just started practicing breathing techniques, yet he claimed to have understood what qi was and even gathered it near the danjeon below his navel by himself through the qi circulation path?

Of course, it dispersed, but still?

'No way. He must be joking, right?'

A guy who knew nothing about martial arts, no matter how much he had a secret manual, did it by himself to that extent?

This was something impossible no matter how he thought about it.

Even with the most basic Three Talents Method, it was difficult to easily understand the definition of qi without learning the basics for practicing martial arts.

"Guard Go Chan?"

"Y-Yes!"

"Why are you making that expression?"

"Th-That's....."

"Is there something strange?"

"No. Rather than that....."

"Rather than?"

"Young master..... Did you really feel the qi through breathing?"

In just half a day, he felt it?

"Yes. Why?"

"Young master. This is a part that really needs to be clarified....."

"I'm telling you I felt it, not joking around. Is there any reason to fool around?"

"....."

This is driving me crazy.

From Go Chan's perspective, it was exactly like this.

Mok Gyeong-un was saying with his own mouth that he was a once-in-a-millennium genius.

Chapter 27

The guard Go Chan stared intently at Mok Gyeong-un and soon steadied his breathing.

Everything this fellow said sounded like a lie.

It was impossible for someone who didn't even know the precise definition of martial arts, no, internal energy, to read a secret manual alone and feel qi through self-study in less than half a day.

Well, perhaps it was possible.

But it would require a talent for martial arts that could be called a once-in-a-millennium prodigy.

"Even those born with a keen sense of qi find the beginning difficult."

Yet Mok Gyeong-un claimed to have done it.

Although he honestly found it unbelievable, there was no reason for this devilish fellow to lie about such a thing.

Then it was a simple matter.

He just needed to verify it.

Whether it was true or not.

"Young master, may this subordinate directly confirm it?"

"How so?"

"Since you said you absorbed qi through the breathing technique, you can just do that. I will check if you are circulating qi during the process."

"I suppose that's possible."

"Verifying to that extent is not a difficult task."

"I see. Then I'll leave it to you."

“Understood.”

Mok Gyeong-un sat cross-legged on the bed.

Well, this part wasn't too difficult, so nothing could go wrong.

Mok Gyeong-un, having taken this posture, closed his eyes and slowly breathed.

“Hoo...”

Go Chan closely observed this.

Then he stepped down from the bed and approached Mok Gyeong-un.

And then,

“This is to check, so don't mind it and just keep focusing on the breathing technique.”

With those words, he brought his two fingers together and placed them on one of the acupoints on Mok Gyeong-un's neck.

Even a faint qi could be felt if it was being circulated through the breathing technique.

He didn't have high expectations, but just in case...

‘!?’

Go Chan furrowed his brows.

What was this?

Surely it couldn't be.

However...

‘.....Ha.’

Qi was truly flowing through the meridians.

This meant that he was properly detecting and absorbing qi.

Go Chan was utterly astonished.

Even for 3 to 4-year-olds, known to have the most sensitive qi sense, detecting qi in less than half a day was truly a difficult feat.

No matter how outstanding, a fortnight was the norm, and without luck, it could take months.

Yet Mok Gyeong-un's meridians had considerable impurities and his qi sense should be diminished at this age, but he felt qi in just a day.

'Does this fellow really have martial talent?'

Go Chan's gaze changed.

Until just now, he had been doubtful, but now he thought it might be possible.

There are no absolutes in all matters.

Exceptions do exist.

Mok Gyeong-un could be such an existence.

'Let's examine it.'

Since he said the qi was dissipating, directly checking was the only way to find the cause.

Go Chan quietly spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

"I will infuse internal energy to examine it once. Please endure even if it's uncomfortable."

"....."

As he was in the midst of practicing the breathing technique, Mok Gyeong-un nodded his head very slightly.

-Shoo!

Go Chan focused and infused true qi into Mok Gyeong-un's Gimun (Liver) acupoint.

He guided the true qi through the Yangmun (Liver) and Jungwan (Ren) acupoints to the lower danjeon area to trace Mok Gyeong-un's circulation path.

In that process, Go Chan couldn't help but be surprised again.

'.....What's with this fellow?'

Impurities don't accumulate in the meridians only if one practices the breathing technique from a young age.

But right now, there were barely any impurities in Mok Gyeong-un's meridians.

It was like looking at a 3 or 4-year-old child.

'How can this be? He definitely wouldn't have cultivated internal energy before, right?'

It was truly a bizarre phenomenon.

For the meridians to be this clean at this age without practicing the breathing technique, one would have to receive 'Clearing the Passage Point' for a long time from a profound internal expert. Otherwise, it was impossible.

Go Chan looked at the back of Mok Gyeong-un's head with a puzzled expression.

'Didn't he say he lived with his grandfather in the mountains?'

What was this about?

Go Chan, who had been filled with doubts, shook his head and for now, sent true qi to the area around the lower danjeon.

It was almost there.

For now, there was one speculation.

'The reason it's dissipating is probably because he just started absorbing qi.'

Usually, that was the case.

At most, it hadn't even been half a day since Mok Gyeong-un started practicing the breathing technique.

No matter how much qi he gathered, the amount would be too small, and since he hadn't properly formed the lower danjeon, it was likely to dissipate...

-Startled!

In an instant, Go Chan got goosebumps.

He felt something cold and spine-chilling.

However,

'Huh?'

He hadn't removed his palm, but the true qi that had been connected was cut off.

What was this phenomenon?

Go Chan, who was furrowing his brows, once again infused true qi into the Liver (Gimun) acupoint out of curiosity.

And again, he sent it to the area around the lower danjeon.

However,

-Startled!

Once more, along with that bizarre sensation, the true qi he sent was cut off.

No, to be precise, it dissipated.

Go Chan was momentarily dumbfounded.

'What?'

It was hard to understand this phenomenon.

It wasn't the qi that Mok Gyeong-un himself had absorbed, but his own true qi.

Yet the moment it reached the area around the lower danjeon, he lost control over it and it dissipated and vanished.

Why was this happening?

Unless one directly cut off the true qi, this shouldn't be possible.

As he struggled to understand, Mok Gyeong-un's voice was heard.

"Sir Go Chan's qi also dissipated?"

".....You felt that too?"

"Yes."

'This is unbelievable. This fellow's qi sense is truly unparalleled.'

At this point, it could only be seen as an innate instinct.

To be able to perceive another person's qi when he had just started absorbing qi himself.

It was tongue-twisting.

If this fellow had learned martial arts from a young age, how would it have been?

'He might have had talent on par with the youngest young master.'

The youngest son of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, Mok Yu-cheon.

His talent was so overwhelming that it might appear only once in three generations of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

A monster who reached the realm of a first-class master at the age of fourteen and reached the beginning of the peak stage just two years later at sixteen.

It was truly a dominating talent.

But it seemed that if this fellow had also started early, he might have approached that level.

However, there was one problem.

'Why is it dissipating?'

He had tried sending it once more just now.

But the result was the same.

If the faint qi he had gathered through the breathing technique dissipated, the reason would be obvious, but for this, he couldn't figure out the cause at all.

"Young master..."

