

MYST, MIGHT, MAYHEM

Chapter 36

Mok Yu-cheon, the youngest young master of Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

He had no choice but to mature earlier than his peers.

Upon learning that his mother was merely a gisaeng, Mok Yu-cheon realized the harsh reality at a young age.

At first, he was in despair.

No one acknowledged him as a young master of Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

He was just a bastard born with lowly blood.

It was misfortune itself.

After spending his childhood in despair, Mok Yu-cheon had only one breakthrough.

‘...Become stronger.’

The world was fair.

His blood might be lowly, but his martial talent was exceptional.

No, it was innate.

The only way for him, who had nothing, to stand out was through martial arts.

He believed that if he became strong enough that no one could look down on him, everyone would have to acknowledge him.

‘I will be recognized.’

And that actually came to fruition.

The manor master, who had shown no interest in him as a bastard, gradually began to favor him due to his outstanding martial talent, and even the retainers acknowledged him.

His half-siblings, who had scorned him and his mother, could no longer treat him casually.

‘Perhaps...’

He, who had been ridiculed as lowly, might become the manor master.

He had gradually swelled with hope.

However, that expectation recently turned into anxiety.

‘What will happen when the manor master passes away?’

The manor master hadn’t designated anyone as his successor.

If things continued like this, the prodigal eldest son or the cunning second son, Mok Eun-pyeong, could become the manor master.

If that happened, the chief wife, who considered him a thorn in her side, might try to kill him.

‘Ah...’

It became complicated again.

He had hoped that his efforts could change everything.

But it felt like hitting a wall once more.

Yet, there was nothing he could do.

He didn’t have the capacity or financial means to scheme or build his power like his other half-siblings.

Right now, there was only one thing he could do.

To continue practicing martial arts.

So, even today, he was immersed in training to clear his mind of distracting thoughts.

However, the face he least wanted to see in the manor, no, the face he despised the most, appeared.

‘Mok Gyeong-un.’

Why did that bastard show up here?

Putting aside his stupidity, he had no interest in practicing martial arts.

Seeing him, his mind, which he had barely emptied while sweating, was about to become unpleasant.

“Get out of the training ground.”

Given that he had been beaten to death once before, if he had any sense, he should understand.

However, an unexpected response came out of his mouth.

“Do you also want to become the manor master?”

“What?”

For a moment, 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.”

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

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

“You... How did you get that?”

“Do you want it?”

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

The Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method.

It was a breathing technique and internal energy circulation method that only the manor master of Yeon Mok Sword Manor could learn.

As someone with the blood of the Mok family, there was no way Mok Yu-cheon wouldn’t recognize this secret manual.

'How did that fellow...?'

Mok Yu-cheon couldn't understand this situation.

The manor master was bedridden and hadn't woken up yet, so how did that bastard Mok Gyeong-un have the secret manual of the Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method?

But then, his mind suddenly became complicated.

'Could it be?'

Did Father give the secret manual of the Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method to this bastard?

No way.

That couldn't be.

Regardless of their origin, the two sons Father considered the most pathetic were the eldest, Mok Yeong-ho, and the third, Mok Gyeong-un.

The reason was that both of them lacked martial talent and didn't put in effort.

Didn't Father openly tell him?

[If only your brothers were half as good as you.]

Those words weren't said for no reason.

Mok Yu-cheon glared sharply at Mok Gyeong-un and said, "Where did you get that? Did you steal it behind Father's back?"

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said, "That's not what's important, is it?"

"Not important? There's no way Father would give the secret manual to someone like you."

"Who knows? If the manor master was attracted to me, he might have given it."

"Nonsense!"

Mok Yu-cheon raised his voice.

'Hmph.'

At that moment, Go Chan, who was standing behind, grimaced as his eardrums rang.
He must really hate Mok Gyeong-un.

He had even infused his internal energy into his voice, making it dizzying.

On the other hand, Mok Gyeong-un showed no significant reaction other than slightly furrowing his brow.

This caught Mok Yu-cheon's attention.

'No reaction at all?'

Normally, Mok Gyeong-un would have made a big fuss.

But he endured it.

Had he diligently practiced martial arts without anyone noticing?

If that was the case, why did his energy feel even weaker than before?

Puzzled, Mok Yu-cheon spoke again.

"Do you have any proof that it's genuine?"

"Proof?"

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and then casually held out the secret manual of the Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method.

Mok Yu-cheon frowned at this.

What trick was this?

After a brief hesitation, Mok Yu-cheon took the secret manual.

It wasn't out of greed but because he was curious if it was the real secret manual.

'Huh?'

However, the secret manual was thin.

Wondering what it was, he opened the secret manual and found only two pages inside the cover.

The formula for the cultivation method could be short, but there was no way it would be just two pages.

Was it really fake?

So, he read the formulas on the front pages.

But the moment he read them, Mok Yu-cheon could be certain.

‘...It’s real.’

He could discern it because he had perfectly mastered the basic techniques.

Naturally flipping to the next page to examine the remaining formulas, Mok Yu-cheon unknowingly swallowed his saliva in regret upon seeing the torn traces.

‘Ah...’

He was seized by a momentary thirst.

As a martial artist, he couldn’t help but yearn for higher martial arts.

The Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method and the Ignited Wood Sword Formation, which were exclusive to the manor master, were the secrets to advanced martial arts.

If he learned them, he could reach the complete peak realm and even ascend to a higher realm of martial arts based on that foundation.

“Why are the contents missing from the back?”

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un smiled brightly and tapped his head with his finger.

Understanding the meaning, Mok Yu-cheon’s eyes narrowed.

‘This fellow...’

Has Mok Gyeong-un always been this cunning?

Memorizing 90% of the original and showing this with only traces of it being genuine was a way to solidify that there was no way to obtain the secret manual without him.

It seemed like he had even prepared for the possibility of the secret manual being snatched away.

‘Is this fellow’s thinking really correct?’

He glanced at the escort guard Go Chan behind him.

However, judging by his nervous appearance, it didn't seem to be the case.

Then it was true.

'...He has changed.'

What has happened in the past two years?

After that day's incident, he had never directly confronted or conversed with Mok Gyeong-un.

It was because Mok Gyeong-un had been scared and constantly avoided him.

However, the Mok Gyeong-un he saw after two years was very different from back then.

"Who are you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Putting aside how you obtained this, what trick are you trying to pull now?"

"Does it seem like a trick?"

-Pak!

Mok Yu-cheon threw the secret manual on the ground, stood face to face with Mok Gyeong-un, and said, "Do you think it's normal for someone who has been running away and avoiding me and my brothers for two years to bring this and mention the manor master position?"

"Hmm. I thought you'd want to become the manor master, but I guess not?"

"What?"

"If you don't want to become the manor master, then this proposal is rather meaningless."

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Mok Yu-cheon was dumbfounded.

Proposal?

What is happened is he talking about?

While he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un picked up the secret manual from the ground, dusted it off, and said, "If you don't want to become the manor master, then you don't particularly need this either, right?"

"..."

At those words, Mok Yu-cheon couldn't respond.

Even if he didn't want to become the manor master, Mok Yu-cheon wanted to learn the advanced martial arts of Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

That was natural for a martial artist.

However, the reason he was hesitating was that he couldn't discern Mok Gyeong-un's true intentions.

This was clearly bait.

"...What game are you playing?"

"Game or not, if you're not interested, I'll just leave for now."

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un put the secret manual into his bosom and tried to leave without any lingering attachment.

