

MYST, MIGHT, MAYHEM

Myst, Might, Mayhem #Chapter 31 - Read Myst, Might, Mayhem Chapter 31

Chapter 31

Unlike the vengeful spirits that lack a physical body and thus cannot be touched or perceived, some of the entities in Imaemangnyang possess tangible forms.

Having a physical form means they can literally be touched.

However, even so, the bodies of Imaemangnyang entities, being an amalgamation of negative spiritual energy, are inherently toxic to living humans. As such, even trained diviners find it difficult to handle them with bare hands.

Surprisingly, Mok Gyeong-un caught the armadillo with his bare hands.

'Is he unaffected?'

As a diviner who employs the armadillo as a spirit servant, Sak couldn't help but be perplexed.

Why?

Merely touching the toxic energy is agonizing.

Yet Mok Gyeong-un showed no signs of discomfort.

-Kak kak!

'Oh no!'

Startled by the armadillo's pained cries, Sak snapped out of her bewilderment.

Swiftly, she drew a talisman from her bosom.

It was the Imperial Decree Incantation talisman.

-Chak chak chak!

Rapidly forming hand seals with her left hand, she chanted an incantation.

“.....!”

As soon as the incantation ended...

-Pa-chi-chi-chi-chi!

“Aargh!”

Blue sparks flew from the hand grasping the armadillo, and violent convulsions seized Mok Gyeong-un’s body.

All humans possess a small amount of lightning energy flowing within them.

The Imperial Decree Incantation talisman technique temporarily amplifies this energy to paralyze the target’s nerves and induce muscle spasms.

“Armadillo!”

Assuming Mok Gyeong-un would be immobilized by the electric shock, Sak tried to snatch her spirit servant, the armadillo.

However...

-Kwak!

-Ka ka ka ka kak!

The armadillo writhed in greater agony.

What was happening?

‘The Imperial Decree Incantation didn’t work. Could it be because he cultivated martial arts?’

Ordinary people, unless they had a unique constitution, were usually susceptible to exorcism techniques to some degree.

However, martial artists who could manipulate qi sometimes proved resistant to talismans and exorcism techniques.

Sak assumed Mok Gyeong-un, being from a martial arts clan, had naturally cultivated internal energy, rendering him resistant.

Of course, contrary to her speculation, Mok Gyeong-un had not endured through the power of internal energy.

'Lucky me.'

It was unintentional.

For the briefest moment, Mok Gyeong-un was paralyzed by the electric shock.

However, even in that instant, he maintained Ritual of Binding, and the temporarily amplified lightning energy in his body surged into his right hand.

Seizing that fleeting opportunity, Mok Gyeong-un instead released the gathered lightning energy into the armadillo.

-Ka ka ka ka kak!

That was the reason for the armadillo's suffering.

'Guyeo!'

As her spirit servant's agony intensified, the distressed Sak attempted another technique.

Rolling up her sleeves, she revealed the Talisman of the Celestial Ox and Talisman of the Ox Dipper talismans attached to her wrists.

-Chwarak!

From her waist, Sak drew another talisman.

It was inscribed with 'Big Dipper.'

Biting the edge of the talisman with her mouth, she formed the hand seals.

-Chak!

'Face Ox Borrowing Strength Technique'

By chanting the Face Ox Borrowing Strength Mantra, this technique temporarily doubled one's strength.

Diviners had devised this method to combat monsters and Imaemangnyang entities.

When used, it granted immense strength for a brief moment.

"Great Dipper,"

"Evil spirit!"

“Huh?”

-Pa-pak!

Chanting the incantation, Sak hastily leaned back.

Demonic Monk had suddenly appeared, swinging his skull prayer beads like a weapon at her head.

Dodging the attack, she bit her lip.

‘Yellow Spirit... when did it...?’

She had forgotten about him while focused on Mok Gyeong-un.

No, she hadn’t considered him a significant threat due to his weakened state.

-Sreu reuk!

But now, his condition seemed to have greatly improved.

The wounds on his body had nearly vanished.

‘Strange.’

No matter how incorporeal a ghost may be, they don’t recover this quickly.

Though puzzled, Sak prioritized the immediate task of freeing the armadillo from Mok Gyeong-un’s grasp...

It was at that very moment.

-Ka ka ka ka kak!

The armadillo’s scream rang out.

Startled, Sak glanced at the captive armadillo.

The armadillo, which had seemed fine just moments ago, had become significantly emaciated.

Realizing something was amiss, Sak grew increasingly alarmed.

‘Armadillo? What in the world...?’

He was merely holding its neck, so why was an Imaemangnyang entity like the armadillo in such a state?

Its condition was rapidly deteriorating.

Panic-stricken, Sak drew a wooden dagger with a talisman attached from her waist, intending to throw it at Mok Gyeong-un.

However...

-Sreu reuk!

Demonic Monk blocked her path.

Sak dashed to the side, forming a hand seal with one hand and chanting an incantation.

“Sun and moon shine brightly.....”

But before she could finish...

“Ugh!”

A tremendous pain seized Sak’s chest.

Instantly realizing the source of the pain, she gazed at Mok Gyeong-un and the armadillo.

“G... Guyeo!”

Sak’s eyes trembled wildly.

The Imaemangnyang armadillo had withered to the point of near-death.

It could only emit agonized groans, as if on the brink of its last breath.

-Kak... kak...

She couldn’t comprehend the situation.

It was bizarre enough for an ordinary human to grasp an Imaemangnyang with bare hands, but why was this happening when he wasn’t even using any exorcism techniques or spells?

“Sto... stop it!”

She cried out in desperation.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been holding the armadillo's neck as it shriveled to the brink of death, paid no heed to her plea.

Instead, he seemed entranced by something.

Only Cheong-ryeong could discern the reason behind Mok Gyeong-un's actions.

-Ha!

She could see it clearly.

The armadillo's energy, an Imaemangnyang entity, was being absorbed by the Ritual of Binding technique.

The armadillo's demonic energy, being the opposite of life energy, contained the essence of death.

'Much more.'

It was merely a means to capture the armadillo.

However, as Mok Gyeong-un began absorbing its energy through Ritual of Binding, he instantly realized...

This Imaemangnyang contained a significantly larger amount of death energy compared to killing a single human.

With this quantity, he might be able to immediately secure enough to form a danjeon[1].

Thus, he continued to drain the armadillo's energy.

The armadillo, capable of controlling insects but lacking any other notable physical abilities as an Imaemangnyang, had no means to escape Ritual of Binding.

-Uweo eo eo...

Completely drained of its energy, the armadillo teetered on the brink of death.

At that very moment...

-Kung!

Sak dropped to her knees on the ground, her voice filled with anguish as she cried out to Mok Gyeong-un.

"Please, let that child go."

The armadillo was her precious spirit servant.

She couldn't bear to lose a spirit servant that had been with her for four years, like family.

Sak shouted.

"If you release it, I will abandon the request!"

Upon hearing those words, Mok Gyeong-un momentarily paused Ritual of Binding and turned his head to face her.

He gazed at Sak with an intrigued expression.

'Giving up over something like this?'

It was unexpected.

It wasn't even human, just an Imaemangnyang.

He hadn't anticipated her willingness to kneel and beg just to save a spirit servant.

'Hmm.'

Was this bird-beaked creature that precious to her?

Smirking, Mok Gyeong-un spoke to her.

"You mentioned a request, right?"

"Yes."

"Whose request was it?"

'Ah!'

She realized her mistake.

In her urgency, she had blurted out that she would abandon the request.

The most crucial aspect of this matter was to maintain secrecy about the client until the very end.

But she had slipped up.

"I'll ask again. Whose request was it?"

“That’s...”

Reputation was important in this field.

Breaching it meant...

“It seems you don’t particularly care about saving this creature. Then...”

As Mok Gyeong-un prepared to resume Ritual of Binding, the hesitant Sak finally answered.

“Lady Seok... The principal wife of Yeon Mok Sword Manor here requested it.”

Mok Gyeong-un smirked at her words.

He had already guessed who the client was, so he merely asked to confirm.

“As expected.”

“...”

Having revealed the client, Sak’s expression darkened, likely feeling a sense of self-loathing.

Mok Gyeong-un asked her again.

“Are you acquainted with the diviner named Myo-sin?”

“...”

-Kak!

The armadillo, barely clinging to life, cried out in agony once more.

Startled by this, Sak spoke.

“Y-yes!”

“Your responses are slower than I expected. From now on, if there’s no answer, I’ll just dispose of this thing.”

-Euk!

Sak gritted her teeth at Mok Gyeong-un’s words.

Despite her considerable experience as a diviner despite her young age, this was an unprecedented situation for her.

Being threatened using her spirit servant.

If the sect leader or other diviners learned of this, they would ridicule her, but for Sak, who had no family, the armadillo and money were her entire life.

“I’ll... I’ll answer well, so please don’t do that.”