"Do you know why?"

"I am ashamed to say that with this subordinate's skill, it is difficult to know the reason."

His pride was hurt, but Go Chan was merely a second-rate expert.

Martial artists referred to those at the first-rate stage and above as masters.

That's how second-rate experts, while stronger than ordinary people, couldn't be said to have reached the realm of masters or grandmasters.

"Unless an expert of a higher level than this subordinate examines it, it seems it will be hard to know."

"But since you've trained in martial arts, don't you have any speculations?"

“...I don’t know. I feel some unusual qi around the young master’s lower danjeon, but it’s hard to discern what it is.”

It was completely different from internal energy.

It was so cold and unpleasant that Go Chan wasn’t even sure if it should be called qi.

To Go Chan, who was like this, Mok Gyeong-un asked in a low voice,

“Then, I won’t beat around the bush and ask directly. If it continues like this, will I be unable to form a danjeon?”

A straightforward question.

At this, Go Chan replied with difficulty,

“...To be honest, that’s right. If the qi gathered through the breathing technique keeps dissipating, you won’t be able to form a danjeon.”

“In the end, ‘that’ becomes the problem.”

“Pardon?”

“No, no. Just talking to myself.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un stroked his chin.

While Go Chan couldn’t pinpoint it exactly, the cause seemed to have become clear.

The death qi near the lower danjeon seemed to be the cause.

‘Hmm.’

What to do about this?

The qi absorbed through the breathing technique doesn’t match with this and dissipates.

And with this breathing technique or circulation method, the death qi couldn’t be moved.

No solution came to mind for this method.

‘This is troublesome.’

The original purpose was to learn martial arts.

That monstrous man he had met back then.

When he tried to revive that sensation, he still didn't dare to think of defeating that man, no, he didn't even dare to confront him.

'Am I unable to learn martial arts?'

If that was the case, there was no reason to stay here.

Mok Gyeong-un's mind became complicated for a moment.

It was still too early to definitely feel discouraged.

As Go Chan said, he was merely a second-rate expert, so he might not have been able to grasp the exact cause.

Would getting help from a proper master be the answer?

As he was pondering,

"Oh my, how peculiar. Seeing how it dissipates the true qi, it seems completely opposite to the qi generated through normal circulation..."

"Opposite?"

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, Go Chan waved his hands and said,

"It, it's just my guess. You don't need to take it too seriously..."

"Opposite... opposite..."

Mok Gyeong-un furrowed his brows and became lost in thought.

The moment he heard the word "opposite," he recalled having a similar feeling when he first absorbed this cold and yin-death qi.

If the qi absorbed through breathing is considered life qi, in other words, living qi, then this is literally death qi.

Then perhaps the method was wrong from the beginning?

Mok Gyeong-un reached his own conclusion and said,

"Sir Go Chan's words are correct. I should try reversing the qi circulation method and breathing technique."

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un closed his eyes.

It was to directly attempt what he had realized.

‘What?’

For a moment, Go Chan couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

Did he just say he would reverse the qi circulation method and breathing technique?

For an instant, he doubted his own ears.

The breathing technique was originally a type of cultivation method derived from Taoism that boosted life qi and yang qi.

But reversing it meant literally accepting death and yin qi.

Moreover, reversing the qi circulation was called the great method of reverse meridians, leading oneself to fall into the demonic path.

“Yo, young master! Stop! You may fall into a qi-deviation!”

Fire Entering the Devil[1].

This was a phenomenon that occurred even if the qi inside the body was slightly distorted.

But if it was like this with just a slight distortion, completely reversing the qi circulation direction was no different from choosing self-destruction.

–Phew!

Watching this scene, the corners of Cheong-ryeong’s mouth curled up.

That foolish fellow was doing something stupid with shallow knowledge.

-How can he think of such a thing?

Even the reverse meridian method developed by the main sect after long research often led to the destruction of the danjeon or severe side effects that turned people into cripples or corpses.

Yet a greenhorn who hadn’t even formed a danjeon was reversing the qi circulation on his own.

It was literally a suicidal act.

-If it goes well, I may find freedom.

Cheong-ryeong smirked and said to the Demonic Monk.

If harm was inflicted from the outside or the Devouring supreme-ruler tried to cause harm, it would eventually return as retribution.

But if one took their own life, it was a different story.

If that happened, they too might be freed from the shackles.

-Don't interfere, mortal.

-Swish!

Cheong-ryeong lightly swung her pipe.

Then, Go Chan, who was trying to stop Mok Gyeong-un, was pushed back by an invisible force and laid down on the bed he had been lying on, stuck to it.

-Ack!

"Th, this is?"

The startled Go Chan tried to gather internal energy to sit up.

But he couldn't move an inch.

"Yo, young mas...mmph!"

-Shh. You need to be quiet.

With a single gesture from Cheong-ryeong, Go Chan couldn't even move his lips.

In the meantime, Mok Gyeong-un was already reversing the breathing technique and qi circulation.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong's red lips twitched.

-If you die on your own, I'll personally dismember your soul.

She was truly looking forward to it.

However,

-Swoosh!

White breath flowed out from Mok Gyeong-un, who was circulating qi.

'!?'

That breath was not warm energy but extremely cold and yin.

Until just now, Cheong-ryeong had thought that Mok Gyeong-un would fall into a devilish state and die from recklessly reversing the qi circulation.

But as things flowed in an unexpected direction, one of her eyebrows raised involuntarily.

'What is this?'

She had never seen such a sight before, even when she was alive.

Why were yin qi gathering around him as he reversed the qi circulation?

It was clearly visible to Cheong-ryeong's ghost eyes.

In the world, not only life qi and yang qi were spread.

Naturally, as yin and yang energies maintained balance, death qi and yin qi were also evenly distributed in corresponding amounts.

But there was an important fact here.

It was that living beings could neither sense nor feel these opposite energies.

Yet what was happening?

-How?

How was Mok Gyeong-un, a living being, attracting death qi?

It was something she couldn't understand at all.

## Chapter 28

Inside Hyehwa Hall, the residence of Lady Seok.

Lady Seok sat with her chin resting elegantly on her clasped hands, looking at a woman with doubtful eyes.

The woman had a truly peculiar aura about her.

At most, she looked to be twenty-two or twenty-three years old, quite young.

However, perhaps because one of her eyes was white, she exuded a somewhat heavy and unapproachable atmosphere.

'If not for that unpleasant white eye, she would have quite enchanted many men.'

The white eye was considerably irritating.

The guard Ho-aeng beside her seemed to have a similar feeling, as she was slightly furrowing her brows.

That's how unusual it was.

But what was that on her shoulder?

She had a bird platform made by weaving cowhide and oak branches.

Usually, such a thing was made for trained carrier pigeons or falcons to perch on with their talons.

But she had no bird.

No, not even the scent of one.

As she was finding it strange, the woman pretended to stroke the empty platform with her hand and muttered to herself,

"It's alright. We'll be leaving soon."

Seeing her like that, Lady Seok clicked her tongue inwardly.

'It's hard to find a proper person among the diviners.'

Why did she find this one even less trustworthy than the diviner Myo-sin who came last time?