Mok Yu-cheon stopped Mok Gyeong-un, who had only walked a few steps.

"Stop!"

At those words, the corner of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth curled up.

As expected, he took the bait.

Although he had only conversed with this fellow just now, he roughly understood what kind of person he was.

He was quite stubborn and moved according to his own beliefs.

This type doesn't simply take the bait.

You have to lay out the situation appropriately like this.

Without turning his head, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly said, "I thought you weren't interested?"

"...Not interested, but what game are you playing?"

“The same question over and over.”

“Shut up. Just answer my question. What’s your intention in asking me if I want to become the manor master?”

“Intention?”

“If you had one, you would have quietly learned it in secret and then aimed for the manor master position. But what’s the point of bringing this to me and asking if I want to become the manor master?”

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders.

Then, slightly turning his body, he said, “Believe it or not, I have no particular interest in the manor master position.”

“What?”

At those words, Mok Yu-cheon glared at Mok Gyeong-un with a suspicious gaze.

No interest in the manor master position?

Was he expecting him to believe this?

“Ha...”

Mok Yu-cheon let out a hollow laugh.

Yeah.

It was an absurd situation.

The fact that he obtained that secret manual, came to him, and spouted such words was a trap in itself.

Whatever his intention was, he must have schemed something sinister.

In the first place, due to the incident two years ago, he also disliked this bastard, but this bastard also greatly feared and disliked him.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un approached him and said, “Unable to believe...”

Before he could finish his sentence...

-Bam!

Mok Yu-cheon's fist, which had suddenly extended forward, accurately struck Mok Gyeong-un's face.

Upon receiving the blow, Mok Gyeong-un was pushed back and immediately fell flat on the ground.

-Drip drip!

Blood flowed from his nose.

He should have shown signs of pain, but the corners of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth trembled as he lay there.

'It's different.'

That was Mok Gyeong-un's state of mind.

Putting aside the man with the black sword, he had directly experienced the skills of escort guard Go Chan, escort guard Gam, and others.

Through that, he learned the difference between second-rate and first-rate.

And now, directly experiencing the fist of the genius Mok Yu-cheon, who had reached the beginning of the peak realm at the mere age of sixteen, he realized the difference in strength.

He understood why Go Chan had described him as several times stronger.

This strength wasn't something that could be dealt with through luck.

'My body can't react.'

Although he saw it in an instant, his body couldn't keep up.

It was a level that would be extremely difficult to confront unless one approached this level of strength to some extent.

'...What is it?'

On the other hand, Mok Yu-cheon narrowed his eyes, keeping his fist extended.

He had thrown his fist to shut him up.

He knew that with his mere third-rate skill, Mok Gyeong-un naturally wouldn't be able to block it.

But there was one thing different from the fellow he knew.

'He didn't close his eyes.'

He was looking straight at his fist.

Usually, when faced with a fist that couldn't be blocked, one should flinch and close their eyes out of fear.

But he continued to stare at the fist even at the moment of being hit.

'He wasn't afraid?'

That Mok Gyeong-un?

While he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un sat up.

Then, wiping the flowing blood from his nose with the back of his hand, he said, "Your fist is fierce."

"Fierce?"

A scoff escaped his lips.

Strictly speaking, it wasn't a proper punch.

He was certain that Mok Gyeong-un was trying to deceive him, so it was a single punch meant to teach him a lesson.

"It would be better not to get up. If you get up again, the intensity will increase to the point where you'll find what just happened laughable."

Mok Yu-cheon warned him.

And he actually intended to carry it out.

However, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said, "It's natural to be suspicious."

"It's not suspicion but certainty. I don't believe anything you say."

"Really?"

"So, I'll make you regret coming to me with such a trick."

Mok Yu-cheon clenched his fist.

Since it had come to this, he had to make it clear, like two years ago, no, even more so than back then.

Only then would Mok Gyeong-un be unable to engage in such antics.

With that determination, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said, "Then I have no choice but to give it to the First Madam or Mok Eun-pyeong."

"...What?"

"Whether you believe me or not is your choice, but if you decide that way, I'll have no choice but to give the secret manual to the two sides to get what I want."

At those words, Mok Yu-cheon flinched.

Because he understood the meaning of these words.

Mok Gyeong-un continued, "When the manor master passes away, the retainers will eventually support the bloodline of the Mok family who has learned the secret manual as the manor master. What will happen if the manor master is chosen between Mok Yeong-ho and Mok Eun-pyeong?"

"..."

"Do you think they will leave you alone?"

Mok Yu-cheon was at a loss for words at the remark that hit the nail on the head.

He had been frustrated, unable to fathom what would happen in the future.

That's why Mok Gyeong-un's words couldn't help but stick in his mind.

Seizing that opportunity, Mok Gyeong-un stood up and continued, "I'm not sure, but you received the manor master's favor and were an outstanding successor who stood out more than himself or his own children. I don't think they'll just leave you alone."

'...'

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, escort guard Go Chan couldn't hide his inner perplexity.

'Why is he provoking him further?'

This wasn't persuasion but almost close to a threat.

Provoking him like that was no different from asking to be killed, so what was he thinking?

As expected, Mok Yu-cheon's face turned red with anger.

"...Are you threatening me now?"

"You're not entirely clueless, are you?"

"What?"

It seemed like it would end with Mok Gyeong-un getting beaten up.

With anger rising, Mok Yu-cheon tried to use force once again.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un spoke in a chilling voice, "It's a matter of life and death. I guess you don't hear the threat as a threat?"

-Flinch!

At those words, Mok Yu-cheon stopped his hand.

He was very angry, but he couldn't possibly ignore Mok Gyeong-un's words.

Since the manor master hadn't clearly designated a successor, in the current situation, as Mok Gyeong-un said, the probability of the one who learned the secret manual becoming the manor master was extremely high.

And if it fell into someone else's hands other than his own...

-Clench!

The result he had feared would unfold.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un approached with light footsteps, gently placed a hand on his shoulder, and whispered in a small voice, "I think you understand the situation now. Who holds the handle of the knife."

Mok Yu-cheon's eyes trembled.

'This bastard...'

Was he really the Mok Gyeong-un he knew?

Chapter 37

Was this fellow really the Mok Gyeong-un he knew?

Glaring at Mok Gyeong-un with anger-filled eyes, Mok Yu-cheon opened his mouth in an equally low voice.

“...Yes, you’re right. If the secret manual goes to other brothers, my situation would be obvious without even looking.”

“Since you understand your situation well, now...”

“But you know what? Have you ever thought that I could beat you to death and make the secret formula come out of your mouth?”

-Clench!

With those words, Mok Yu-cheon grasped Mok Gyeong-un’s wrist that was placed on his shoulder.

Then, he drew upon his internal energy and applied force.

Thanks to that, the veins on the back of Mok Gyeong-un’s hand swelled up as if they would burst at any moment.

Mok Yu-cheon spoke, exuding a murderous aura.

“With a little more force, I can cripple your wrist.”

-Crunch!

Mok Yu-cheon applied even more force to his hand.

A twisting sound could be heard from the grasped hand, and if he squeezed a little more, it would be truly dangerous.

‘If you know that I can also go berserk when pushed...!?’

Mok Yu-cheon furrowed his brow.

He thought Mok Gyeong-un would be in pain and agony to this extent.

However, there was no change in Mok Gyeong-un’s expression.

Rather, he was staring intently at him.

‘This bastard?’

He’s enduring this?