“We’ll see. I’ll continue asking questions, so please provide answers. If you accepted the request, did you receive money?”

“Yes.”

“How much did you receive?”

“A thousand silver coins.”

“That’s a substantial amount.”

“...”

“I sense there’s more to the exact request details.”

“I was told that if the third young master, Mok Gyeong-un, had killed people while possessed by an evil spirit, I should forcibly exorcise him.”

“That doesn’t seem to be all.”

“They said it didn’t matter if he lost his life during the exorcism. And... they asked me to obtain a secret manual from you.”

“Aha.”

Mok Gyeong-un smirked.

As expected.

Since they perceived his ability to control a spirit servant as an unknown power, they likely wouldn’t take unnecessary risks and would entrust the request to another diviner.

Mok Gyeong-un stared intently at her.

Then he asked.

“Do you have any companions?”

After a momentary hesitation, Sak answered.

“...Yes.”

She had considered denying it but ultimately responded, thinking that if Mok Gyeong-un knew there were other diviners besides her, he might be more cautious about taking reckless actions.

As if her assumption had been correct...

“Hmm. So you have companions... Do your companions know that you’re currently handling this task?”

“Everyone knows.”

She immediately replied, thinking it was fortunate.

If he was aware of the group’s existence, she believed Mok Gyeong-un would be more prudent.

And her prediction seemed somewhat accurate.

“Things have become quite troublesome.”

He found it considerably bothersome that she had companions and that they were all aware of her current task.

He had killed Myo-sin, and now another diviner, Sak, had come.

If she were to die as well, the likelihood of another diviner seeking him out would be high.

“Do they also know that the target of the request is me?”

“Yes.”

“Hmm.”

Sak thought that if she played her cards right, the situation might be resolved favorably.

Although she had promised to abandon the request, this man was extremely dangerous.

While her clouded eyes prevented her from accurately assessing him, it seemed he wasn't actually possessed by a ghost but genuinely controlled it.

'...Is he really using it as a spirit servant?'

Ghosts serving as spirit servants was an impossibility.

For now, she hoped that this man, fearing future repercussions, would release her spirit servant, the armadillo, and herself.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been stroking his chin with his hand, spoke.

"Well, there's no choice."

'Phew.'

Upon hearing those words, she inwardly breathed a sigh of relief.

Thank goodness...

-Kwak!

-Ka ka ka kak!

Suddenly, the armadillo screamed in agony.

Sak, startled, cried out.

"I... I answered, so why are you doing that?"

"Ah... No matter how much I think about it, whether I let you go or not, it seems other diviners will come after me in some way. Am I wrong?"

"..."

Sak couldn't bring herself to answer his question.

Even if she wanted to deceive him, this man was too cunning to be easily fooled.

"Your silence confirms it."

Mok Gyeong-un said with a grin.

"Then, bid farewell to this bird-beaked creature."

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un resumed Ritual of Binding to absorb the remaining energy from the armadillo.

At that moment, Sak's eyes reddened as she shouted.

“Stop! Stop! I'll do anything, so please don't kill that child!”

Mok Gyeong-un's lips curled into a bitter smile at her desperate plea.

In the front courtyard of Hyehwa Hall.

Lady Seok stood with her hands behind her back, waiting endlessly.

This time, she had to ensure the matter was handled thoroughly.

If that impudent Mok Gyeong-un truly sided with the second son, Mok Eun-pyeong, and handed over the secret manual, the situation could be reversed.

Therefore, she hoped the diviner named Sak would resolve the issue effectively.

“Madam, the wind outside is cold. Wouldn't it be better to wait inside?”

Sohwa, one of the maidservants, spoke to her.

Lady Seok shook her head.

“Do you know how things will turn out?”

If the worst-case scenario unfolded, she intended to handle the aftermath immediately.

If it didn't work out, she had to ensure that no one could have it.

As she pondered, Ho-aeng, the escort warrior, pointed towards the entrance of the hall where Sak was entering.

“Madam, the diviner is coming.”

The diviner Sak could be seen there.

“Ah!”

Seeing her unharmed, Lady Seok's face brightened.

It meant the request had been successfully completed.

“Congratulations, Madam.”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself.”

She believed she should go inside Hyehwa Hall and inquire about how the task was accomplished and whether the secret manual was obtained.

However, after passing through the entrance, Sak stopped.

Lady Seok found it peculiar.

As she watched her, it seemed the diviner Sak was taking out some kind of talisman from her bosom.

‘What is she doing?’

Unable to contain her impatience, Lady Seok gestured for Sak to come closer and said, “What are you doing over there? Come here and talk...”

Before she could even finish her sentence, the diviner Sak shouted loudly, “Madam, our Ghostly Spirit Pavilion cannot kill Young Master Mok Gyeong-un as per your request!”

‘!!!!!!’

She shouted so loudly that Lady Seok, the escort warrior Ho-aeng, and even the maidservants couldn’t hide their bewilderment.

What in the world was this supposed to mean?

‘This wench has gone mad.’

But that wasn’t the end of it.

“Young Master Mok Gyeong-un is not possessed by an evil spirit! Therefore, do not make such requests to our sect anymore! If you make another request...”

With those words, the diviner Sak formed hand seals and chanted an incantation,
“.....”

Sensing something was amiss, the escort warrior Ho-aeng urgently tried to rush forward to seize the diviner Sak.

It was at that very moment.

“Ugh!”

“Aak!”

The two maidservants Lady Seok had brought from her maiden home clutched their chests in agony, suffering.

Their faces turned a dark crimson, and the veins on their foreheads swelled as if they were about to burst.

Chapter 32

“Aaargh!”

“M-Madaaaaam!”

The maidservants wailed in agony.

The veins on their faces swelled, as if they were about to burst at any moment.

“You wench!”

The escort warrior Ho-aeng, even more enraged, tried to rush forward.

At that moment, Lady Seok hurriedly shouted, “Ho-aeng! Stop!”

“Pardon?”

At her cry, Ho-aeng had to halt after a mere three steps.

Lady Seok glared at the diviner Sak, who was chanting an incantation, with a gaze filled with resentment.

Sak had adeptly grasped her weakness.

Lady Seok cherished the maidservants and escort warrior she had brought from her maiden home as much as her own children.

They shared the longing for their hometown.

However, if she allowed herself to be swayed in this manner, it would only provide an opening for exploitation.

“Ma...”

-Seuk!

Lady Seok raised her hand with a face turned cold as ice.

It was a gesture telling him not to intervene.

Glaring at the diviner Sak as if to kill her, Lady Seok spoke.

“Diviner Sak, if you don’t stop right now, I swear. I will mobilize all my connections and power to erase you and Ghostly Spirit Pavilion from this world.”

These words were sincere.

Sak had touched something that should never be touched.

How dare she not only betray her but also make her people suffer?

Faced with her fury, Sak couldn’t hide her bitterness, though she didn’t show it outwardly.

In the end, things had turned out just as Mok Gyeong-un wanted.

[You said you’d do anything. Surely you can do that much, right?]

[...]

This was the first time she had encountered someone so cunning.

She thought he was a clueless 17-year-old young master, but he turned out to be a little devil.

To think he would come up with such a tactic.

Because of this, Lady Seok would come to despise her and the Ghostly Spirit Pavilion.

No, from Ghostly Spirit Pavilion’s perspective, a long-time patron had turned into an enemy.

‘Haa.’

She let out a deep sigh.

She was in no position to worry about the Ghostly Spirit Pavilion.

What would happen to her once this truth was revealed?

In her attempt to save a single spirit servant, she had violated several of Ghostly Spirit Pavilion’s rules. It wouldn’t be surprising if she were expelled, exiled, or faced even greater consequences.

'Is it time to leave?'

-Kwak!

Biting her lip firmly, Sak stopped chanting the incantation.

Then she shouted at Lady Seok.

"If you try to pursue and harm me, you will lose your two maidservants."

'This wench dares!'

Lady Seok's anger reached its peak, but she barely suppressed it.

Having witnessed the bizarre power of exorcism techniques that could threaten lives from afar, she couldn't easily dismiss Sak's threat.

-Heum chit!

Lady Seok frowned, glancing somewhere.

She had heard the sound of many people within the estate rushing towards Hyehwa Hall.

They were likely the outer court warriors.

Finally, Lady Seok, who had been glaring at Sak, made up her mind.

"...Leave before I change my mind. Hurry."

At these words, Sak let out a small sigh of relief.

"Whew."

The technique she had employed was called the Six Men and Women Servant Technique, an exorcism method that could directly harm or control people.

Normally, it required a part of the target's body, their date of birth, six sacrificial offerings, and two talismans.

Only when all these were prepared could one perform killing or any other action.

What she had used now was merely a temporary application, borrowing the power of a few special talismans and a unique artifact called the tranquil bracelet.

-Rustle!

The tranquil bracelet hidden in her bosom had shattered, so she could no longer employ the technique.