She had informed them of the news of Myo-sin's death, so she thought the Ghostly Spirit Pavilion, the group of diviner in Mengcheng, would send someone more skilled, but she was quite displeased.

However, without showing it, she spoke.

"You said your name was Sak?"

"Yes."

“...If you don't mind me asking, may I inquire about your age? You look younger than you appear.”

“Age is not important.”

“Alright. I suppose you can't reveal it.”

“I'm nineteen.”

“Pardon?”

She was even younger than expected.

Not even in her prime.

The guard Ho-aeng, having learned that Sak was young, carefully interjected.

“Shall we request Ghostly Spirit Pavilion again?”

At her words, Sak silently rose from her seat.

Then she stretched out her hand and spoke.

Guard Ho-aeng frowned and asked,

“What's with that hand?”

“You'll provide the travel expenses, right?”

“...What have you done to deserve travel expenses?”

“It wasn't us who broke the agreement, but your side.”

“It's not a breach of contract.”

“Since it's a replacement of the dispatched diviner, I'm only requesting the travel expenses, excluding the penalty.”

“.....”

It wasn't just her aura that was irritating.

Lady Seok snorted as if dumbfounded and spoke.

“My family has had a connection with Ghostly Spirit Pavilion since my maiden days and maintained a good relationship, but this matter is hard to accept. For such a serious

case where the diviner you sent died a strange death, you send a young friend who's not even in her prime..."

"Diviner Myo-sin is my teacher."

"Pardon?"

At Sak's words, Lady Seok furrowed her brows.

Looking at Myo-sin, he seemed to be a middle-aged man who had honed his divineric arts for many years.

But this woman named Sak was merely nineteen.

Yet she says diviner Myo-sin is her teacher?

As she found it strange, Sak spoke.

"A diviner receives six levels of titles according to their skill. From top to bottom, it's Shin, Il, Wol, Gi, Myo, Su. My teacher Myo-sin is at the lowest level, Su, having just completed 5 years."

"The lowest level?"

As far as Lady Seok knew, diviner Myo-sin was quite renowned in Mengcheng.

But he was a diviner of the lowest level?

"Then what about you?"

"I am at Gi."

It was the fourth out of the six titles and two levels higher than Myo-sin.

At Sak's words, Lady Seok looked at her for a moment.

Her appearance still seemed young, and her strangely brazen and arrogant attitude was irritating, but if this was true, she wouldn't be worse than Myo-sin, even if not better.

"Madam, I will go again..."

-Swish!

Lady Seok raised her hand, cutting off guard Ho-aeng's words, and spoke.

"Alright. I will entrust you with the task."

“Madam?”

“Since this diviner is said to be skilled, let’s see.”

For now, she decided to entrust it to her.

If it failed, the silver would freeze just like with Myo-sin.

And she would have grounds to protest at the Ghostly Spirit Pavilion.

Lady Seok rose from her seat.

“I have something to show you, so follow me.”

With those words, she went outside and guided them to a place like a warehouse located behind Hyehwa Hall.

Entering there, there was another door, and a waiting servant opened it and lit a lantern.

-Flicker!

As they entered, Lady Seok covered her nose with her sleeve.

It was because of a terrible stench.

Lady Seok pointed to a corpse covered with a straw mat, leaving only the feet exposed.

“This is diviner Myo’s corpse.”

The identity of that corpse was none other than the deceased Myo-sin.

It was made to look as if it had been burned, but it was hidden to show to another diviner.

-Step, step!

Sak approached the corpse of the dead Myo-sin.

And she removed the straw mat.

“Teacher.”

Sak stared intently at the face of the dead Myo-sin with trembling eyes.

Although there was said to be no great affection between diviner, the death of someone she knew was still unpleasant.

Lady Seok asked her,

“How do you think he died?”

A straightforward question.

To this question, Sak replied in a low voice,

“The cause of death is not judged by what is seen. Only the dead can tell.”

-Swish!

Then she brought her hand to the face of the dead Myo-sin.

Seeing this, Lady Seok and guard Ho-aeng frowned and slightly turned their heads.

They couldn't imagine touching a foul-smelling corpse with their bare hands.

Sak touched Myo-sin's face with her eyes closed.

And then,

-Clench, clench!

With her left hand, she made hand seals.

‘Gye! Tu! Jeon!’

The Baek, Ja, followed by the Byeong.

Sak, who had made the hand seals of the Nine Character Dharani, chanted something in a small voice.

“Three-Person Joint Technique. The Northern Emperor has granted me authority. So reveal all that you have experienced. Urgently, urgently, as the law and decree command!”

The atmosphere was getting eerie.

The air seemed to grow heavy.

What is she doing?

Both Lady Seok and guard Ho-aeng held their breath and watched her.

Soon, a bizarre scene unfolded before their eyes.

-Tremble, tremble, tremble!

'!?'

The entire body of the dead Myo-sin began to shake on its own.

'The, the corpse is moving by itself?'

Guard Ho-aeng was so startled that he covered his mouth and unknowingly took a step back.

On the other hand, Lady Seok only furrowed her brows at this sight, not greatly frightened.

Rather, she focused on how the Fang Arts were being performed, as she couldn't see it up close.

"Reveal all. Urgently, urgently, as the law..."

-Clench!

Sak bit her lip tightly, and her expression instantly distorted.

'As expected.'

It didn't deviate from her expectations.

As Sak pulled her left hand, which was maintaining the hand seal, the dead Myo-sin's mouth opened with a creak and closed.

After that, the movement subsided.

Sak opened her eyes slightly and released the hand seal on her left hand.

"What happened?"

To that question, Sak said nothing.

But soon she opened her eyes, removed her hand, and spoke.

"I asked my teacher."

"Asked? As if a dead person would really answer..."

"Of course not. Unless the spiritual remains in the corporeal part of the soul, they won't directly answer."

“.....”

Was she making a joke now?

Didn't she clearly say she asked?

As if reading her thoughts, Sak continued,

“All the dead have traces.”

“Traces?”

“In the spirit of a corpse that hasn't been dead for forty-nine days, spiritual traces remain. If you awaken those traces, you can see how the owner of the soul met their death.”

“Then did you see who did it?”

“I didn't see.”

“What do you mean? You just said a moment ago that within forty-nine days...”

“If one loses their life by Sal (murder), only a fragment of the last moment remains, so no matter how skilled a diviner is, it's difficult to accurately confirm how they died.”

‘Fear...’

The last fragment of diviner Myo-sin that she saw was extreme fear.

That's why she had bitten her lip tightly.

This in itself wasn't particularly special.

But would a person living as a diviner have been this terrified just from being killed?

Of course, if it was a vengeful spirit of the Yellow Sprit level, it might have been difficult to handle with just the title of Su-ranked diviner, so it was quite possible.

Lady Seok asked,

“...Then you're saying we can't know anything?”

“That's not the case.”

“What do you mean?”

“Dying by Sal means it was a death by supernatural phenomena. Seeing how the blood vessels of the corpse are so grotesquely protruding, it’s not an ordinary vengeful spirit.”

At those words, Lady Seok’s eyes sharpened.

This was the very point she had doubts about.