The situation is just a step away from his wrist bone breaking, yet he wasn't even anxious?

For a moment, Mok Yu-cheon was dumbfounded.

This didn't seem to be a matter of patience.

"...What are you? Are you really Mok Gyeong-un?"

'Gasp!'

At those words from Mok Yu-cheon's mouth, the expression of escort guard Go Chan, who was watching restlessly from behind, hardened.

It was already worrisome that they had been in contact for too long.

Could it be that their identities had been exposed?

If that was the case, it could truly be the worst situation.

But at that moment, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and looked straight at Mok Yu-cheon, opening his mouth.

"Then what do you think?"

Seeing his unwavering demeanor, Mok Yu-cheon's eyes narrowed.

The difference from the cowardly and timid fellow he knew was so great that it even felt strange.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un said, "You talk as if you know me well, but what do you know to say that?"

"Are you saying that I don't know you..."

"Yes. What do you know? Aside from being half-siblings and us having an incident two years ago, what do you know to ask like that?"

"..."

At the question asked in a confident voice, Mok Yu-cheon closed his mouth.

He was too confident, so he had nothing to say in return.

His appearance had changed so much in two years that it was puzzling, but when asked in reverse like this, he didn't know how to answer.

He hadn't had many conversations with him even before their confrontation two years ago.

They were half-siblings, and everyone despised and kept their distance from him, calling him the offspring of a lowly gisaeng.

This fellow was the same.

'Annoying.'

But why was this fellow being so arrogant in reverse?

The question of what he knew about him was what he wanted to ask the people of this Mok family.

-Clench!

Mok Yu-cheon, who had been biting his lip tightly, finally loosened the force in his grasping hand.

Then, releasing Mok Gyeong-un's wrist, he said, "Let me ask you one thing. Why me?"

"Why you?"

"Yes. None of you bastards ever acknowledged me. Then you could have made a deal with those proud bloodlines."

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly said, "I just thought you were better than your brothers, that's all."

"..."

For a moment, Mok Yu-cheon fell silent.

Mok Yu-cheon stared intently into Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

He thought Mok Gyeong-un would also despise him because of the incident two years ago, just like himself.

But hearing these words was truly unexpected.

Of course, it wasn't a matter of their relationship suddenly improving because of this.

'...Did I view this bastard too simply?'

That thought crossed his mind.

He had wanted someone to recognize him, but he had never tried to understand someone else.

Perhaps Mok Gyeong-un had truly changed over the past two years.

Mok Yu-cheon lowered his guard and spoke while standing straight.

“Phew... Alright. Let’s do whatever this deal is.”

“Good.”

“What do you want?”

Although he didn’t show it outwardly, Mok Yu-cheon was inwardly worried about what request Mok Gyeong-un would make.

Offering a secret manual known as the manor master’s exclusive martial art was no different from making a huge concession.

Considering its value, there was no way he would ask for something trivial.

He hoped it wouldn’t exceed the level he could accommodate.

To Mok Yu-cheon, Mok Gyeong-un raised three fingers and said, “I have three demands.”

“What?”

“I think it’s worth this much.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Mok Yu-cheon didn’t respond.

Because it was difficult to say it wasn’t.

So, he thought he should at least hear what he would demand.

“Still, that’s a lot. Anyway, what are they?”

“They’re not that difficult for you.”

“...I understand. Tell me.”

“First, if you become the manor master, don’t touch me, even if I don’t know about the other brothers.”

At those words, Mok Yu-cheon’s eyes flickered with interest.

Indeed, it wasn't an extremely difficult request.

No, from Mok Gyeong-un's perspective, it might be a natural demand.

If he were to become the manor master with the support of the retainers, he would naturally engage in a war with the other half-siblings.

'Even if I don't like this fellow, it's not a bad request from my perspective.'

Because he could reduce the number of enemies by at least one.

With that, he readily answered, "Alright. I can accommodate that much. What's next?"

"If you become the manor master, I want continuous financial support."

"Financial?"

"Yes."

"...Fine."

This wasn't a particularly difficult request either.

Hearing it, it sounded more like he was asking to be continuously responsible as a member of Yeon Mok Sword Manor, rather than demanding a large sum of money.

Mok Yu-cheon considered it not bad and accepted it.

Unexpectedly, there weren't any significant demands as he had worried, so he considered it fortunate.

However, he couldn't let his guard down.

The final request could be substantial.

"What's the last one?"

"This isn't a big deal either. I want the cultivation method and martial arts formulas related to Yeon Mok Sword Manor's basic techniques."

"What?"

Mok Yu-cheon furrowed his brow at the unexpected request.

Seeing his reaction, Go Chan became inwardly anxious.

Somehow, they had luckily passed the issue of their identities, but if he asked about this, it would inevitably raise suspicion again.

'Will it work?'

As he was feeling anxious, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly said, "You heard me. I want the cultivation method and martial arts formulas related to Yeon Mok Sword Manor's basic techniques."

At these words, Mok Yu-cheon spoke in a tone of incomprehension.

"You know it too, don't you?"

"I know it."

"Then why are you demanding that? It's not necessary..."

"To be honest, the third request isn't really needed."

'Huh?'

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

What's this about?

Not needed?

Like Go Chan, Mok Yu-cheon also asked in confusion.

"Not needed?"

"Yes. The first two are what I really want. But the last third one, I'm just demanding it because I personally have something to confirm."

At those words, Mok Yu-cheon relaxed his furrowed brow.

Then, tilting his head, he said, "What are you trying to confirm?"

"It's nothing much. I just want to confirm if what I know is correct."

"Confirm if what you know is correct?"

"Yes. There's no other reason."

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Mok Yu-cheon let out a faint smile.

Seeing his reaction, Go Chan was puzzled.

He couldn't understand why Mok Yu-cheon was showing such a reaction instead of being suspicious of Mok Gyeong-un's ambiguous words.

But the next words from Mok Yu-cheon revealed the reason.

"Are you suspecting Father?"

'!?'

"Do you think Father taught me differently?"

'What?'

At those words, Go Chan's eyes widened.

No, this was a completely unexpected approach.

He didn't expect Mok Yu-cheon to make his own assumptions instead of being suspicious.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly said, "I just want to confirm."

"There won't be much difference."

"I'll know that when I hear what you say."

At those words, Mok Yu-cheon scoffed.

Then, shaking his head, he said, "There's no point in confirming, but you're doing something unnecessary."

"If there's no difference, you can just tell me. I can immediately confirm if it's different or not just by hearing what you say."

"You're making an absurd request."

"You have nothing to lose anyway."

"...Well, that's true."

"Then you can just tell me the formulas of the basic techniques right here. I'll also let you know right after you tell me."

"What? Here?"

Mok Yu-cheon glanced around and frowned, asking in response.

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and said, "Why? Are you worried someone might eavesdrop? Or do you perhaps lack confidence in memorizing it verbally?"

At these words, Mok Yu-cheon spoke in an irritated tone.

"You're just in the position of confirming what you already know, but I have to memorize the formulas of an advanced martial art that I just learned. It's different!"

"Ah... Is that so? Then would it be better to write it down and send it to you?"

At these words, Mok Yu-cheon momentarily flinched.

It would be more convenient to have it written down and sent, but upon thinking about it, that didn't seem right.

'I should hear it here.'

Just in case.

Although he had confirmed the secret manual, there was a slight chance that Mok Gyeong-un might teach him the wrong formulas.