In the end, it had been a kind of gamble.

‘Let’s go quickly.’

If she didn’t hurry, she might get caught.

-Squeeeeak!

Carefully opening the door to the medicine hall, the diviner Sak entered.

Mok Gyeong-un, who was sitting on the bed, raised his hand and spoke nonchalantly to her.

“Did you do well?”

“...Yes. I did as you instructed.”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un asked again.

“Are you certain about that?”

“Yes, Young Master. I have confirmed it.”

Sak slightly furrowed her brow and turned her head at the voice coming from behind.

The one who answered behind her was none other than the escort guard Go Chan.

‘As expected, he had someone keep an eye on me.’

Sak clicked her tongue inwardly.

Indeed, someone as cunning as him wouldn’t leave her unsupervised.

However, she didn’t particularly care.

For the sake of the armadillo, she had accurately followed his instructions.

Looking at the emaciated armadillo gasping for breath in Mok Gyeong-un’s right hand, Sak said, “Now, please keep your promise.”

“Alright. A promise is a promise.”

Despite Mok Gyeong-un's words, Sak remained tense.

Although he was younger than her, she had no idea what this man might do.

Therefore, she couldn't let her guard down.

Holding the armadillo's neck, Mok Gyeong-un approached her.

"Ah! There's something I want to ask."

She flinched.

Surely he hadn't changed his mind or was about to say something else, right?

She had doubts but tried her best not to show them and spoke.

"...What is it?"

"In that group you belong to, Ghostly Spirit Pavilion, are there others besides you who can control Imaemangnyang entities or ghosts as spirit servants, like this armadillo or Demonic Monk here?"

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, Sak glanced at Demonic Monk, the Yellow Spirit.

No matter how she looked at it, that ghost undoubtedly belonged to the realm of evil spirits.

It was truly incomprehensible.

Ghosts are beings that remain in this world driven solely by their obsessions.

Therefore, due to their fixation on those obsessions and the grudges they seek to inflict harm with, they cannot be controlled as spirit servants.

No, they cannot even become spirit servants.

'They are merely targets for exorcism.'

How on earth was that man controlling the Yellow Spirit as a spirit servant?

She couldn't understand it at all.

Moreover, wasn't he not even a diviner?

"Do you not want to talk about it?"

Startled by Mok Gyeong-un's urging, she quickly answered.

"No, that's not it. In the Ghostly Spirit Pavilion, there are three diviners, including myself, who can control spirit servants."

'Well, it will be two now.'

Not only had she violated Ghostly Spirit Pavilion's rules, but she had also made an enemy of the principal wife of Yeon Mok Sword Manor. She had no choice but to leave in some way.

In the worst case, they might try to kill her or place a curse on her.

Anyway, that wasn't important right now.

"Not that many, I see."

"...Not in the Ghostly Spirit Pavilion, at least."

"In the Ghostly Spirit Pavilion? Are there other diviner groups then?"

At these words, Sak blamed herself inwardly.

She had spoken about something she didn't need to mention.

If she were to leave Ghostly Spirit Pavilion anyway, she would have to join another group, but it was a mistake.

With that, she gave a vague answer.

"Just as there are many martial arts sects in the gangho besides Yeon Mok Sword Manor, it's the same with diviner groups."

"Well, that makes sense."

"Is there anything else you'd like to ask?"

"Can you also tell me what kind of Imaemangnyang the other two diviners control?"

"..."

Sak truly wanted to click her tongue.

This man clearly hadn't let his guard down regarding Ghostly Spirit Pavilion.

Not only had he sown discord between that woman, the principal wife who wanted to kill her, and Ghostly Spirit Pavilion, but he also seemed to be preparing countermeasures.

She glanced at the armadillo, who was looking at her pitifully in Mok Gyeong-un's grasp.

After a moment of hesitation, she finally spoke.

"Go, a diviner who has long served as the sect leader's assistant, controls the demonic bird Go-jo[[or Gu-diao 盞雕]] from Mt. Nokou as a spirit servant."

"What power does that Imaemangnyang possess?"

"I don't know exactly. But I remember its appearance. It has an eagle-like body with peculiar horns."

"You're not pretending not to know when you actually do, right?"

"...A spirit servant is akin to a secret art for a diviner, so most of them conceal what powers they possess."

That was true.

Even among diviners, they generally neither reveal nor inquire about each other's exorcism techniques or spirit servants.

It was an unspoken rule among them.

Nodding his head, Mok Gyeong-un asked, "What about the other person?"

"It's the sect leader of Ghostly Spirit Pavilion. Even I don't know what Imaemangnyang the sect leader possesses."

"You don't know?"

"Yes. However, there's a high probability that they possess a top-tier Imaemangnyang as a spirit servant."

'At least, since they're one of the sect leaders of the Sixty-Four Halls of Fangwon, that's likely the case.'

Sixty-Four Pavilions of the Directional Plains.

They were sixty-four diviner groups located throughout the Central Plains.

The sect leaders of these halls were renowned diviners in the hidden world.

Although they might not have reached the pinnacle known as the Six Directions supreme-rulers, they were said to be at least of intermediate level, so their skills must be extraordinary.

“Are there also ranks among Imaemangnyang entities? Like ghosts?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, Sak nodded.

“Yes.”

“What level would a top-tier one be?”

“Imaemangnyang can be classified into Fierce Beasts, Monstrous Beasts, Demonic Beasts, Diabolic Beasts, Spiritual Beasts, and Divine Beasts based on their rank.”

Sak’s spirit servant, the armadillo, was referred to as a Fierce Beast in the Classic of Mountains and Seas.

In fact, among Imaemangnyang, Fierce Beasts were considered relatively docile and tended to avoid humans.

However, even Monstrous Beasts included some that preyed on humans.

Therefore, starting from Monstrous Beasts, subduing or controlling them as spirit servants was extremely challenging.

“Hmm. Then, that sect leader must control a Spiritual Beast or Divine Beast.”

At those words, Sak shook her head.

“No, no. That’s not the case.”

“It’s not?”

“Yes. Spiritual Beasts and Divine Beasts are walking calamities themselves, so even the most exceptional diviners find it nearly impossible to make them their spirit servants.”

Spiritual Beasts and Divine Beasts were beings referred to as calamities or legends.

Even she had never actually seen these beings.

She had only encountered records about them in ancient texts or the Classic of Mountains and Seas, which she had studied to learn exorcism techniques.

‘Considering that, the Six Directions supreme-rulers must be truly remarkable.’

The Six Directions supreme-rulers, known as the pinnacle of diviners.

They were six diviners who had received the title of “supreme-ruler.”

Among them, she had heard that two had subdued Spiritual Beasts as their spirit servants.

Out of countless diviners, only two had reached that realm, so they deserved the title of “supreme-ruler.”

“Then, it must be a Demonic Beast or Diabolic Beast, right?”

“That’s probably the case.”

Even if not above the level of Spiritual Beasts, being a Demonic Beast or Diabolic Beast was enough to be considered top-tier among Imaemangnyang.

They were beings that gained notorious reputations in a region or possessed extraordinary powers.

Mok Gyeong-un muttered softly, his lips twitching.

“It would be nice if it were a Diabolic Beast.”

“Pardon?”

“Ah... It’s nothing.”

Sak furrowed her brow.

What did this man just say?

As she was wondering, Mok Gyeong-un handed the armadillo to her and said, “Alright. You may go now.”

“...”

With trembling eyes, she received the gasping armadillo.

After Sak left, the escort guard Go Chan spoke with a concerned tone.

“Young Master... Is it okay to let her go like that?”

“I promised to let her go, didn’t I?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Go Chan grumbled inwardly.

'Since when was he merciful?'

However, he didn't show it on his face.

Perhaps he had grown accustomed to it.

"Will it be alright? I have a lingering concern that the diviner woman might harbor resentment and seek revenge..."

"It's fine."

"Aren't you worried?"

There was a possibility.

Although he couldn't see anything with his eyes, based on what he had heard, it seemed Mok Gyeong-un had threatened the diviner woman with something precious to her.

So there was a chance she might hold a grudge because of that.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un said with a peculiar smile, "Go Chan's words are correct, but she probably won't be able to do that. Probably."

"..."

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Go Chan was puzzled.

He didn't know what gave him such confidence.

-Tremble tremble!

The diviner Sak, cradling the gasping armadillo.

Her heart ached terribly.

She had spent years with this child, and the armadillo was her only friend and family.

Yet it was on the verge of death.

Having lost most of its energy, it wouldn't be surprising if it died at any moment.

If she didn't somehow replenish or restore its energy, she might lose the armadillo.

-Euk!

Her heart ached, and moreover, she was furious.

She was someone who had been recognized as a talented individual, receiving the title of diviner at a young age.

Yet she had to endure such humiliation.

The diviner Sak turned her head and looked towards the medicine hall where Mok Gyeong-un was.

'...Although I'm retreating like this now, before long...'