“So you’re saying it’s true that he died like this because of supernatural phenomena?”

“Yes. It’s a very strong vengeful spirit.”

“I knew it. That child did it after all. Ahhh.”

The desired answer came out.

Then it meant that Mok Gyeong-un used supernatural phenomena to kill diviner Myo-sin and even threatened the life of Sohwa, her maid.

As everything became clear, she trembled with rage.

What kind of bastard was he that even such vengeful spirits were helping him?

Lady Seok spoke sharply with a voice filled with anger,

“You can handle it, right?”

To her question, Sak asked back,

“If you promise one thing clearly, it’s possible.”

“What is it?”

“Not all supernatural phenomena are the same. Vengeful spirits are the opposite of cultivating life, so they can’t be tamed as Devouring supreme-rulers in the first place. So in the end, we have to consider it as possession.”

“And?”

“If what was mentioned in the request is true, that young master named Mok Gyeong-un may have already lost his corporeal part of the soul to supernatural phenomena and lost his spirit. Taking this into account, during the exorcism...”

Lady Seok cut off the complicated explanation,

“Just get to the point.”

“...There is a high probability of death. Is that alright?”

At Sak's words, the corners of Lady Seok's mouth curled up slightly.

Rather, it was what she wished for.

“I don't mind.”

Seeing her like that, Sak sneered inwardly.

It was truly ridiculous to see a family coveting each other's lives for the sake of the succession competition.

But it wasn't something for her to concern herself with.

She took out a wooden dagger from the waist belt made of leather.

“What are you trying to do?”

“First, I'll return the Sal to weaken the vengeful spirit and the host.”

“How?”

“Receiving a reverse Sal is an excruciating pain that makes one wish for death. Watch.”

-Swish!

Sak took out a talisman from her bosom.

On the talisman, it was written in red ink:

[逆(Reverse)]

She wrapped it around the wooden dagger and then unhesitatingly stabbed it into the chest of the dead diviner Myo-sin.

-Stab!

“The Northern Emperor grants me the talisman to drive away evil spirits, so urgently act according to the command!”

-Wriggle!

At that moment, the corpse of the dead diviner Myo-sin twisted.

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–Phew. Damn bastard.

Smoke flowed from Cheong-ryeong's red lips.

She glared at Mok Gyeong-un, who was circulating qi, with a displeased expression.

What the .... was that fellow's identity?

If one reversed the qi circulation, it was normal to fall into qi-deviation, become a cripple, or face death.

But the death qi was gathering.

Those who could be affected by or sense death qi were the dead, in other words, vengeful spirits like themselves.

But Mok Gyeong-un was a living human.

Was this possible?

-...A living human attracts the qi of death.

It was an unprecedented sight.

But she still didn't know.

Since it was an unknown realm that living humans hadn't explored yet, even if he gathered death qi, it was hard to guarantee that he could circulate and control it like the qi of cultivating life.

Controlling the qi of death was no different from entering the realm of the dead.

–Whew.

Curiosity filled her crimson eyes as she exhaled thick smoke.

Could a living human really gather and even control the qi of death?

This was quite interesting and greatly stimulating.

However,

-Smolder, smolder!

One of Cheong-ryeong's eyebrows, who had been looking at Mok Gyeong-un, raised.

-This is?

Cheong-ryeong stared in the northeast direction.

Then, Demonic Monk also flinched and looked northeast, and soon stood as if guarding Mok Gyeong-un's breathing technique that was gathering death qi.

Tension filled Demonic Monk's eyes.

At that moment,

-Thud!

Demonic Monk clutched his chest and was pushed back.

-Whoosh!

As if receiving immense pressure, Demonic Monk crossed his arms and distorted his expression.

-Crack, crack, crack, crack, crack!

Wounds like something appeared all over Demonic Monk's giant body.

Even his blood vessels grotesquely protruded.

Then, the eyelids of Mok Gyeong-un, who was concentrating on the reverse qi circulation with his eyes closed, trembled.

At this rate, he would be hit by Sal.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong's crimson eyes deepened.

-How dare a lowly bastard.

-Rustle!

Cheong-ryeong, who was on the ceiling, lightly descended as if flapping her wings.

Then, swinging her pipe toward where the reverse Sal was flying, she parted her red lips.

-Begone.

-Swoosh!

As soon as those words ended, the gray smoke flowing from Demonic Monk's wounds gathered into one and rushed toward the northeast direction.

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-Stab! Stab! Stab!

Sak, who had made a hand seal with her left hand, was repeatedly stabbing the corpse with the wooden dagger wrapped in a talisman.

Lady Seok felt a strange thrill at Sak's appearance, trembling her body.

Thinking that this would make that devilish fellow Mok Gyeong-un suffer, her excitement wouldn't subside.

'More! Suffer more!'

-Stab! Stab!

Stabbing the corpse relieved her anger.

Sak, who had been stabbing the body recklessly, now raised the dagger to pierce the dead Myo-sin's brow.

At that very moment...

-Whoosh!

Sak's body was flung backward and soon crashed into the warehouse wall.

-Bang!

"Ugh!"

Sak, who had hit the wall, dropped the dagger with a groan.`

She looked at her palm that had dropped the dagger, and it was swollen in the shape of the dagger as if she had suffered a burn.

-Drip, drip!

Then, black blood flowed from her mouth.

"Diviner Sak!"

The startled Lady Seok supported her.

It was hard to understand what was suddenly happening.

“Why is this happening?”

“.....”

To her question, Sak couldn't give any answer.

It was because the shock she had suddenly received was so great that she was experiencing the pain of her internal organs twisting.

‘Reverse Sal... to strike back with reverse Sal...’

Sak's heterochromatic eyes trembled.

This was a completely unexpected situation.

In the middle of it, something so evil and powerful that it gave her goosebumps had intervened.

‘...It's not just Yellow Spirit level.’

It was a vengeful spirit of an even higher class.

Chapter 29

“What in the world is this.....”

Diviner Sak couldn't hide her bewilderment.

If that sensation just now wasn't her imagination, it undoubtedly surpassed the level of a Yellow Spirit.

This was even more unexpected than the pain from the reflected evil energy.

A vengeful spirit above the level of a Yellow Spirit?

“Sak-bangsa[[Diviner]]? Are you alright?”

Lady Seok, the lady of the house, asked as she helped Sak up.

Sak nodded her head at this question.

Although the evil energy was reflected back at her, she had protected her body with guardian talismans, so she avoided fatal internal injuries.

“Cough cough.....”

“What exactly happened?”

“The evil energy I sent was reflected back.”

“Reflected back the evil energy? What is happened does that mean?”

“Just as I said. Diviner Myo-sin lost his life to the vengeful spirit’s killing energy. but I sent the same killing energy back to the vengeful spirit.”

“But you’re saying it bounced that off?”

“Yes.”

At her answer, Lady Seok furrowed her brow.

What was going on here?

A diviner superior to Myo-sin in skill had her reflected evil energy bounced off – she didn’t know how to process this.

“...Then does this mean we cannot resolve this matter?”

-Shk!

At this question from Lady Seok, Sak wiped the black blood from the corner of her mouth and spoke.