In that case, it would be better to hear it verbally here.

That way, if there were any mistakes when he asked him to repeat it several times, he could discern them.

Considering it a good idea, Mok Yu-cheon said, "No, let's do it here. But keep reciting it until I fully memorize the formulas."

"That's not difficult at all."

Thus, the deal between the two was sealed.

Two hours and two quarters had passed.

On the way back to the Medicinal Hall.

Escort guard Go Chan clicked his tongue as he looked at Mok Gyeong-un's back, walking with light footsteps.

'He's truly amazing.'

He had no choice but to acknowledge it this time.

He knew Mok Gyeong-un was smart from his continuous experiences, but he didn't expect it to be to this extent.

Originally, Mok Gyeong-un's only desired request was the basic techniques.

However, he first mentioned plausible demands to dispel Mok Yu-cheon's suspicion.

Moreover, he also requested the basic techniques, saying he just wanted to confirm if they matched what he already knew, naturally guiding the atmosphere.

'Ah... Really...'

He was incredibly cunning.

Of course, luck played a part to some extent.

Thanks to Mok Yu-cheon's own assumptions, Mok Gyeong-un was able to take advantage of the situation well.

That's because his intuition was extraordinarily sharp.

'It would be hard to be more natural than this.'

He was an amazing fellow.

But there was one thing he was curious about.

It seemed like Mok Gyeong-un had managed to hear the formulas of the basic techniques from Mok Yu-cheon, but due to the purpose of confirmation, it seemed like he only heard them once.

Was it possible to memorize so many formulas after hearing them just once?

After pondering whether to ask or not, Go Chan finally inquired.

"...Young Master, but it seems like you only heard the formulas once. Is that alright?"

"What do you mean?"

"There are too many formulas to memorize at once..."

"What's difficult about that?"

"Pardon?"

“Isn’t it possible to memorize that much after hearing it just once?”

‘!?’

At those words, Go Chan’s eyes widened.

He memorized those many formulas of the basic techniques, which took nearly half an hour, after hearing them just once?

The basic techniques included fist techniques, sword techniques, basic qi circulation methods, and even body-tempering methods.

It was an amount that couldn’t possibly be memorized after hearing it just once.

Even Mok Yu-cheon, who was called a heavenly martial talent, had to hear it recited by Mok Gyeong-un almost eight or nine times before he could barely memorize it, didn’t he?

“...Did you really memorize it after hearing it once?”

“Yes. It’s not particularly difficult, so what’s strange about it?”

“...”

Not particularly difficult?

Then did that mean he and that young master Mok Yu-cheon were idiots?

He had considered it amazing that Mok Yu-cheon was able to memorize it in about two hours just by listening to the recitation.

‘Ha.’

If these words were true, this fellow’s mind could truly be extraordinary.

Go Chan, who was inwardly dumbfounded, shook his head.

This fellow couldn’t be judged by common sense.

So, it would be better for him to just go along with it.

“...No, it’s nothing. I asked because I wasn’t confident in memorizing it after hearing it once. Anyway, it’s fortunate that the deal was completed without any issues. But will it be alright?”

“What do you mean?”

“Even if it was a deal, is it alright to teach the secret manual to Young Master Mok Yu-cheon so readily?”

Given Mok Yu-cheon’s temperament, he was better than the other young masters.

He would probably keep the agreed-upon deal unless something significant happened.

But there was a sense of regret.

Didn’t he essentially give up the opportunity to gain the support of the retainers?

To him, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly said, “It’s not even the proper formulas, so there’s no problem in teaching them.”

“...Pardon?”

Go Chan furrowed his brow.

What was he talking about now?

“Young Master... What do you mean by that?”

“Ah. I should have kept it to myself.”

“Pardon?”

Mok Gyeong-un put his arm around Go Chan’s shoulder and whispered in his ear with a grin.

“It’s a secret, so only you know, Go Chan. I taught him the formulas of the Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method and the Ignited Wood Sword Formation by reversing the characters or changing them to have different meanings every thirteen or fourteen characters. I was nervous that I might get caught, but somehow it worked out well.”

‘!?’

Upon hearing those words, Go Chan couldn’t hide his bewilderment for a moment.

He had found it strange that Mok Gyeong-un handed over the secret manual too readily.

But he taught the formulas of the cultivation method and sword technique incorrectly by arbitrarily rearranging them?

If one practiced them incorrectly, they could suffer from Qi Deviation, become a cripple, or even die.

“Young Master, if you do that...”

“Why?”

Mok Gyeong-un Gyeong-un asked with his characteristically chilling smile.

‘!!!!!!’

At this, Go Chan felt shivers all over his body.

This fiend had no interest whatsoever in whether the youngest young master, Mok Yu-cheon, would be harmed or not.

‘...This fellow is truly a devil.’

The atmosphere earlier had been somewhat warm.

He thought it was a deal that both sides could be satisfied with, but it wasn’t at all.

The winner of the deal was this devilish fellow.

-Whew.

However, there was another being observing their appearance from the air, clicking its tongue.

It was Cheong-ryeong.

Cheong-ryeong looked at Mok Gyeong-un while puffing on her pipe.

‘Crazy mortal.’

It was truly absurd.

That mortal named Go Chan was completely unaware of this fact.

Mok Gyeong-un had improvised and temporarily changed around eighty characters in the formulas, and he had recited them to Mok Yu-cheon nine times without a single mistake, exactly the same each time.

It goes beyond the level of having an extraordinary mind.

Chapter 38

Four days later,

In a dense forest not far from the estate of Yeon Mok Sword Manor,

A man wearing a bamboo hat and carrying a backpack filled with old books and tools, dressed in a navy blue Taoist robe with the yin-yang symbol, was walking somewhere, holding a sword technique hand seal in one hand and a talisman with the character “追” (chase) written on it in the other.

The man continuously chanted an incantation.

“.追.....追.....追.....追.....”

This was the Harmony Mantra.

It was a type of Summoning Harmony Technique used to meet someone whose whereabouts were unknown, and he had been searching the surroundings while employing this technique for two or three days straight.

Normally, he would quickly find someone with this technique.

However,

‘It’s concealed.’

A very strong and ominous energy was obscuring it.

This wasn’t a case of going missing or being killed in an ordinary manner.

The power of evil spirits or techniques was involved.

‘Who could it be?’

Sak was considered the third-ranking diviner within Ghostly Spirit Pavilion.

Moreover, as she controlled the Imaemangnyang entity Guyeo as her spirit servant, she had the ability to single-handedly exorcise ghosts up to the Yellow Spirit level.

Yet, for her to be defeated like this was incomprehensible.

[What? How could that be?]

[This is a letter sent by the chief wife of Yeon Mok Sword Manor. Read it.]

The letter contained a threat-like protest.

It stated that if they didn’t hand over the penalty of three thousand silver coins and Sak, they would annihilate Ghostly Spirit Pavilion.

If the contents of the letter were true, it was understandable for the chief wife to be angry, but it was unlikely for Sak to engage in such an act.

[There must be something more to it. Find her and uncover the truth.]

So, he had been doing this day and night without rest.

He had to find her quickly before Yeon Mok Sword Manor made a move.

At that moment, while he was focusing on the technique again,

-Tremble tremble!

The talisman of “追” (chase) held in his left hand shook violently.

‘Nearby.’

With that, the man grasped the talisman with both hands and chanted an incantation.

“...追追!”

As soon as the incantation ended,

The shaking characters on the talisman darkened and floated in the air on their own, flying somewhere.