-It seems you're vowing revenge, mortal.

-Gasp!

Startled, Sak tried to quickly distance herself from the voice that suddenly came from behind.

However, someone embraced her head with two arms from behind.

-Seuk!

'Oh no...'

She was at a loss.

The coldness she felt from behind sent chills down her spine.

Even the armadillo she was holding trembled like a leaf, terrified.

Not because it was weak, but out of genuine fear.

'This... This sensation...'

She couldn't possibly manort this feeling.

The being that had deflected her Reverse Killing technique and damaged her Spirit Eyes.

Beads of cold sweat formed on Sak's forehead.

And those drops of sweat trickled down her cheeks.

-Drip drip!

'It can't be.'

Now that she was in direct contact with this being, she was certain.

This was definitely not some Green ghost or the like.

'How can this be...?'

She couldn't believe it.

To think he could control such an evil and spine-chilling being?

-Zzap!

"Ugh!"

Her Spirit Eyes, reacting to the evil entity, shed tears of blood with excruciating pain, as if they were being torn apart.

She could no longer see anything with her Spirit Eyes.

-Swirl swirl!

Through her dark pupils, she saw someone looking down at her upside down.

'!!!!!!!!'

A beautiful face.

In stark contrast, those blood-red eyes gleaming with madness.

The moment she met them, she couldn't breathe.

Chapter 33

A middle-aged man with a fierce appearance.

He was Sang Ung-baek, the outer manor master of Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

Known as the "Merciless Fist" in northern Anhui Province, he was a master of martial arts and had been the most loyal subordinate of the second generation since the time the manor was founded by the Mok clan.

Unlike the inner hall master Jang Myeong-in, who had entered the manor trusting the manor master, Sang Ung-baek was known for his strong convictions even among the retainers.

As such, Lady Seok couldn't win him over.

He was a central figure in Yeon Mok Sword Manor and held significant influence among the retainers.

Therefore, she had no choice but to be cautious around Sang Ung-baek.

"It's true, Outer Manor Master. No matter what, why would I order harm to be done to that child?"

"Hmm. Is that so?"

Despite her explanation, Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek showed a reaction of disbelief.

This infuriated Lady Seok inwardly.

Not only had things become complicated due to that wench of a diviner's actions, but now she was also being subjected to suspicion.

'Damn wench.'

She had no idea what had transpired.

The diviner had received a thousand silver coins and then betrayed her at the drop of a hat.

'Ghostly Spirit Pavilion... Sak...'

She would make sure they paid the price.

Right now, this man was another problem.

"Phew."

Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek had a persistent nature.

Once he harbored suspicion, he would continue to monitor and scrutinize her.

In this situation, she had no choice but to distance herself from Mok Gyeong-un for a while.

‘Troublesome.’

She needed to seize the secret manual from that bastard Mok Gyeong-un.

If Sang Ung-baek’s surveillance caused the second son, that incompetent Mok Eun-pyeong, to snatch it away, Yeong-ho’s position might be jeopardized.

She needed a different approach.

Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek was gazing at her with a suspicious look.

He clicked his tongue inwardly.

‘It’s a mess.’

Ever since the manor master’s life had become uncertain, with his death imminent any day, Yeon Mok Sword Manor had literally fallen into disarray.

Still, he thought they would at least mind their manners until the manor master drew his last breath.

But this was the worst.

Even with the manor master still alive, they were openly trying to kill other successors in a fight for the position of the next manor master.

‘Manor Master...’

If the manor master learned of this, he would be greatly disappointed.

On the other hand, it was regrettable.

If the manor master had firmly established the succession from the beginning, he and the other retainers would have upheld his will and protected the designated successor.

But that hadn’t been the case, leading to this situation.

Now, even the retainers’ opinions were mostly divided, so the moment the manor master’s breath ceased, Yeon Mok Sword Manor might truly become a battlefield among blood relatives.

‘What should I do?’

In the end, he too had to make a choice.

Normally, it would be right to support the eldest son, Mok Yeong-ho, but seeing this, it was utterly disappointing.

Even considering the first wife, it was undesirable.

The person who would become the eldest in the family once the manor master passed away was engaging in such acts.

But suddenly, something didn't make sense.

'Come to think of it, the second young master too...'

Why were they targeting the third young master, Mok Gyeong-un?

If they had fought among themselves or targeted the youngest young master, whom the manor master cherished the most for his innate martial talent, it would have been somewhat understandable.

But the third young master, Mok Gyeong-un, had absolutely nothing.

He lacked martial talent, and with the downfall of his mother's maternal family, his position had weakened.

None of the retainers supported him, so neither the chief wife nor the second young master had any reason to keep him in check.

Yet they targeted his life.

'Because he's the easiest target?'

No, it was too early for that.

The manor master hadn't even passed away yet, and engaging in such acts would only cause them to lose the support of the retainers.

Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek grew genuinely curious.

Why had they targeted Mok Gyeong-un?

There must be something they needed to keep in check, prompting them to prioritize targeting him above all else.

'...I need to find out what it is.'

It wasn't a matter to be overlooked.

If there was something that made them all willing to risk his life, it needed to be verified.

-Swish!

Someone entered the medicine hall by passing through the ceiling.

It was none other than Cheong-ryeong, wearing a crown and holding a long pipe in her mouth.

Demonic Monk greeted her respectfully with a bow.

In response, she grumbled.

-Is it because she had a spirit servant? Or because she's a diviner?

-...

She had been waiting for an opportunity to try to possess Sak's body.

However, she had failed.

She was confused about what the problem was.

Diviners take precautions to protect their bodies with incantations or talisman techniques in advance.

As a result, low-grade ghosts, even if they wanted to possess the bodies of diviners or individuals with strong energy, were unable to do so.

But Cheong-ryeong wasn't a low-grade ghost.

Yet she couldn't possess the body.

-Tsk.

She had tried to sever the forced bond through possession but had failed.

Was it because she, herself had become a spirit servant?

With a sullen expression, Cheong-ryeong descended and gazed at Mok Gyeong-un, who was sitting on the bed, focused on the reverse circulation of qi.

-There's no way to escape. But this fellow...

Her blood-red eyes flickered with intrigue.

Through her ghostly eyes, she could see that Mok Gyeong-un's energy was becoming considerably stable.

-Ho ho.

Mok Gyeong-un had absorbed the energy of the Ritual of Binding armadillo through the Chakui Technique.

The energy of an Ritual of Binding is more negative and purer than the death energy generated from a deceased human.

She had expected him to be unable to control it or even expel a significant amount, but it was unexpected.

He was steadily absorbing this energy.

-Hmm.

Cheong-ryeong approached close to Mok Gyeong-un.

Then she brought her face close to Mok Gyeong-un's, who was focused on circulating his qi.

'Strange.'

The scar on his forehead.

It hadn't been long since he was cut, but the wound looked as if several days had passed.

At this rate, it seemed like it would heal within a few days.

'...It surpasses human resilience.'

She had found it strange that he had survived despite suffering injuries that could be considered nearly fatal before becoming a spirit servant.

But upon closer inspection, it was clear.

This fellow possessed a recovery ability incomparable to ordinary humans.

How was this possible for a human?

'There's something.'

He was definitely not an ordinary human.

If she hadn't been forcibly turned into a spirit servant and lost control, she could have seized his body to find out why, which was a pity.

Clicking her tongue, Cheong-ryeong stared intently at Mok Gyeong-un's face.

'Quite a pretty face.'

She had felt it before, but Mok Gyeong-un's face could be considered exceptionally beautiful.

It met the criteria for a pretty boy.

Although she didn't particularly like this mortal fellow, at least his beautiful face was somewhat tolerable.

It was suitable for appreciation.

-Pak!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un suddenly opened his eyes.

As a result, their eyes met at close range.

Oh my.

This guy surprises even ghosts.

"What are you doing?"

-...

Saying she was admiring his face would be embarrassing.

In response to his question, Cheong-ryeong distanced herself and casually turned her head to the side, holding the long pipe in her mouth, feigning ignorance.

-What am I doing? I'm not doing anything.

"Hmm."

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been silently observing Cheong-ryeong, asked, "Did you handle that matter well?"

-Hmph. How dare you ask me such a question?

“As expected of Cheong-ryeong.”

Mok Gyeong-un smiled brightly.

As if displeased by his attitude, she raised one eyebrow.

She felt like she had made a mistake by agreeing to help this fellow.

She had offered to assist him, going against expectations, to see how he would handle the Ritual of Binding armadillo and the diviner woman on his own, but now she regretted it.

To her, Mok Gyeong-un said, “You were gone for a long time, so I wondered if you had left for good.”

-...Leave, you say.

Cheong-ryeong grumbled grumpily at Mok Gyeong-un’s perceptive words.

Her desire to leave was immense.

Apart from agreeing to help him, her true intention was to sever the bond of being a spirit servant at the first opportunity.