“It’s not a matter of resolving it.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“The situation has become far more dangerous than anticipated.”

At Sak’s grave tone, Lady Seok asked with a worried look:

“Dangerous, you say?”

“If it was around the level of a Yellow Spirit, I could have sent the evil energy, weakened the vengeful spirit, and exorcised it with talisman techniques. But that went awry.”

“Awry meaning...”

“It’s a malicious vengeful spirit of a far higher level.”

At Sak's words, Lady Seok asked in an uncomprehending tone:

"Do vengeful spirits also have levels?"

"Yes. You can think of it as a measure of danger."

"Then you said before that a Yellow Spirit? Was it Yellow Spirit? Anyhow, you said it was of a higher level than a Yellow Spirit spirit, so how much more dangerous is it?"

Brushing her disheveled hair back, she replied:

"Actually, even a Yellow Spirit level spirit is extremely dangerous as it can directly inflict killing energy on humans and cause death. But anything higher than that is something even diviners who deal with monsters cannot help but be on alert for."

"Even for diviners?"

"Yes. Green ghosts and above are quite rare."

"Why is that?"

"To become a Green ghost or above, that vengeful energy must persist for decades or the spirit must have suffered immense agony. However, most vengeful spirits naturally dissipate over time and are exorcised on their own."

"...So those Green ghosts are the ones that have survived over many years?"

"Yes. Vengeful spirits that have existed for decades. That is a Green ghost. Even for diviners who specialize in this, dealing with such high-level spirits is no easy task. In most cases, it requires at least five Level 5 diviners to stake their lives to exorcise them."

Diviners like Myo-sin were absolutely no match for Green ghosts.

At Sak's explanation, Lady Seok cautiously asked:

"Then is the vengeful spirit possessing him one of those decades-old Green ghosts?"

"Most likely."

That was Sak's assumption.

She herself had only encountered higher level spirits twice.

Those could be called calamities without exaggeration, but she felt this wasn't quite to that degree.

If it was truly that high level, the Yeon Mok Sword Manor here would have already been dyed red with blood.

Its range of influence was incomparable to those below Green ghosts.

That's why she was convinced it was a Green ghost.

"Sak-bangsa...if it's that dangerous, can you handle it alone?"

At this question from Lady Seok, Sak held out her hand.

"...What does that mean?"

"You'll need to pay an additional fee."

"For what?"

"Five hundred silver nyang is insufficient for a Green ghost level. You'll need to raise it to a thousand."

"....."

This situation and she's haggling?

At Sak's words, not Lady Seok but the guard Ho-aeng interjected in disbelief.

"A thousand silver nyang? No matter what, five hundred is enough to buy how many sacks of rice, and you think that makes sense?"

"Silver and lives cannot be compared."

"Lives? Ha! Just because madam requested you, I think you're mistaken but this is a martial household. It's not a place for ordinary people..."

"Then the guard can handle it."

Saying that, Sak tried to leave the storage room.

'This wench, really!'

Unable to hold back at her behavior, the guard Ho-aeng blocked her way.

"Who said you can leave as you please?"

"Please step aside."

“Unless you spit back what you received or something...”

“No. It’s fine.”

“What?”

At the sudden words, guard Ho-aeng looked puzzled, but Sak glanced at the top of her sack and muttered as if calming something:

“Settle down. Guyeo.”

‘!?’

There was nothing on the sack.

But why would she say such things as if there was something there? It was bothering her.

Annoyed by this, the guard Ho-aeng asked:

“What’s on the sack that you’re talking like that? Before too, as if there’s something...”

-Rustle rustle!

Before she could even finish.

Subtle rustling sounds reached her ears.

Ho-aeng looked in that direction.

‘Huh?’

There were only piles of sacks and nothing else.

But again, rustling sounds came from somewhere.

And from multiple places at that.

-Rustle rustle! Rustle rustle!

-Shk!

With a tense expression, Ho-aeng moved her hand to the sheath at her waist.

It was an unpleasant sound.

It was coming from here and there and quite grating.

Then Sak waved her hand and spoke in a firm voice:

“Guyeo. Enough.”

As if by magic, the rustling sounds that were just coming from everywhere ceased in an instant.

Feeling a sudden ominous premonition, Ho-aeng asked in a slightly deflated voice:

“Wh...what was that just now?”

At this question, Sak shook her head side to side and said:

“Don’t provoke Guyeo.”

Saying that, Sak made a gesture as if petting the empty air above the sack.

She did the same thing before too, and there was no understanding what she was doing.

“There’s nothing there, so what on earth...”

“Guyeo is very shy.”

“No. What the heck is this Guyeo that you keep...”

“Guyeo is a native Imaemangyang of Mt. Yeo at the end of Mt. Gal.”

“Imaemangyang? You don’t mean a monster?”

“Similar.”

Imaemangyang (魑魅魍魎).

To be precise, mountain goblins or monsters are called Imae (魑魅) while water monsters in rivers or seas are referred to as Mangnyang (魍魎).

Since ancient times, people have combined these terms and called them Imaemangyang.

“Guyeo is an Imaemangyang that became my servant ghost. Of course, even if it’s shy, it never forgives those who try to harm its master.”

-Hwarak!

As soon as she finished speaking, the torch flickered and a strange shadow was cast behind the sack.

'Wh-what is this?'

Seeing the shadow, Ho-aeng took a step back with a terrified expression.

There was clearly nothing visible on the sack, but a huge shadow with a snail-like coiled body, a bird's beak, and a snake's tail was undulating.

Its appearance was utterly bizarre.

"If there's nothing more, please step aside now."

Sak tried to pass by the frightened Ho-aeng.

At that moment, Lady Seok spoke.

"Wait!"

"....."

"Can you really handle that Green ghost or whatever it is?"

At that question, the corners of Sak's mouth lifted slightly.

She figured they wouldn't be able to refuse anyway.

Although a Green ghost level was said to be extremely dangerous, she felt she could handle it somehow as a diviner (Banggi) who could employ servant ghosts.

Sak erased the smile from her lips and turned her head with a serious expression.

"The vengeful spirit will be very angry after having the killing energy reflected back. If we don't hurry and deal with it, an even bigger incident may occur."

Lady Seok looked at Sak with sharp eyes.

Soon, she made her decision.

"Alright. A thousand silver nyang. I will pay it."

"Upfront."

"....."

This diviner wench.

She seems obsessed with money.

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Mok Gyeong-un slowly opened his closed eyes.

Everything was different from when he absorbed the life-nurturing energy through normal qi circulation.

Instead, these chilling and yin energies he took in through reverse circulation felt like wearing clothes that fit his body, allowing him to freely circulate qi.

They didn't even disappear when entering below his danjeon.

'Was this the answer.'

Rather than taking in life-nurturing energy that didn't suit his body, this was better.

Moreover, he could even circulate qi.

However, there was one problem.

'Too little.'

Compared to life-nurturing energy, this death energy was significantly less.

It was less than even a tenth.

Like a dried up spring, no matter how much he circulated qi, it wouldn't fill up properly.

'What a pity.'

If he could secure more of this energy, it seemed he could form a cinnabar field even with this death energy.