-Flap flap!

The man followed the flying talisman.

Eventually, the talisman bent downward somewhere.

It was hidden by thick bushes, and when he passed through, a quite steep cliff appeared.

It was a place where one could easily fall to their death if they misstepped.

The man looked around and found a slope to descend.

There, he discovered the talisman lying neatly on the ground.

However,

‘!?’

Something else caught his eye before the talisman.

In the surroundings, there were fragments of flesh and dried bloodstains, making it difficult to recognize the human form.

Upon seeing this, the man couldn't help but frown.

'How could this happen...?'

He had never anticipated such an outcome.

He had considered the possibility of her being attacked, but this was more serious than he thought.

The man swallowed his dry saliva.

This was definitely not something that could happen with a mere Yellow Spirit level entity.

'What is happened happened?'

Nothing could be determined solely based on this horrific scene.

If at least the corpse had been intact, there would have been a way to find out in detail through necromancy, but with this, the chances were slim.

However, there was no other choice.

The man placed his hand on the ground in the center of the catastrophe and closed his eyes.

Then,

-Chak! Chak!

He formed hand seals with his left hand.

'Gae (皆)! Tu (鬪)! Jeon (前)!'

Oe-bak hand seal, Oe-sa, followed by the Bobbyeong.

They were the hand seals of the Nine Character Dharani.

“皆皆皆皆。”

-Tremble tremble!

The bloodstained objects on the ground began to tremble slightly.

Beads of cold sweat formed on the man's forehead.

When one is killed by an evil spirit, even the soul and the remaining bodily energy are damaged, making it difficult to draw out the traces through incantations.

“Reveal everything. Urgently execute...”

The man's head was thrown back.

Then, like a flashback, fleeting memories pierced his mind.

-Swish!

[Myo-sin...]

[Cough cough, I deflected the killing technique you sent.]

[Are you a diviner?]

[Whew. It's quiet now.]

[How can you grasp an Imaemangnyang with your bare hands?]

[You said you'd do anything, right?]

[...Now I'm retreating like this, but before long...]

-Shiver!

At that moment, along with an ominous and spine-chilling energy, the man's consciousness returned.

The man muttered with trembling eyes.

“Wh-What was that?”

The memory was cut off along with the tremendous fear Sak had felt at the end.

It seemed like something had snipped off that part.

If it were this level of fear and dread, there should have been at least a little bit of the final fragment visible, but there was none.

‘Strange.’

All beings fall into fear in the face of death.

However, the fear seen before this abruptly cut-off memory wasn't the fear felt before dying but the emotion experienced while facing some immense terror.

'What is happened happened?'

He grew even more curious.

The memories were too short, like fleeting moments, so it was impossible to know exactly what had transpired.

Through the glimpses of some memories, he had only learned one thing.

'Mok Gyeong-un...'

That person was at the center of Sak's death and this incident.

Although it was just a fragment, there was one particularly memorable memory.

'...Grasping an Imaemangnyang with bare hands?'

It was a difficult feat even for diviners unless they met special conditions.

From this, one of two things could be inferred.

Either this young master named Mok Gyeong-un was possessed by a Yellow Spirit, as they had initially suspected, making this possible.

Or he might have been born with spiritual talent.

If it was the latter, it was a remarkable talent.

'...He might be a natural-born diviner.'

Such talent was hard to find.

It was said that even the slightest ability to sense spiritual traces through one of the five senses indicated talent.

However, touching an Imaemangnyang, a mass of demonic energy, without any conditions was on a completely different level.

The man shook his head.

'This isn't what's important.'

For now, he had to make contact with this fellow named Mok Gyeong-un to find out what had happened.

The man glanced at the air and muttered.

“Go-jo. I have a feeling we shouldn’t let our guard down.”

With those words, he gestured for someone to follow.

Then, the shadow of an eagle on the ground flapped its wings in response.

The strange thing was that the head of the eagle in this shadow had a peculiar set of horns.

Shining Orchid Pavilion, located at the southern end of the back alley in the low-end market.

It was overflowing with various low-quality ****.

“Hahahaha.”

“Drink up. I’ll pay for everything today.”

“Let’s get wasted today!”

Due to these individuals, other customers couldn’t even muster the courage to enter.

‘Phew.’

Watching them, escort guard Go Chan, who was standing at the entrance, sighed.

‘At least this is the only information organization in this area.’

It was a place of quite low quality.

If categorized into high, middle, and low, it would barely qualify as low-grade.

Just looking at the gathered individuals, the level was significantly inferior.

However, he had an order from Mok Gyeong-un, so he came to make a request at a nearby place.

[Ask if they know this symbol.]

[Pardon? How do I...]

[You don't need to know the details. Escort guard Go Chan, just submit the request to that information organization or whatever it is.]

[Understood.]

'What could this be?'

The symbol Mok Gyeong-un had shown him was quite simple.

However, he had never seen it before.

It might be because he had retired a long time ago, but if even he, a former assassin, didn't know it, it could be something trivial.

'Where is he, anyway?'

The leader of this place should be here.

Since it was a low-quality place, there were no special rules, and they would bring information in exchange for money.

'Ah, there he is.'

He had met him a few times after settling here.

Go Chan sighed once and called out to someone.

"Boss Gwak."

At his call, a man sitting in the middle of the inn, filled with the scent of alcohol, slowly turned his head without getting up.

Then, blinking his eyes, he seemed to recognize Go Chan and stood up with a bright expression.

"Oh my. Isn't it escort guard Go Chan from Yeon Mok Sword Manor?"

Although it had been a long time since they met, he was still a person immersed in alcohol and women.

Even now, he had a woman who looked like a courtesan by his side, which was a distasteful sight.

Go Chan shook his head and said, "I have a request to make."

“A request?”

“I will pay the proper price.”

“I understand. Come up to the second-floor office.”

Although he didn't like it, he had heard that Boss Gwak was originally from the Hao Sect.

That's why his information network wasn't too shabby.

Not long after entering the private room, a thumping sound was heard from the second-floor corridor.

He always made such noise due to his large build.

‘He's disqualified as an assassin.’

The basics of an assassin lie in secrecy and confidentiality.

Of course, individuals with such qualities were rare.

At that moment, the door to the private room opened, and Boss Gwak entered.

“...What are you doing?”

Go Chan asked, raising an eyebrow.

Boss Gwak had entered with a woman under his arm.

Judging by her upswept hair, heavy makeup, and clothes that showed her cleavage, she seemed to be a courtesan.

Her face was so beautiful that it drew the eye, but this wasn't the occasion for that.

“This is a new girl who recently joined. Isn't she nice?”

“Didn't I say I had a request to make?”

“She's one of our girls, so you don't need to mind her presence. If you have something to say, go ahead. I need to go down soon.”

‘...This pathetic fellow.’

Go Chan inwardly felt murderous intent rising within him.

No matter how low the quality was, this was truly below standard.

If things continued like this, there was no need to make a request.

“Send her out.”

“Oh, escort guard Go. As men, we should enjoy...”

“If she keeps coming out like this, I’ll just leave.”

“...”

Those words had an effect.

Boss Gwak, who had become like a mute who had eaten honey, irritably said to the courtesan, “Go down and wait for this gentleman obediently. If I find you in the arms of another man, be prepared for the consequences.”

Then, as he tried to slap her buttocks with his palm,

-Tak!

The courtesan caught Boss Gwak’s hand.