-Stop talking nonsense and continue circulating your qi. If you want to make the energy you took from the armadillo your own, even a little bit, you should...

“Ah! There’s one thing I want to confirm.”

-Confirm?

“Yes. I’m curious if this is what they call the danjeon.”

-Danjeon? It’s still unknown whether you can form a danjeon with death energy or not. If you diligently...

“Isn’t this tiny clump below the navel the danjeon?”

-...What?

Cheong-ryeong furrowed her brow.

Did this fellow just say he had formed a danjeon?

-That can’t be.

Cheong-ryeong looked at Mok Gyeong-un with an expression of disbelief.

No matter how much energy he had absorbed from the Ritual of Binding, forming a danjeon so quickly was incomprehensible to her.

She had never seen such a precedent even when she was alive.

After sensing the energy, he had only circulated his qi for a short while, and he had already created a danjeon?

-Can I check?

“Yes. I’m curious if it’s correct, so go ahead.”

With that, Cheong-ryeong brought her palm towards Mok Gyeong-un’s abdomen.

The method of confirmation was very simple.

As a ghost without a physical form, she could directly enter his body to check.

However...

-!?

It doesn’t pass through.

Her palm didn’t enter his abdomen but stopped at the surface.

As a high-grade ghost, she was capable of materializing her ethereal body for a brief moment.

But this wasn’t because she had materialized now.

-Tak tak!

“What are you doing?”

-It won’t go in.

“Why?”

-How would I know?

Even she couldn’t understand the exact reason.

It was clearly an ethereal state, so why was this happening?

Thinking there might be a problem with herself, she approached Go Chan, who was snoring on the bed next to them.

Then she inserted her hand into Go Chan's stomach.

It went in so naturally.

-It works here? Then...

She briefly materialized the tip of her inserted hand and lightly touched his danjeon.

The moment she did so, Go Chan woke up with a start.

"Eek!"

Then he trembled, his eyes rolled back, and he fainted.

Cheong-ryeong had momentarily forgotten.

The danjeon, from the moment it is formed, becomes the most sensitive part of the body.

However, whether Go Chan fainted or not, she didn't care.

Rather...

-Tsk tsk, what an exaggeration. Anyway, it's not my problem.

She was focused solely on the conclusion.

For some reason, her ethereal hand didn't pass through Mok Gyeong-un but collided with him.

It was a highly peculiar occurrence.

-Strange. Could it be because he became a spirit servant? Hey, Madman. You try it too.

At her words, Demonic Monk approached and carefully touched Mok Gyeong-un's body.

As expected, even Demonic Monk's ethereal body couldn't pass through Mok Gyeong-un's body.

The two ghosts couldn't hide their puzzlement.

"Do you know why?"

-Hmm. If it's not between ethereal bodies, there's no reason for them to collide like this.

"Then it would be difficult for you to confirm whether I have a danjeon or not?"

-Well... Even if not, there are other...

Before she could finish her sentence...

-Squeak!

The door to the medicine hall opened with a small sound.

Wondering who it was, they looked in that direction and saw a middle-aged man with a fierce appearance entering.

'Outer Manor Master?'

It was Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek.

Mok Gyeong-un remembered his face since he had interrogated him once before.

"Aah."

Upon discovering Mok Gyeong-un sitting cross-legged, Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek's expression darkened slightly.

It was because he saw the injuries covering his body.

Although he was recovering quickly, the scabs still made it difficult to discern.

Sang Ung-baek approached and spoke.

"You're still awake, Young Master."

"Ah. Yes."

Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek, who had come close, bowed his head deeply and said, "I apologize. If I had paid more attention, this wouldn't have happened."

Based on appearances alone, Mok Gyeong-un's condition was at its worst.

Sang Ung-baek, who believed he had ended up like this due to an attack, genuinely considered it his own negligence.

That's why he was apologizing.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head and said, "No. It's alright. These things can happen."

"It's not a matter of these things can happen. The outer hall warriors were guarding, yet you were injured, Young Master. This is entirely my fault."

"You don't need to blame yourself."

Mok Gyeong-un spoke with a smile.

Sang Ung-baek's eyes flickered as he observed Mok Gyeong-un.

As the outer manor master, although not frequently, he had occasional contact with the young masters and had a rough understanding of their personalities.

There were also rumors circulating within the manor.

'...Strange, just like last time.'

Sang Ung-baek knew Mok Gyeong-un to be quite fussy and timid.

Especially after his martial talent declined and his maternal family fell, he had become even more so.

But looking at him now, should he say he was composed?

He had faced life-threatening situations twice in a row, yet he remained so calm?

This incident wasn't that long ago.

Yet there was no sign of fear or emotional trauma.

'Was he always like this?'

Suddenly, doubts arose.

Even for adults, it was challenging to remain composed and calm despite being injured and having one's life threatened.

"Young Master... Are you truly alright?"

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un instantly realized that he had made a mistake.

He had considered it trivial, but he should have feigned some distress.

With that, he slightly lowered his head and said, "To be honest, I am worried that I might die quietly at this rate."

Upon hearing those words, Sang Ung-baek's eyes narrowed further.

His suspicions deepened.

Even if he expressed concern only after being asked, it was already too late.

'...This has become troublesome.'

Mok Gyeong-un also noticed his suspicion.

Until now, he hadn't faced significant suspicion, but an unexpected person seemed to complicate matters.

Although it didn't seem like he doubted whether Mok Gyeong-un was an imposter yet, continuously involving someone with such keen intuition would be unfavorable.

At that moment, Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek spoke.

"Young Master... You don't look well.

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un instantly realized that he had made a mistake. He had considered it trivial, but he should have feigned some distress. With that, he slightly lowered his head and said, "To be honest, I am worried that I might die quietly at this rate."

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At that moment, Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek spoke.

"Young Master... You don't look well. May I examine your body to see if you have any severe internal injuries?"

Upon hearing that question, Cheong-ryeong, who was beside him, whispered,

-It's better to be careful. If, as you said, a danjeon has truly formed, no matter how small it is, its energy will be completely unrelated to life energy.

Mok Gyeong-un glanced at her with a puzzled look.

Then she said with a smirk.

-You might be mistaken for practicing an evil path.

'What's that?'

Mok Gyeong-un still didn't have much knowledge about martial arts. However, based on her tone, he roughly understood the meaning of her warning.

With that, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head and said, "It's alright. When the physician comes tomorrow..."

"Young Master, please forgive my rudeness."

-Pak!

Before he could finish his sentence, Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek swiftly grasped Mok Gyeong-un's right wrist using a Golden Roc Hand Technique. Sang Ung-baek's hand movements were much faster than those of the escort guard Gam or Lady Seok. There was no room to dodge.

Not only did Sang Ung-baek grasp Mok Gyeong-un's wrist, but he also struck acupoints on his chest.

-Pa pa pa pak!

He instantly struck the numbing acupoints that would immobilize the body. Having struck the acupoints, Sang Ung-baek injected his true energy through Mok Gyeong-un's wrist to examine his danjeon.

After injecting his true energy, Sang Ung-baek quickly examined Mok Gyeong-un's internal organs through the meridian pathways and tried to sweep down to the danjeon.

However...

-Swish!

The true energy that was flowing through his body suddenly dispersed.

'!?'

Sang Ung-baek furrowed his brow. Thinking that the true energy had been interrupted halfway, he tried sending it again. But the result was the same.

-Swish!

His true energy flowed along the meridian pathways but dispersed once more. Something was strange.

Sang Ung-baek pondered for a moment. Usually, when examining the body, one injects true energy to a degree that doesn't strain the other person's body. However, if it dispersed like this, he had no choice but to inject more true energy. It's just that this method could be a bit dangerous.

"Young Master... I apologize, but I will inject a little more true energy. Although I have struck the numbing acupoints, please endure the discomfort for a moment..."

"Hmm. There's no other way. Cheong-ryeong."

"Cheong-ryeong? What is..."

-Puk!

It was at that very moment. Sang Ung-baek couldn't move for an instant. It was because he was seized by a bizarre sensation of something grasping his heart.

"Gasp... Gasp..."

Instinctively, Sang Ung-baek knew. It was gripping very gently, but if it applied even a little force, it seemed like his heart would burst. What is happened was this bizarre occurrence?

As he was perplexed, Mok Gyeong-un said something as if he were conversing with someone.

"No, no. It would be troublesome if you burst his heart. Please wait a moment."

'!?'

In an instant, Sang Ung-baek's eyes widened as if they would tear apart.

Chapter 34

-How dare a lowly mortal presume to examine my body by striking my acupoints without permission? Does this fellow have a death wish? What should I do? If you don't want your heart to burst, should I just pluck it out?

“Gasp... Gasp...”

Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek found it difficult to even breathe. He couldn't relax due to the hand grasping his heart.

Mok Gyeong-un, observing Sang Ung-baek in this state, turned his gaze to Cheong-ryeong, who had a smirking expression behind him. Mok Gyeong-un was quite intrigued by her abilities.