Should he just kill someone moderately and absorb death energy in a gruesome manner?

'Hmm.'

Mok Gyeong-un had that fleeting thought.

But that seemed difficult to do right away.

The more he killed people recklessly, the more restrictions that would arise, so even if he did kill someone, he needed some thorough calculations.

Otherwise, he could end up in a predicament like before.

‘Should I ask them instead?’

As vengeful spirits, Demonic Monk or Cheong-ryeong might know where this death energy was abundantly distributed.

So he went to find Demonic Monk, but,

‘Huh?’

Demonic Monk’s condition looked quite bad.

It was sitting on the floor leaning against something, its body covered in wounds with gray haze-like substance rising from it.

He didn’t know why it was like this.

Moreover, the guard Go-chan was passed out on the infirmary bed in a strange posture as if he fainted.

‘What’s this?’

Did something happen while he was circulating qi?

As he was feeling puzzled, someone’s voice rang out.

-Hmph. You’re a handful. Mortal.

The owner of the voice was Cheong-ryeong.

Sitting on the bed with a pipe in her mouth, she puffed out thick smoke and spoke, lifting Mok Gyeong-un’s chin with the end of the pipe.

-Are you sure you’re a living human?

“You think I might be dead? My heart is beating just fine.”

-Hmm. If you were a proper living being, you should have drawn in life-nurturing energy, not death energy, and performed proper qi circulation and practices.

“Is that wrong to do?”

At this question from Mok Gyeong-un, Cheong-ryeong snorted.

It wasn't a matter of right or wrong.

She was just curious about something that defied principles.

-Do you not feel like your heart will burst or your head will crack?

"No, nothing like that."

-How odd. How odd indeed. You are the first mortal of your kind that I've encountered.

"Is that so? But may I ask something too?"

At this question from Mok Gyeong-un, Cheong-ryeong put the pipe back in her mouth, took a deep drag and exhaled, speaking in an annoyed tone.

-Huu. What do you want to know?

"Nothing much. How can I gather more death energy?"

-Why do you want to gather that? Are you really intending to form a cinnabar field with that energy?

"Precisely."

At these words from Mok Gyeong-un, Cheong-ryeong twitched her red lips.

She found this mortal who bound her quite detestable, but on the other hand, she was curious.

If one formed a cinnabar field with death energy instead of life-nurturing energy and wielded it, she wondered in what form that power would manifest.

'Death energy in a living human body.....'

Quite interesting.

Fiddling with the pipe between her fingers, she spoke.

-Good. I'll tell you. There's an easy way.

"And what is that?"

-Kill. That will do.

“...By killing, you mean?”

-When living things, be they humans or anything else, die, their life-nurturing energy transforms into death energy. What you absorbed was probably like that too.

At first, even Cheong-ryeong was doubtful.

After all, living humans cannot absorb death energy.

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un licked his lips slightly and said:

“That’s a pity. I also think that way would be faster, but if I do that, things will get quite troublesome. So it seems hard to kill recklessly right away. Any other methods?”

‘A pity, he says....’

The more she knew this guy, the more he was definitely different from ordinary humans.

His way of thinking was completely different, so to speak.

-Then change the place and time.

“Place and time?”

-In the first place, a place like this infirmary is a place to save people. It’s overflowing with life-nurturing energy, so how much death energy do you think you can gather here?

“I see.”

Mok Gyeong-un nodded as if he understood.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong shook her head side to side and continued.

-The time when life-nurturing energy reaches its peak is at dawn before sunrise. As it is the time when life stirs, life-nurturing energy is abundant. Then when would the opposite be?

“Around sunset?”

At those words, Cheong-ryeong laughed.

-No.

“No?”

-You may think so, but the time when death energy is most abundant is different.

“And when is that?”

-From the hour of the rat to the middle of the hour of the tiger[[11 PM to 3 AM]]. This is called the hour of the dead.

“Hour of the dead? Sounds plausible.”

-It reaches its peak in between at the beginning of the hour of the ox. At that time, death energy becomes most abundant.

“Then I should aim for that time. As for the place, somewhere overflowing with yin energy would be good. Like a graveyard, for example.”

-At least your head works that much. Mortal.

Cheong-ryeong lifted the corners of her red lips.

Then, as if becoming conscious of her own expression, she quickly returned to a serious face.

Seeing Cheong-ryeong like this, Mok Gyeong-un smirked inwardly but showed no outward signs and said:

“Thank you for telling me. But can I know why Go-chan and Demonic Monk are like that?”

He was curious about this too.

-You’re quick to be curious. That mortal, you...

As if realizing it would be problematic to say she did that to stop his suicidal act of reverse qi circulation, Cheong-ryeong quickly changed the subject.

She was about to talk while pointing at Demonic Monk with her pipe, but then,

-Uuu-oooh...

A strange sound was heard from outside.

It sounded like a bird cry but also like a fox cry depending on how you heard it.

Finding this strange, he heard a rustling sound from somewhere.

Mok Gyeong-un looked in that direction.

‘What’s that?’

It seemed to be coming from the left side of the bed, but there was nothing there.

-Rustle rustle!

But this time, the sound came from the right side.

So he looked there again, but there seemed to be nothing this time either.

Finding this odd, he was about to-

-Rustle! Rustle! Rustle! Rustle! Ssss ssss ssss ssss!

Sounds came pouring out from here and there.

As he turned his gaze there, black somethings were suddenly swarming and filling the floor.

They were none other than bugs.

All sorts of bugs at that, and their number was hard to fathom.

“...What are these?”

-A troublesome thing has gotten involved, it seems. Mortal.

“Pardon?”

-It's Guyeo.

In the Classic of Mountains and Seas, one of the three great forbidden books of the Central Plains, it is written thus:

Deep in the mountains of Mt. Yeo-a lives an evil beast called Guyeo.

It has a bird's beak in its mouth, owl-like eyes, and a snake-like tail.

Guyeo avoids humans.

Guyeo's cry sounds like it's calling its own name.

Wherever Guyeo appears, bugs always swarm, and not a single grain of rice can be harvested, eventually turning the land into a barren wasteland.

Chapter 30

The Classic of Mountains and Seas, one of the three great forbidden books that has existed since the time of King Yu of the Xia Dynasty.

It is the oldest geographical book, and within it are written many strange records.

Guyeo is one of the Imaemangyang recorded in the Classic of Mountains and Seas, a being so dangerous that it is described as an evil beast.

-Rustle! Rustle! Rustle! Rustle! Sss sss sss sss!

The various bugs swarming in were hard to count.

Mok Gyeong-un rubbed his chin as if troubled and spoke to Cheong-ryeong.

“Are these bugs Guyeo?”

-No. There is an Imaemangyang that has a good compatibility with bugs. Or rather than being friendly, I should say it immobilizes bugs.

“There are many.”

There really were many.

At some point, the floor had turned black, covered with bugs.

They filled every inch, making one hesitant to step down from the bed.

Those with weak stomachs might find it distressing to even look at.

Mok Gyeong-un glanced at Demonic Monk who was still leaning against the wall.

-Rustle rustle!

Demonic Monk’s wounds were slowly filling up.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un spoke to Cheong-ryeong.