“Oh?”

“Phew. How unpleasant.”

The courtesan muttered as if annoyed.

“You wench!”

At her attitude, Boss Gwak was dumbfounded and tried to slap her face.

At that very moment,

-Puk!

The courtesan’s hand had already reached Boss Gwak’s ear.

Then, Boss Gwak staggered like a puppet whose strings had been cut.

“You!”

Startled by this sight, Go Chan hurriedly tried to draw his dagger, but something that flew from the courtesan’s hand pierced his acupoint.

-Pu pu pu puk!

It was a very thin needle.

As the needle pierced him, Go Chan couldn't open his mouth or move.

It was as if his acupoints had been struck.

-Deu reu reu!

The courtesan pulled out a chair from the table and pushed it behind the staggering Boss Gwak.

Then, Boss Gwak naturally sat on the chair.

Of course, from the front, it didn't look like he was in good condition, with his eyes rolled back, showing only the whites of his eyes.

'This... This is...'

Go Chan couldn't hide his bewilderment as he looked at the needle stuck in his chest.

As a former member of the Flying Kill Sect, he couldn't possibly not know what this was.

'Lustrous Jade Flying Needles[1]?'

It was the unique secret skill of Flying Killing Yama's Guest[2] technique, the sect leader of the Flying Kill Sect and one of the four great assassins in the Central Plains.

It was impossible for a mere courtesan to use the Lustrous Jade Flying Needles, which could be considered the symbol of the sect leader of the Flying Kill Sect.

The current sect leader, Flying Killing Yama's Guest, was a man who had reached the age of sixty.

Although he was older compared to the active members, his skills were truly unrivaled, allowing him to firmly maintain his position as one of the four great assassins for over twenty years.

Yet, for his unique secret skill to be in the hands of this courtesan...

'!!!'

Go Chan couldn't hide his surprise.

He seemed to understand this courtesan's identity now.

'C-Could it be?'

Flying Killing Yama's Guest had a granddaughter.

Her name was Ha Chae-rin.

She was the only surviving blood relative after losing her entire family in an unexpected attack.

Flying Kill sect leader poured everything into this remaining bloodline.

So far, it was good.

It was something that everyone could fully understand.

The problem lied elsewhere.

'...Is the sect leader in his right mind?'

All the assassins of the Flying Kill Sect believed that Flying Killing Yama's Guest would never pass on his sect leader position to his only granddaughter.

Because she was utterly unsuitable as an assassin.

It was no exaggeration to say that the foundation of an assassin lies in cold rationality.

However, that granddaughter was far from it.

She was the embodiment of a personality disorder.

Her foul language that didn't match her pretty and young age, her extreme mysophobia, her anger management issues...

Nothing was suitable for an assassin.

'Everyone opposed it.'

The last time he saw her was four years ago.

It was before he retired, but when the executives and all the assassins of the Flying Kill Sect protested, Flying Killing Yama's Guest forcibly confined her in the Bisaldong, saying he would set her straight.

'It's impossible.'

Everyone was convinced that it was absolutely impossible to set her straight.

How could he possibly control her fiery temper and make her possess the cold rationality of an assassin?

With that, he had forgotten about her.

It had been four years since he retired, so she would have grown into a proper woman at the age of nineteen by now.

‘Proper...’

She had indeed grown up splendidly.

With such an alluring face, anyone would easily fall for her unless they were exceptional.

At that moment, she extended her hand towards the wall of the private room.

-Seuk!

The needles embedded in the wall were pulled out and attached to the bracelet on her wrist.

Seeing this, it was clear that it was indeed Flying Killing Yama’s Guest’s unique secret skill, the Lustrous Jade Flying Needles. Her using this meant she had inherited the sect leader position.

‘...Then does that mean she succeeded in the Hundred Days, Hundred Kills?’

To become the sect leader of the assassin sect of Flying Killing, there was a rite of passage. It involved taking a test called the Hundred Days, Hundred Kills. The Hundred Days, Hundred Kills required completing a hundred designated requests within a hundred days. If one achieved this, they would be called one of the Four Great Assassins.

‘Impossible.’

Given her temperament, it was doubtful she could have accomplished this. Or did the former sect leader truly succeed in raising her into a proper assassin? Perhaps that could be the case. Come to think of it, it was also surprising that she, with her severe mysophobia, was enduring and serving alcohol among the prostitutes.

‘Was there room for rehabilitation?’

If that were the case, the former sect leader might become admirable. After all, he had managed to raise that personality-disordered individual into one of the Four Great Assassins. Then, a small voice reached his ears.

“Oh my. shit.”

‘...!?’

He saw Ha Chae-rin, disguised as a courtesan, wiping a small drop of blood from her cheek. She had a cold gaze, as if displeased. Seeing her like that reminded him of her younger days when she used to swear.

‘...Is she really fixed?’

As he was feeling doubtful, she approached him. Approaching him, she pulled out one of the needles embedded in his chest. Then, a cough escaped from Go Chan’s mouth.

“Cough, cough.”

The fact that his voice came out seemed to indicate she had removed the needle blocking his vocal cords. Ha Chae-rin sat on the table, crossing her exposed smooth legs, and said, “I never expected to see a retired person like this. Uncle Go Chan. Or should I call you Former Low-Rank Assassin No. 83?”

‘shit.’

It was indeed Ha Chae-rin. He thought she would have forgotten since it had been four years, but she remembered him just from the few encounters they had. Go Chan parted his lips with a tense voice.

“...It’s been a long time, Young Lady.”

“Sect Leader.”

“Pardon?”

“I’m the sect leader now.”

He had been skeptical, but his conjecture was correct. She had become the current sect leader of the Flying Killing. As this fact was revealed, Go Chan was overwhelmed by a sense of unease. The reason was simple. When a retired assassin meets an assassin from their former assassin group, it usually means death.

As he was feeling anxious, Ha Chae-rin said, “Is it because you retired that you don’t see me as a sect leader?”

“N-No, how could that be? Congratulations on becoming the new sect leader.”

“Hmmp. Kneel and receive my blessings.”

‘...’

At the thick curse that flew out of her mouth, Go Chan was at a loss for words. No matter how he looked at it, she was exactly the same as he remembered her. Even before, it didn’t suit her pretty face to utter such profanity. Ha Chae-rin covered her lips with her hand and said, “Oh my. Look at me. I must have become too comfortable meeting someone I know after a long time. I should put on some airs and such, but a curse slipped out without me realizing it.”

“P-Please feel free to be comfortable.”

“How can I do that? A lady should have manners.”

‘...’

What manners at this point? He thought that inwardly but kept his mouth shut. Of course, he didn’t have the courage to say it out loud. Rather, he became even more tense. He didn’t know what words would come out of her mouth.

At that moment, Ha Chae-rin parted her red lips. “Someone might think I came here to kill you. Grandfather also cherished you two, allowing you to retire together with Uncle Gam. So relax.”

“...Is that true?”

Go Chan asked with wide eyes. He had been worried that she might be after his life. But if she said that, it seemed there wouldn’t be any significant problems.

‘Phew...’

He felt relieved. But suddenly, he also found it strange. If she wasn’t after him, why did the new sect leader personally appear here and use the Lustrous Jade Flying Needles on him? As he was puzzled, Ha Chae-rin said with a smile, “It’s a good thing.”

“Pardon?”

What was a good thing? “I was planning to enter and leave Yeon Mok Sword Manor through the eldest young master, who I heard enjoys wine and women, but I can go in together with you, Escort Guard Go Chan.”