‘The difference in level is clear.’

Demonic Monk, who was at the Yellow Spirit level, seemed to struggle even against first-rate masters, but Cheong-ryeong had subdued Sang Ung-baek with incredible ease. He, who seemed stronger than the escort guard Gam, had been caught off guard without even sensing it. It seemed she could kill him at any moment if she wished to.

It made sense why the Basic Writings of the School of Yin and Yang stated that beings above the Green ghost level were difficult adversities to handle. It was worth the effort to patiently appease her. Although she wasn't fully under control like Demonic Monk yet, if he tamed her further, she might prove useful.

-Are you going to keep this up? I can't maintain this partial materialization for long.

‘Ah...’

Is that so? It was good to know. One must accurately understand an ability to use it appropriately in a given situation.

Cheong-ryeong raised one eyebrow and said.

-Perhaps you can't move because your acupoints have been struck?

“No.”

-Seuk!

Mok Gyeong-un moved and removed Sang Ung-baek's hand that was grasping his wrist. At this, Sang Ung-baek's eyes, unable to move, trembled. He was certain he had properly struck the acupoints. Yet how could Mok Gyeong-un move?

‘Could it be?’

Sang Ung-baek seemed to understand the reason. Even the forcefully injected true energy had dispersed within his body. That meant there was a high probability that the true energy used to strike the acupoints had also dispersed.

'Ha!'

A body resistant to acupoint striking without the Acupoint Reversal Technique or profound internal energy. It was truly peculiar.

To the astonished Sang Ung-baek, Mok Gyeong-un asked.

"Does it hurt?"

"Haa... Haa..."

"Are you in too much pain to even speak?"

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek carefully parted his lips.

"Wh... What is happened have you done to me?"

Sang Ung-baek couldn't understand what this thing was that penetrated his body and grasped his heart. In response to Sang Ung-baek's question, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said, "You probably don't want to know."

"Pardon?"

If he learned what was behind him, he would become even more terrified.

"And I don't feel the need to tell you."

Upon hearing Mok Gyeong-un's words, Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek frowned, not knowing what to do. Was this really the Mok Gyeong-un he knew? The atmosphere was vastly different.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un asked, "By the way, Outer Manor Master, why did you try to examine my body?"

"That's..."

"I'd appreciate it if you tell me properly."

-Gulp!

Meeting Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, Sang Ung-baek unknowingly swallowed his dry saliva. He hadn't realized it, but those eyes were staring at him intently without blinking. What kind of gaze is this chilling?

It wasn't the kind of gaze a mere 17-year-old boy should have.

“You don’t seem to want to answer. Cheong-ryeong, you said you wanted to burst his heart...”

“I-I wanted to confirm!”

Sang Ung-baek hurriedly answered in response to the threat disguised as a non-threat.

Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head slightly and asked,

“Confirm what?”

“...I found it hard to understand why the First Madam and the second young master would go to such lengths to target you.”

“You found it hard to understand why they were targeting me?”

“That’s right.”

“Hmm. Why is that?”

“Pardon?”

“The competition for succession is in full swing, so it doesn’t seem like a strange occurrence.”

At those words, Sang Ung-baek hesitated for a moment before carefully saying, “If this is your true self that you have been hiding, I can understand their sentiments. However, based on the image you have shown until now and your circumstances, the others shouldn’t have actively targeted you from the start.”

“...”

“The manor master hasn’t even passed away yet, so it was strange for them to go to such lengths to target you. Thus, I thought you might be hiding something.”

Upon hearing Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek’s words, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue inwardly. To think suspicion could arise in this manner as well.

‘The real fellow must have been quite lacking.’

It was ridiculous to be suspected for such a reason. Of course, it wasn’t entirely incomprehensible. He had stood out too much in just a few days.

‘Hmm.’

Mok Gyeong-un stroked his chin. If Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek, whom he had only encountered once, harbored suspicion, other retainers might also keep an eye on him for similar reasons before long. Fortunately, it seemed there was no suspicion of him being an imposter yet. They just seemed to think he was hiding his strength.

Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth. "So, did you achieve your purpose of confirmation?"

At that question, Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek parted his lips with a tense voice. "...Did you hide it deliberately?"

"Who knows? I have no obligation to tell you that. Rather, I'm contemplating what to do with you, Outer Manor Master."

-It's hard to maintain this. Just kill him, mortal.

Cheong-ryeong spoke in a dry voice while puffing on her long pipe. Mok Gyeong-un shook his head slightly. "Not yet."

If he killed the outer manor master, the situation would truly escalate. Then his plan to learn martial arts at Yeon Mok Sword Manor and leave would be disrupted. It was quite a dilemma.

-Then what are you going to do?

"Who knows?"

-I'm reaching my limit soon. Decide.

"Hmm."

Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek couldn't understand at all. Someone was clearly grasping his heart, but he couldn't sense any presence behind him. It was a situation that would make even ghosts wail. What was even more bizarre was that Mok Gyeong-un seemed to be conversing with someone, even though Sang Ung-baek couldn't hear anything.

How was he supposed to accept this situation? But that didn't seem to be the problem now. It seemed he had learned something he shouldn't have known. He might even face execution.

Thus, he hurriedly said, "Young Master... Please forgive my rudeness."

"No. It's too late to ask for forgiveness for something that has already happened."

"It is indeed rudeness. As a retainer of the Mok family, I should have approached more cautiously, but I was too hasty. I beg for your forgiveness."

“It’s alright.”

“I truly had no other intentions. I simply wanted to confirm if you also possessed the qualifications for succession.”

This was true. He had been disappointed in the chief wife and the second son, Mok Eun-pyeong. That’s why he wanted to verify if Mok Gyeong-un possessed something that warranted their caution. After all, the moment of decision would come when the manor master passed away in the future.

“Having witnessed your true self, I...”

“Enough.”

“Pardon?”

“I have no interest in the succession struggle among the family members. But if even the outer manor master gets involved, it might become a bit tiresome.”

“Y-Young Master? What do you...”

What did he mean? If he had no interest in the succession competition, why had he hidden his true colors?

Sang Ung-baek couldn’t hide his perplexity.

-Good. Then I can kill him, right?

Cheong-ryeong said with a curled lip, as if she had been waiting for this moment.

“No.”

-No? Then what are you going to do?

Mok Gyeong-un glanced at the Demonic Monk beside him and said, “Can you do what you tried to do to me before?”

-...!?

At those words, Demonic Monk’s eyes flickered with interest. Cheong-ryeong gave him a questioning look, and Mok Gyeong-un pointed at Outer Manor Master Sang Ung-baek with his finger and said, “I remember reading in the Basic Writings of the School of Yin and Yang that when a ghost possesses someone, it’s called possession. Can you do it?”

-What?

Cheong-ryeong's eyes widened at those words. Was this fellow blatantly giving an opportunity for possession? Instead of giving such a great opportunity to her first, he was giving it to this rebel monk...

-Hmm.

Cheong-ryeong's eyes narrowed. Come to think of it, she truly disliked the fierce appearance of this mortal named Sang Ung-baek. It wasn't a body she particularly wanted to seize. Thus, Cheong-ryeong spoke in a tone as if she was willingly yielding.

-Since he's giving you the opportunity, why don't you try it, Rebel Monk?

-...

Demonic Monk glanced around furtively, then looked at Sang Ung-baek with eyes like he was eyeing a delectable prey. The desire to seize a living body,. Even if they became spirit servants, it was the same.

"You can hold him, right?"

-It's not a difficult task.

-...

At those words, Demonic Monk approached Sang Ung-baek.

-Shiver!

As he got close, almost face to face, Sang Ung-baek, sensing this chilling sensation with his intuition, cried out to Mok Gyeong-un in startlement.

"Y-Young Master, what are you trying to do now?"

"You heard it, didn't you?"

"Pardon?"

"Possession."

As soon as those words were spoken, Demonic Monk merged into Sang Ung-baek's body.

-Swish!

"Ugh!"

Feeling this, Sang Ung-baek hurriedly drew up the energy from his danjeon, trying to expel this unpleasant something from his body. However, at the same time, Cheong-ryeong touched Sang Ung-baek's danjeon and brain.

"Guh!"

Although temporarily, the energy that was about to spread from the danjeon throughout his body was blocked. Moreover, as she touched his cerebrum, Sang Ung-baek's eyes became dazed, as if he had lost consciousness.

Demonic Monk seized this moment and attempted to possess Sang Ung-baek's body.

-Urgh! Urgh!

Sang Ung-baek's waist bent like a bow. Then, an eerie sound emerged from his mouth.

"Kkeuk kkeuk kkeuk kkeuk!"

-Tuk tuk tuk!

Black veins bulged out here and there, and his appearance resembled the previous state of the manor master. It was the process of occupying the body through killing.