“These bugs. They’re related to Demonic Monk becoming like that, right?”

-Probably so.

“Seems like even Cheong-ryeong doesn’t know for sure.”

-What’s there not to know? I saved it from the killing energy flying at it, so what? Be grateful. If it wasn’t for me, you would’ve been dead for sure.

“Killing energy?”

Reverse killing, yeoksal (逆殺).

He remembered reading about it in the Yin-Yang Book.

Being afflicted by a monster, a vengeful spirit, is called sal (殺).

Sending that sal back to the vengeful spirit or its host with the help of a higher being is called yeoksal.

It’s a kind of revenge.

‘An ordinary person wouldn’t know how to do that.’

Here, Mok Gyeong-un’s thoughts moved very quickly.

Ordinary people would have their thoughts freeze up or be extremely confused by the swarming bugs, but Mok Gyeong-un calmly analyzed the situation.

‘A diviner...then is it Lady Seok.’

And he instantly pinpointed the culprit.

In this situation, the only one who would call another diviner and request a yeoksal was the lady of the house, Lady Seok.

As expected, she wasn’t the type to give up easily.

Mok Gyeong-un shook his head side to side.

-What will you do? If you stay still like this, you’ll become food for the bugs.

Cheong-ryeong gestured with her chin.

The legs of the wooden bed where the bugs were touching were creaking and lowering.

-Rustle rustle!

The speed was quite fast.

The only places without bugs were the top of the bed and the long table with medicinal ingredients.

No, there was one more place.

'The lamp.'

That place was a bit different from the others.

Usually, bugs had the habit of gathering toward bright places.

They would unknowingly approach and get pushed back by the heat or burn, so there was a circular gap around it.

"Cheong-ryeong. Can you help?"

-Well. Why should I?

"....."

Mok Gyeong-un raised an eyebrow and looked at her.

Then Cheong-ryeong snorted and took a deep drag from her pipe before exhaling and speaking.

-I helped you out of compassion earlier since you were circulating qi, but now that you're awake, you have no confidence to handle even this much?

At these words from Cheong-ryeong, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue.

She was the type to be difficult at important moments.

He thought she might cooperate now that she answered his questions nicely, but it seemed not yet.

"Isn't it practically a symbiotic relationship? Will you really do this?"

-I'll let you survive.

"Ah."

She was truly a difficult servant ghost to handle.

Then Cheong-ryeong grinned and spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

-Hey. Mortal. Let me make a suggestion.

"A suggestion?"

-Yes. Try overcoming this crisis with your own strength. If you resolve this situation on your own, I'll seriously consider whether to help you in the future or not.

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue.

She was his servant ghost anyway, so she had no choice but to help if his life was threatened.

Yet she was making this kind of proposal, which was laughable.

Perhaps it was because her level was high unlike Demonic Monk, but she was truly stubborn with a strong ego.

“Well, I have no choice. The one in need has to comply. Let’s try the easy method first.”

-Easy method?

At Cheong-ryeong’s retort, Mok Gyeong-un raised his voice and shouted.

“Is anyone there?”

Outside the infirmary were the warriors of the outer house.

Getting their help was the easiest way rather than resolving it himself.

“Warriors?”

But no answer was heard.

The shadows on the door clearly showed them standing...

‘Hmm.’

Their heads were slightly tilted to the side.

As if they had lost consciousness.

It seemed something was done to them.

-What were you expecting?

“...I see.”

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders.

-Thud thud!

Then a shadow approached the door of the infirmary.

Judging by the shape of the shadow, it seemed to be a woman, and on the woman's right shoulder was a sack with a bizarre shape of a shadow above it.

It was a strange shadow with a bird's beak and a snake's tail.

-Coming in person, how confident.

"Is that it?"

-Huu. Yes. That's Guyeo.

It seemed the bizarre shadow on the shoulder was Guyeo.

Puffing smoke from her pipe, Cheong-ryeong snorted and muttered in a displeased tone.

-Now there are even folks carrying that damn bird thing as a Shiksin.

"Seems you dislike it."

-Bugs are absolutely disgusting.

Cheong-ryeong seemed to truly hate bugs as she shuddered for no reason.

Her dislike of bugs was unexpected.

Could it be she was refusing to help without showing it just because of this?

He didn't believe that was the case.

-Rustle rustle!

At some point, the bed had sunk almost halfway due to the bugs.

This was the same for the bed Go Chan was on.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un bit the inside of his wrist below his back hand.

-Crunch!

-What are you doing?

"A temporary measure, you could say."

-Temporary measure?

-Drip drip!

As blood flowed from his bitten wrist, Mok Gyeong-un sprinkled it in all directions.

-Plop plop plop plop!

Then an amazing scene unfolded.

As Mok Gyeong-un's blood touched the bugs, they made strange noises and went into fits, frantically avoiding the spots where the blood splattered.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong asked in puzzlement.

-Why are they acting like that?

"I ate a lot of poisonous plants since I was young, so my blood is toxic."

-Your blood is toxic?

At this, Cheong-ryeong looked at him in disbelief.

Having toxicity in one's blood was practically the same as being a poisonous person.

The more she knew this guy, the more bizarre of a human he was.

-Plop plop plop plop!

Mok Gyeong-un kept sprinkling blood from under the bed to the surroundings.

Seeing the bugs get startled and avoid the blood made one imagine how strong the toxicity was.

Soon, the bugs couldn't approach Mok Gyeong-un's vicinity.

On the other hand, the bed Go Chan was lying on was precarious.

-Rustle rustle!

Mok Gyeong-un tried his best to keep the bugs away by sprinkling blood, but since it wasn't the surroundings, the bugs were pushing in through the blind spots.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un threw the wooden pillow on the bed at the guard Go Chan.

-Smack!

"Ugh!"

Startled by the wooden pillow hitting his head, Go Chan woke up.

The awakened Go Chan instinctively looked around and gasped.

“Wh-what is this?”

A tremendous number of bugs.

Those bugs were covering the surrounding floor and even crawling up onto the bed.

The surprised Go Chan lifted the blanket and frantically shook off the bugs.

To such Go Chan, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“It’s dangerous, so keep catching the bugs.”

“Y-young master? What is happened...”

“I don’t know either. But I advise against getting off the bed.”

‘This is insane.’

Go Chan found this situation utterly baffling.

But for now, he had to do as Mok Gyeong-un said and shake off the bugs to keep them in check.

As they were battling the bugs like that,

-Thud!

The door to the infirmary opened and someone entered.

Seeing this, Go Chan shouted in surprise.

“You there, miss! It’s dangerous, don’t come in!”

The one who entered was a woman with one white eye.

She was the diviner Sak.

“Dangerous...huh?”

Go Chan’s eyes widened.

As Sak took a step inside, the bugs parted to the sides, creating a path.

Of course, that was because her Shiksin was controlling these bugs.

-Rustle rustle!

Her mismatched eyes sparked with interest.

She had intended to slowly apply pressure and instill fear, but for some reason, the bugs couldn't approach, as if he had done something.

What did he do?

As she was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un spoke to her.

“Are you a diviner?”

At this question, Sak furrowed her brow.