‘!?’

For a moment, Go Chan furrowed his brow, wondering what she was talking about. Why did she want to enter Yeon Mok Sword Manor with him? “Wh-What do you mean by that? Why would you enter Yeon Mok Sword Manor with me?”

At that question, Ha Chae-rin slightly lifted Go Chan’s chin with her fingertip and spoke in a murderous voice, “I’m thinking of taking the head of the third young master of Yeon Mok Sword Manor.”

‘!!!!!!’

Footnotes

Chapter 39

“I need the head of the young master you serve.”

‘!?’

At the words of Ha Chae-rin, the Flying Killing Sect Leader, escort guard Go Chan was momentarily speechless.

He had wondered what purpose she had for entering Yeon Mok Sword Manor, but this was truly bewildering.

“Wh-What do you mean by that?”

“It’s exactly as you heard. I’m going to take the head of the one called Mok Gyeong-un.”

Go Chan’s mind became complicated.

There were a few rules for assassins.

One of them was that as long as they belonged to an assassination sect, murder without a request was prohibited.

That applied even to the sect leader.

Go Chan swallowed his dry saliva and asked, “...Did you receive a request?”

“No.”

“Pardon?”

At her quick answer, Go Chan furrowed his brow.

She came to take Mok Gyeong-un's head without receiving a request. What was this about?

To the puzzled Go Chan, Ha Chae-rin twirled her hair and said, "A piece of information came in from someone in Yeon Mok Sword Manor."

"Information?"

"Intermediate Assassin No. 29."

-Thump!

At that moment, Go Chan's heart raced.

Intermediate Assassin No. 29.

'Senior Brother Gam.'

It was the assassin number of Gam Il-cheong, his senior brother.

Touching the chin of the stiffened Go Chan, Ha Chae-rin said, "I heard that Assassin No. 29, no, Uncle Gam, was killed by Mok Gyeong-un, the third young master of the Mok family."

"..."

"It was unexpected. To think that the third young master of the Mok family, a mere third-rate, killed a first-rate master who was once a skilled intermediate assassin of the Flying Killing Sect."

"..."

"But there's something even more puzzling. As far as I know, Uncle Go, you were Uncle Gam's junior... So why are you still by Mok Gyeong-un's side?"

"..."

At her question, Go Chan was at a loss for words.

It was extremely awkward to answer.

If he said he had submitted to him, even though he was retired, she might harm him for turning a blind eye to the death of a former fellow disciple. But if he kept his mouth shut, he would also find himself in an unfavorable situation.

'shit.'

After a moment of deliberation, Go Chan barely parted his lips.

“...I had no choice but to wait for an opportunity.”

“Opportunity?”

“Since it’s been quite some time since I retired, my skills weren’t sufficient to immediately deal with the Mok family fellow who killed my elder brother.”

At Go Chan’s words, the suspicious Ha Chae-rin grinned.

Then, placing her hand on Go Chan’s shoulder, she said, “As expected of Uncle Go. I knew it would be like that. No matter how retired you are, how could an assassin of the Flying Killing Sect submit to the enemy and turn a blind eye when his own elder brother was attacked?”

It felt like a dagger was flying and piercing his chest.

However, for Go Chan to escape this situation as much as possible, this was the only way.

Although she was young, if she had become the sect leader and inherited the title of Flying Killing Yama’s Guest, her martial prowess would be at least at the peak realm or above.

If he couldn’t run away, he had to use his head.

“How could that be? My senior brother cherished me so much.”

He was so cherished that he was interrogated to the point of torture, had two fingers cut off, and was treated with such affection.

So, even if he died, he had no desire for revenge or longing.

However, these words seemed to have an effect, as Ha Chae-rin nodded her head and then,

-Tuk! Tuk! Tuk!

She removed the needles embedded in his chest.

As the needles were removed, his stiffened body moved, and he could breathe properly instead of taking half-breaths.

“Haa...”

“Don’t feel too bad. I needed to verify whether Uncle Go had submitted to the young master of the Mok family or if there was another reason.”

“ ... ”

Silently regulating his breathing, Go Chan asked her, “...But Young La... No, Sect Leader.”

“Yes?”

“This isn’t a matter that requires the sect leader to personally intervene, so why?”

“Why?”

“Pardon?”

“Is there a reason I can’t personally intervene?”

“N-No, how could that be?”

There was no reason she couldn’t.

It was just a bit puzzling that someone who had inherited the title of Flying Killing Yama’s Guest, one of the Four Great Assassins, would personally intervene in a matter related to a retired assassin, not even a top-tier request.

Of course, considering her temperament, it could have been a whim.

Ha Chae-rin grinned at Go Chan and said, “Since we’re at it, let’s depart for Yeon Mok Sword Manor.”

Seeing her enthusiastic demeanor, Go Chan’s complexion darkened.

‘I have to let him know somehow.’

Otherwise, his life might truly be in danger.

-Pak! Pa pa pa pak!

Mok Gyeong-un, practicing the stepping technique, the foundation of body-tempering techniques, for nearly three hours.

Although it had only been four days since he started proper martial arts training, at a glance, his posture was as precise as if he had practiced for several years.

Watching Mok Gyeong-un, Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue.

‘What kind of fellow is this?’

He was training martial arts independently through self-study.

She had thought he would ask for her help to some extent, but there was none of that.

Yet he had already achieved such mastery.

‘...It’s astonishing.’

Even when she was alive, she had seen countless martial talents.

But this type was a first.

Usually, when starting martial arts, one practices basic forms.

Forms are a type of shape, and when these forms are connected, they develop into a complete technique.

Therefore, mastering forms is important.

‘The reason for repeating the same posture is to make it familiar to the body.’

In the gangho, life-and-death confrontations are frequent.

In such moments, the outcome is often determined in an instant.

Because one cannot calculate many things in that instant, the outcome can be completely different depending on how familiar the body is.

Therefore, martial artists continuously repeat postures during training.

However,

‘...Except for the first time he assumed the posture, he never made a mistake from the second time onward.’

Mok Gyeong-un’s posture had not the slightest deviation.

He repeated that posture dozens of times over three hours without the slightest error.

This was possible because two conditions were met.

‘With his unbelievable memory, his body is embodying it exactly based on that memory.’

It was no exaggeration to call this miraculous.

Even if one remembers it in their head, physically reproducing it is a separate issue.

Yet this fellow can do it.

He can move his body accurately as he has learned or intended.

There is almost no margin for error.

There were sections where he needed to repeatedly adapt because the necessary muscles for some movements were not developed, but otherwise, long-term training would be meaningless.

-Whew.

The smoke thickened.

The tobacco in the pipe kept burning.

Watching this fellow, the desire to teach him something continuously arises.

However, she suppressed that.

Only those who are qualified can learn her techniques.

And in any case, he had already obtained the Breaking Thought Eight Forms, which could be considered the supreme enlightenment.

That alone could be considered immense fortune.

-Pa pak!

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been stepping through the body-tempering postures, finally adjusted his stance and regulated his breathing.

“Phew.”

-How long are you going to keep doing this?

Cheong-ryeong spoke to him.

That’s because the sun, which had been high in the sky, was about to set.

“Is that so?”

After dealing with escort guard Gam and obtaining the body of outer hall master Sang Ung-baek through Ma-seung, Mok Gyeong-un, whose movement had become somewhat free, had been immersed in martial arts training for four days after obtaining the basic techniques of Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

In the first place, his purpose here was martial arts, so he was devoted to it.