Understanding this, Mok Gyeong-un looked at Sang Ung-baek with an intrigued gaze. His body was twisting violently, and he seemed to be in great agony.

-Hoo.

Cheong-ryeong exhaled a thick cloud of smoke from her long pipe. She, too, was observing this with eyes full of anticipation, just like Mok Gyeong-un.

'Please, let it be severed.'

That wench named Sak had failed because she was a diviner. But this man named Sang Ung-baek was different. She hoped that the Demonic Monk would succeed in dominating the body and sever the bond of being a spirit servant.

If that happened, she could also target a corporeal soul that seemed easy to deal with at any time and sever the bond of being a spirit servant herself.

-Swish!

It was at that moment when they were watching with anticipation. The black veins that had been bulging out from the skin seemed to subside as the body became somewhat dominated. And the agonized expression on Sang Ung-baek's face disappeared. It changed to a completely expressionless state.

-Tuk tuk tuk!

Straightening his waist, Sang Ung-baek opened his eyes that had been closed. With a pale face and a peculiar glint in his eyes, different from ordinary people, Sang Ung-baek's demeanor had changed significantly from before.

At that moment, Sang Ung-baek slightly tilted his head and trembled.

"Why is this happening? Is the possession not finished yet?"

In response to that question, Cheong-ryeong answered.

-He must be imprisoning the self. It's natural to dominate the mind after seizing the body.

"Oh. Is that so?"

-Once the mind is dominated, everything is taken away. Even the memories of the possessed body.

"Memories? Ah!"

Come to think of it, when Demonic Monk was an evil spirit, he had once used a diviner's incantation to make the manor master blurt out the location of the secret manual in his mind. If memories could be read, it meant one could almost be divided into that person.

The corners of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth curled up slightly.

'Not bad.'

There was no need to go through the series of troublesome processes to make him useful. A spirit servant was completely his own. There was no worry about them changing their mind at any moment, unlike humans.

It was at that very moment. The trembling of Sang Ung-baek's head stopped. Although a subtle ghostly energy could be seen in his eyes, the paleness had disappeared to the point where it was difficult to discern at a glance.

"Is it over?"

In response to that question, Sang Ung-baek nodded. Then, as if satisfied, he said with a twitching mouth, "My lord. This body is now mine."

The possession was successful. Mok Gyeong-un also smiled in satisfaction at having completely seized the body.

'The outer manor master's body.'

It might make his range of action much more convenient in the future. On the other hand, Cheong-ryeong's expression wasn't very pleasant. The reason was that she could see the red thread protruding from Sang Ung-baek's chest still connected to Mok Gyeong-un.

-Tsk!

Severing the bond of being a spirit servant through possession was impossible.

Chapter 35

Early the next morning.

One of the young servants in the medicine hall carefully brought Mok Gyeong-un's breakfast on a tray.

"As you instructed, the meat... is prepared with visible blood."

Although he followed the order, the servant frowned, finding the blood unpleasant.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled brightly and said, "Why? Do you find the blood unappetizing?"

"Ah, no, that's not it."

The servant waved his hands in denial.

As a mere servant, he was worried that offending the young master might lead to trouble.

However, Mok Gyeong-un still spoke with a smiling face, "When the meat is fully cooked, the texture isn't great. Should I say it's tough? I prefer it when it's tender and has some blood. Try eating it like that sometime."

"...Yes, yes."

He couldn't understand what was so delicious about it.

There was a difference between slightly undercooked meat and meat with that much blood.

Especially with pork, it seemed like it would be rather gamey. It was indeed a unique taste preference.

As the servant withdrew, Mok Gyeong-un savored his meal with relish.

His manner of eating was incredibly elegant.

-Munch munch!

He chewed precisely around thirty times before swallowing, repeating the process, and never opened his mouth while chewing.

His use of chopsticks was also quite refined.

Watching this with narrowed eyes, escort guard Go Chan was inwardly puzzled.

Mok Gyeong-un had said he lived alone with his grandfather in the mountains, but judging by his behavior, it seemed like he had received proper etiquette training.

Come to think of it, his way of speaking was similar.

For someone known as a murderous demon, he habitually used honorifics towards others.

'The more I know, the less I understand.'

As he pondered, his stomach involuntarily made a sound.

-Growl!

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un eat, he couldn't help but feel hungry.

However, as if hearing that small sound, Mok Gyeong-un was now looking at him.

'Huh?'

"You must be hungry."

Startled, Go Chan, who had been observing with narrowed eyes, quickly sat up and greeted him.

"Y-Young Master, did you sleep well?"

"No, I didn't sleep as much as you, Guard Go Chan."

"You didn't sleep?"

"Yes."

"Then, after your meal, you should get some more..."

“No. If I die, I can sleep as much as I want.”

“ ... ”

No matter what he says, he always manages to give people the chills.

Go Chan swallowed his dry saliva and said, “Is something troubling you?”

“I suppose you could call it a concern. It’s nothing major, and I was planning to ask you about it when you woke up anyway.”

“What do you mean?”

Go Chan asked, feeling unnecessarily anxious.

After experiencing those bizarre events last night, he hoped today would be a bit quieter.

He even had a dream where a female ghost smoking a long pipe appeared and stuck her hand into his stomach.

To that extent, he felt like he wasn’t in his right mind these days.

Mok Gyeong-un lowered his voice and said, “Do you know the basic techniques of Yeon Mok Sword Manor?”

“Pardon?”

At that question, Go Chan momentarily looked at Mok Gyeong-un with a puzzled expression.

That’s because he wondered why Mok Gyeong-un was suddenly asking about the basic techniques.

Mok Gyeong-un asked again.

“Do you know them?”

“I’ve coincidentally witnessed them a few...”

‘Oops!’

For a moment, he almost said “the real Mok Gyeong-un” without realizing it, but he quickly rephrased.

“I’ve seen you practicing them a few times before, Young Master.”

Even though he was lazy and lacked martial talent, the real Mok Gyeong-un was still from a martial arts family.

Naturally, he had practiced martial arts before.

Of course, his practice was almost negligible, but still.

“That’s fortunate. Then, can you teach me the basic techniques?”

“Pardon?”

“I’m asking you to teach me the basic techniques.”

“H-How can I?”

Go Chan asked back, unable to understand Mok Gyeong-un’s request.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un recalled yesterday’s early morning.

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Having discovered the formation of his danjeon, Mok Gyeong-un tried to practice the Ignited Wood Sword Formation he had memorized in the hidden training room of the Medicinal Hall.

However, an unexpected problem arose.

[Hmm... The movements aren’t connecting. It’s strange.]

He moved his body according to the memorized secret manual, but the movements didn’t flow together at all.

Why was that?

Cheong-ryeong looked at Mok Gyeong-un and chuckled, saying,

-It’s an advanced martial art.

[Pardon?]

-Mortal, you really know nothing about martial arts.

[What's an advanced martial art?]

-To put it simply, it's literally a high-level martial art. It's difficult to reach an advanced realm through ordinary martial arts, no matter how much you practice, but advanced martial arts are different. They contain condensed insights to reach an even more profound realm.

[Then isn't that a good thing?]

-You fool. What's good about it?

[What?]

-Without basic techniques, it's impossible to understand the forms of advanced martial arts. To eliminate unnecessary postures and forms, one must have a foundation in basic techniques.

[...]

-Do you understand?

[Roughly.]

-Tsk tsk. Anyway, if you don't practice the basic techniques, you won't even be able to learn half of the first form of that sword technique.

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That's how it turned out.

Therefore, Mok Gyeong-un asked Go Chan if he knew the basic techniques of Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

"It seems I can't learn the Ignited Wood Sword Formation without the basic techniques."

Mok Gyeong-un honestly told Go Chan.

At those words, Go Chan asked with a surprised expression, "You're trying to learn the manor master's exclusive secret technique?"

"Yes. Is there a problem with that?"

“Rather than a problem, are you perhaps aiming for the successor position, Young Master?”

The reason for Go Chan’s surprise was that.

He was well aware that Mok Gyeong-un wanted to learn martial arts.

However, if that martial art was the Ignited Wood Sword Formation, which was exclusively for the manor master, the story would be a bit different.

The term “manor master’s exclusive” wasn’t attached to that secret manual for no reason.

“No. How could that be?”

“But why?”

“If it’s the manor master’s exclusive martial art, wouldn’t it be all the more useful?”

Is it appropriate to describe it as merely useful?

Among the past manor masters of Yeon Mok Sword Manor, there were some who had become the overlords of Anhui Province using the Ignited Wood Sword Formation.

That’s how renowned the Ignited Wood Sword Formation was as an advanced martial art, even in the gangho.

“It’s not just useful, but an extraordinary sword technique. But Young Master, if you learn that, it might cause problems later...”

“It’s fine as long as we don’t get caught.”

Getting...

caught was not the issue.

The moment he learned it, it would be no different from participating in the manor master succession war.