Looking at the 17-year-old pretty boy standing on the bed, he didn't seem possessed by a monster at all.

If he were possessed by a Green ghost-level vengeful ghost, he wouldn't be in that state.

‘Is it that?’

Sak's gaze shifted to the large figure of Demonic Monk leaning against the back wall.

Her black eyes saw nothing.

But her other eye, the white eye, could see.

The vengeful spirit, that is.

‘...Yellow Spirit?’

Her white eye narrowed.

Looking through the white eye, one could estimate the level of a monster or vengeful spirit to some degree.

But that injured vengeful spirit looked like Yellow Spirit level no matter how she looked at it.

‘How can that be?’

A Yellow Spirit level couldn't deflect a killing strike.

If so, it meant not the Yellow Spirit but Mok Gyeong-un, who was presumed to be its host, had done it, but he didn't seem skilled in sorcery at all no matter how she looked at him.

Then who on earth had reflected the killing strike...

-You seem young but quite skilled.

A voice ringing in her ears.

At this, Sak turned her head to the side.

-Throb!

Within a hazy boundary, her white eye burst with blood vessels at the sight of something red.

"Ugh!"

Startled by the intense pain, she tightly closed her white eye.

What was that just now?

Her white eye that could see the other side couldn't contain that existence.

No, to be precise, she herself couldn't accept that existence conveyed through the white eye.

It was right at that moment.

-Uuu-ooooh!!!!

The Guyeo that had been docile on her shoulder suddenly let out a scream.

"Guyeo! Calm..."

-Uuu-ooooooh!!!!

At the ear-splitting scream, Sak couldn't endure and covered her ears.

She looked at Guyeo with a baffled expression.

Guyeo was staring at something with extremely wary eyes, so terrified that it couldn't control itself.

'For Guyeo to be this scared? What is happened...'

-Uuu-ooooh!!!!

-Rustle rustle!

Along with Guyeo's scream, the bugs on the floor suddenly soared upward.

The orderly appearance disappeared.

Winged bugs flew up and swarmed madly toward Mok Gyeong-un and Go Chan.

"Y-young master!"

The flustered Go Chan didn't know what to do.

Then Mok Gyeong-un reached out his hand toward the nearest lamp.

And he performed the Ritual of Binding (着) while chanting the mnemonic chant[[口訣]] in his mind.

'A precarious distance.'

If he concentrated within a distance of 1 jang, he could pull objects with the Ritual of Binding.

The location of the lamp was right at the precarious boundary.

-Shake shake!

The lamp stand trembled.

Then it was sucked into Mok Gyeong-un's hand.

-Smack!

Seeing this, Go Chan's eyes widened.

It was so surprising that Mok Gyeong-un, who hadn't even formed a cinnabar field yet, was displaying such a technique.

But that was only for a moment.

-Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un leaped onto the bed where Go Chan was in one go.

Then he swung the lamp mercilessly at the flying bugs.

-Whoosh! Whoosh!

The charging bugs also found the lamp hot and scattered here and there.

However, as if influenced by Guyeo's continued screams, they frantically tried to find openings and fly in.

"Go Chan, your guard's dagger!"

"Yes?"

"Dagger!"

At Mok Gyeong-un's shout, Go Chan searched his waist.

But the dagger he always carried for treatment was placed on top of his upper garment folded under the bed.

At this, Go Chan bent down and quickly reached his hand under.

-Rustle rustle!

"Eek!"

The bugs swarming from the floor were sticking to the clothes and even the dagger.

He hesitated for a moment, but Go Chan endured it and grabbed the dagger.

Thanks to that, the stuck bugs fiercely bit Go Chan's hand.

One might think being bitten by bugs wouldn't hurt much, but it's a different story when dozens of them swarm and bite.

"Aargh!"

Go Chan lifted his hand holding the dagger while frantically shaking it.

Mok Gyeong-un swung the lamp at his hand.

-Whoosh!

The remaining bugs stuck to it fell off in a panic.

"H-here it is!"

Taking this chance, Go Chan passed the dagger.

Receiving the dagger, Mok Gyeong-un handed him the lamp and said,

“Keep swinging it.”

“Yes, sir!”

Go Chan swung the lamp at the flying bugs.

In that gap, Mok Gyeong-un drew the dagger and,

-Slash!

‘!?’

He slashed it toward his own forehead.

It wasn’t deep, but the skin was cut enough for blood to flow out.

‘Wh-what is this?’

Go Chan couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

Why was he suddenly inflicting wounds on himself?

But that wasn’t the only one.

Mok Gyeong-un kept cutting here and there on his body with the dagger, creating wounds.

-Slash! Slash!

“Young master, what are you doing!”

Even at his shout, Mok Gyeong-un didn’t stop inflicting wounds.

‘...Did he go crazy?’

Even the diviner Sak, who was trying to control Guyeo somehow, had her attention stolen for a moment by Mok Gyeong-un’s actions.

Suddenly harming himself, what kind of act was this?

It was in that absurd moment.

The blood-covered Mok Gyeong-un, who had wounded various parts of his body, looked at her and lifted the corners of his mouth.

-Shudder!

That sight was so uncanny that Sak furrowed her brows.

How many scary things had she seen while working as a diviner?

But this feeling was completely different. It was right at that moment.

-Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un kicked off the ground and ran toward where she was.

'What are you doing?'

This was truly a suicidal act.

The bugs were flying about and charging, yet he was frantically harming himself and leaping into it.

Was he crazy with a death wish?

That's what she thought.

However,

-Plop plop plop plop plop!

In that instant, an unbelievable sight unfolded.

The bugs that had touched Mok Gyeong-un went into convulsions and fell to the floor.

Most of the nearby bugs also tried their best to avoid touching Mok Gyeong-un, as if not wanting to make contact.

As a result, a path naturally formed.

'Why are the bugs...?'

She couldn't fathom it at all.

If he made wounds like that, the unique smell of blood should make them swarm even more, but it was strange.

However, there was no time to be surprised now.

Mok Gyeong-un had come right in front of her.

“Guyeo! Block him!”

Sak shouted like that and flung her body back, trying to take out a talisman from her bosom.

Then Mok Gyeong-un threw the dagger he was holding at her.

‘shit!’ She was startled and tried to twist her body to avoid it.

At that moment, Guyeo, who couldn’t be controlled due to fear, seemed to sense her crisis and flew up from the sack, striking the dagger with its claws.

-Smack!

Clang!

And it let out an eardrum-shattering scream at the enemy threatening its master.

-Uuu-ooooh!

Along with the scream, the bugs shook and swirled from the floor.

Something huge was about to happen.

It was right then.

-Swoosh! -Uuu-oooh?

Guyeo, who had been screaming, suddenly lurched forward and was sucked into Mok Gyeong-un’s hand.

It was the Ritual of Binding

-Ack ack ack! Guyeo, grabbed by the neck, choked and suffered.

“Whew. It’s quiet now.”

Mok Gyeong-un looked at the captured Guyeo with a satisfied face.

Seeing that, Sak’s eyes widened. ‘...No way.’

How could he grab an Imaemangyang that wasn’t even his servant ghost with his bare hands?