Aside from the current manor master, who was on the verge of death, no one had learned the secret manual. If Mok Gyeong-un alone learned it, there would surely be an uproar.

However, Go Chan couldn’t bring himself to say the rest.

After all, Mok Gyeong-un wasn’t the type to listen even if he told him not to.

“Sigh. But Young Master, I cannot teach you the basic techniques.”

“Why?”

“Even if I’ve seen the basic techniques a few times, I don’t remember them accurately, and I don’t know the qi circulation formula for the basic techniques either.”

“Ah...”

That’s right. In the secret manual, there was something called a qi circulation formula for each form.

The utilization of internal energy differed for each posture within a form. If this was incorrect, the technique wouldn’t display its proper power and, if done incorrectly, could even lead to internal injuries.

With that, Mok Gyeong-un asked, “Then who knows the basic techniques?”

“Naturally, it would be the young masters and the manor master who is bedridden.”

The basic techniques of Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

The Ignited Wood Nine Forms and the Ignited Wood Beginner’s Sword Technique.

Although they were called basic techniques, they were martial arts that could only be learned by those with the blood of the Mok family.

“Only them?”

“...Yes, that’s right.”

“Hmm.”

Mok Gyeong-un placed his chopsticks on the rice bowl and stroked his chin.

He hadn’t expected that only they would know the basic techniques.

He thought there would be some among the martial artists within Yeon Mok Sword Manor who knew them, but it deviated from his expectations.

Then, as of now, since the manor master was bedridden, the only ones who knew the basic techniques were the three young masters besides himself.

‘It’s impossible.’

Go Chan shook his head slightly.

There was no way the other young masters would teach Mok Gyeong-un the basic techniques.

In the first place, if he asked them to teach him because he didn't know, he would be subjected to unnecessary suspicion. There was no way around it.

However, Go Chan suddenly grew curious.

'Wait a minute, but he hasn't even formed a danjeon yet, so what is he trying to learn?'

As far as he knew, Mok Gyeong-un hadn't even created a danjeon yet.

Yet, whether it was the basic techniques or anything else, trying to learn the forms so soon was too hasty.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un slowly got up from the bed.

"Young Master?"

"There's no other way."

"Pardon?"

"Let's go."

"Wh-Where are you referring to?"

"Since they are the only ones who can teach me, I'll have to learn from them somehow."

"But Young Master... The other young masters won't teach you the basic techniques. And if you ask them to teach you, you might be on their radar.."

"I'll come up with an excuse or persuade them."

"Pardon? How?"

"I'll figure that out myself. So, let's go for now."

As Mok Gyeong-un urged him, Go Chan cautiously tried to dissuade him.

"Young Master... For now, since you're injured, wouldn't it be better to rest for a few days? The outer hall warriors are guarding this place anyway, so if you wander around with an injured body..."

"You don't need to worry about the outer hall warriors."

“Pardon?”

What does he mean by not worrying about the outer hall warriors? It was another puzzling statement.

On the way to the exclusive training ground for the young masters.

Escort guard Go Chan, still unable to understand, glanced towards the medicine hall and tilted his head.

‘Oh my.’

Something was strange.

Just yesterday, the outer hall warriors seemed to be monitoring them.

But suddenly, their attitudes had changed.

As soon as they saw Mok Gyeong-un, they politely greeted him with a bow.

When he said he was going to the training ground, instead of stopping him, they wanted to follow him as an escort.

[We will accompany you, Young Master.]

[No, it’s alright.]

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un declined their offer.

‘What the?’

He couldn’t understand why they were acting this way.

It was also puzzling that this suspicious little devil didn’t find it strange at all.

Did something else happen while he was asleep?

It was utterly incomprehensible.

But that wasn’t the important matter now.

“Young Master... Are you really going?”

“Yes. I said I’m going, didn’t I?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's consistent answer, Go Chan was at a loss.

That's because the person Mok Gyeong-un was seeking was none other than the youngest young master, Mok Yu-cheon.

'This is insane.'

His relationship with the other young masters wasn't good either.

But Mok Yu-cheon was a bit more extreme.

No, it wasn't for no reason that the real Mok Gyeong-un had avoided encountering him.

Go Chan cautiously warned, "Young Master... It could really lead to big trouble. Even now, it would be better to turn back..."

"Big trouble. He must really hate me, huh?"

"Didn't I mention it before?"

"Ah. You said that the real Mok Gyeong-un, who died, almost got beaten to death for disparaging Mok Yu-cheon's mother as a vulgar prostitute wench, right?"

"...Then why are you going despite remembering that?"

Go Chan still remembered it.

[Stop! Stop it! I was wrong! Argh!]

He remembered how the real Mok Gyeong-un, with his leg and rib bones shattered, had crawled on the floor.

He had desperately begged for his life.

Given that incident, the youngest young master, Mok Yu-cheon, genuinely despised Mok Gyeong-un.

Would he teach the basic techniques to the person he hated if asked?

"The other two are not in a position to make a deal right now."

"But..."

"If we're picky about everything, we won't be able to do anything. So, let's go for now."

'Ah...'

He really won't listen.

It seems like he lacks a sense of crisis, so he should clearly explain it to him.

“Young Master, Mok Yu-cheon is a monster who has reached the beginning of the peak realm at the mere age of sixteen. A master at the peak realm is several times stronger than a first-rate master. If you carelessly provoke him, it could lead to serious consequences.”

“Yes, yes. I understand.”

‘Argh!’

Go Chan pounded his chest in frustration.

There was no other way now.

He thought Mok Gyeong-un would have to experience firsthand what kind of relationship the real Mok Gyeong-un and Mok Yu-cheon had.

Before long, the first training ground came into view.

There, Mok Yu-cheon could be seen, shirtless, practicing horse stance training like last time.

He never neglected his training, not even for a day.

-Ho ho. Quite a decent mortal.

Cheong-ryeong's voice reached Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

Even under the sunlight, her level was clearly high, so unlike Ma-seung, she maintained her original appearance.

Taking a deep puff from her long pipe and exhaling, she said,

-He has martial talent.

“You can see that?”

-Do you think there are many sixteen-year-olds with that level of life energy?

In Cheong-ryeong's ghostly eyes, the surging energy over Mok Yu-cheon's shoulders was clearly visible.

He possessed outstanding martial talent that she would have wanted as a disciple if she were still alive.

She warned Mok Gyeong-un.

-He's the type commonly referred to as a genius. It's better to be careful. Even I find it difficult to exert my power under the sunlight.

Sunlight was the embodiment of life energy.

Therefore, it was challenging for her to maintain her form.

Nodding slightly at Cheong-ryeong's warning, Mok Gyeong-un entered the training ground.

Naturally, Mok Yu-cheon's gaze turned towards him as he was practicing horse stance.

Upon discovering Mok Gyeong-un, Mok Yu-cheon's face hardened terrifyingly.

Anyone could see that his expression was filled with anger.

'shit.'

As expected.

Go Chan, thinking that Mok Yu-cheon might use force in a fit of rage, which could be dangerous, quietly tried to dissuade Mok Gyeong-un in a whisper.

"Young Master... I think it's better to go back. Young Master!"

Despite his dissuasion, Mok Gyeong-un strode towards Mok Yu-cheon.

'shit.'

There was no other way now.

At that moment, Mok Yu-cheon spoke while maintaining his horse stance.

"Get out of the training ground."

As expected, his words weren't pleasant.

Go Chan wanted to recommend leaving the training ground while he had the chance.

However, Mok Gyeong-un had no intention of doing so.

Smiling brightly at Mok Yu-cheon, who was exuding a hostile atmosphere, he said, "Hello."

'Smiling? At me?'

At Mok Gyeong-un's attitude, Mok Yu-cheon raised one eyebrow.

Since that incident, the guy who had been avoiding him out of fear was now showing a smile in front of him.

Did he have something to rely on?

Mok Yu-cheon surveyed his surroundings.

However, the only one protecting Mok Gyeong-un was the escort guard Go Chan.

'Just a second-rate.'

He wasn't a formidable guard who could protect Mok Gyeong-un from him.

Mok Yu-cheon scoffed inwardly.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smiling face, "Do you also want to become the manor master?"

"What?"

Completely caught off guard by Mok Gyeong-un's words, Mok Yu-cheon frowned and turned his head.

Then he spoke as if it was absurd, "What nonsense are you spouting?"

"It's exactly as you heard. I asked if you also want to become the manor master."

At those words, Mok Yu-cheon raised his voice and said, "I don't know what trick you're trying to pull by appearing in front of me, but stop talking nonsense and get lost. If you don't want to crawl out of here like last time..."

"Well. I think you'll want to have this."

-Swish!

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un took something out from his bosom.

It was none other than a secret manual with the title Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method written on it.

Seeing this, Mok Yu-cheon's eyes widened.

"You!... How did you get that?"

"Do you want it?"

Mok Gyeong-un temptingly waved the secret manual and asked Mok Yu-cheon.