‘The conditions are favorable.’

It was the best, as he wasn’t even disturbed.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un presumed that this wouldn’t last long.

The moment the forge master’s breath ceased, it would likely be a series of troublesome events.

‘Leaving at an appropriate time wouldn’t be bad.’

After all, he had already obtained the martial arts.

There was no need to stay here any longer.

In any case, he had only one goal.

-Crunch!

To make a wine cup from the skull of the bastard who killed his grandfather and place it on the ancestral altar.

Mok Gyeong-un said with a bright smile, “Then shall we go in and have a meal?”

At those words, the corners of Cheong-ryeong’s mouth twitched upward as if she had been waiting.

-Munch munch!

Across from Mok Gyeong-un, who was holding a book, a young maidservant was sitting and immersed in eating.

The young maidservant ate the braised pork and drank from a wine cup, showing a happy expression.

“Gulp. This taste is the best.”

Watching the young maidservant, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

With that, the young maidservant refilled the wine cup and said, "What are you laughing at?"

"You seem to be enjoying it a lot."

"One of the three joys of the living is eating. Someday, even you, mortal, will realize that this world is good even if you roll in a shit field."

The young maidservant was none other than Cheong-ryeong, who had possessed her.

Every mealtime, she would enter the body of the maidservant who brought the food.

For four days, this had been her joy.

-Tuk tuk! Tuk tuk!

The problem was that it didn't last long.

Cheong-ryeong, who had taken over the young maidservant's body, looked at the back of her hand holding the wine cup and clicked her tongue.

"Tsk tsk."

The veins were turning black and bulging out.

An ordinary body couldn't withstand her ghost, which had ascended to the level of an Imaemangnyang entity.

Four days ago, she had tried to obtain any body, entering the body of a pretty young maidservant to endure it, but that maidservant nearly died.

"This one can't even endure for a moment."

"Just bear with it a little. Until a suitable body appears."

"Hurry up and find one for me."

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled.

In fact, he had no intention of finding her a body right away.

Cheong-ryeong, who was of a high level and could always stay by his side, was his trump card.

“Don’t nag.”

“Yes, yes.”

“By the way, you’re too interested in exorcism techniques.”

“Because it’s interesting.”

The book Mok Gyeong-un was reading was an exorcism manual called the Six People Spirit Summoning Technique, which the deceased diviner Sak had possessed.

Mok Gyeong-un had asked to bring all of Sak’s belongings.

He had obtained many useful items, more so than from the diviner Myo-sin.

There were several talisman techniques and a considerable number of related talismans.

These were enough to pique Mok Gyeong-un’s interest.

“There are quite a few interesting techniques here. For example, the dead...”

-Flinch!

Mok Gyeong-un furrowed his brow and turned his head to the side.

At Mok Gyeong-un’s attitude, Cheong-ryeong said with a glint in her eyes, “You’ve really become sensitive.”

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un closed the book and rose from his seat.

Half a quarter ago, in escort guard Go Chan’s room.

Go Chan brought a set of clothes to Ha Chae-rin.

“These are the clothes worn by the young maidservants.”

Slightly lifting and examining the clothes he had brought, she muttered with a chuckle, “So tacky. The courtesan clothes are better.”

Go Chan glanced at her.

He had to let Mok Gyeong-un know about this somehow, but she hadn’t given him a chance.

Then, as a last resort, he thought of the maidservant's clothes.

He intended to secretly go to Mok Gyeong-un and inform him of this fact while she was changing clothes.

Go Chan slightly bowed his head and said, "Sect Leader. I will step out for a moment while you change clothes."

"Why? Don't you want to watch?"

"H-How could that be?"

"It's a rare opportunity to see the bare body of someone with a figure like mine."

With those words, she slightly revealed her cleavage.

"Ahem, ahem."

Her mischievous behavior was still the same.

Even though she was still like this, the fact that the former sect leader had passed on the sect leader position to her showed how remarkable he was.

Go Chan bowed and waved his hands, trying to leave.

To him, Ha Chae-rin said with a smile, "Uncle Go. Thank you. Thanks to you, I was able to enter here easily."

At those words, Go Chan felt bitter inwardly.

It wasn't a situation to be thanked for, as he had let her in half-forcibly, regardless of his will.

"No, it's nothing. Then I'll step out..."

Before he could finish his sentence,

-Pu pu pu pu puk!

'!?'

Needles embedded in the numbing acupoints.

They were the Yeong-in Flying Needles.

Go Chan looked at her with a perplexed gaze.

Ha Chae-rin smirked and lowered her right hand, which was wearing a bracelet.

Then, approaching him, she opened her mouth.

“There’s no need for that.”

“Wh-What is the meaning of this?”

“Your role ends here, Uncle.”

“Pardon?”

“I said, it ends here.”

“B-But Sect Leader?”

“Did you really think I believed that foolish excuse you made? Ha.”

‘Oh no.’

Go Chan bit his lip tightly.

From the beginning, she hadn’t believed his words at all.

She had merely used him to easily enter without triggering the defensive net of Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

“The fact that you obediently remained under the person who killed your senior brother naturally means you submitted. What nonsense is a retired piece of trash spouting about enduring for the sake of revenge? Hmph.”

Ha Chae-rin scoffed at Go Chan.

At her laughter, Go Chan gritted his teeth.

Seeing her unchanged personality disorder, his teeth ached.

How did she pass the Hundred Days, Hundred Kills and become the sect leader of the Flying Killing Sect? It was questionable...

‘!?’

Suddenly, Go Chan furrowed his brow and opened his mouth.

“Could it be... that you’re in the midst of the Hundred Days, Hundred Kills?”

To become the sect leader of the assassin sect Flying Killing, there was a rite of passage.

It involved taking a test called the Hundred Days, Hundred Kills.

At his question, Ha Chae-rin silently curled the corners of her mouth.

It was a sign of affirmation.

'Ha.'

No wonder something felt strange.

It was odd for her, in the position of sect leader, to personally handle such a matter.

If she weren't carrying out the Hundred Days, Hundred Kills, there was no way she would directly intervene in such a matter.

Ha Chae-rin, who had been smiling with the corners of her mouth raised, said, "But you're not a complete idiot, I see. That's right. The sixtieth sacrifice of the Hundred Days, Hundred Kills is none other than Mok Gyeong-un, the third young master of Yeon Mok Sword Manor."

"..."

Go Chan Chan was drained by his own powerlessness.

Since when had things become so tangled?

Everything had turned into a mess after that fake Mok Gyeong-un appeared.

No, was it because he was so weak that he couldn't even escape being a second-rate at this age, being swayed back and forth and ending up like this?

At that moment, Ha Chae-rin drew the dagger from Go Chan's waist.

"Wh-What are you doing?"

In response to that question, she smirked and said, "Uncle, you killed the young master you served for the sake of avenging Uncle Gam and then committed suicide. Got it?"

"F-From the beginning..."

-Ta ta ta tak!

Ha Chae-rin sealed even Go Chan's fatal acupoints.

Then, placing her index finger on her lips, she whispered, “Shh. Be quiet. You should be grateful that I’m saving your honor as a member of the Bisalmun Sect, even though you’re retired.”

With those words, Ha Chae-rin tried to slit Go Chan’s throat.

It was at that very moment.

-Pat! Whirik!

The dagger in her hand escaped and flew through the door screen.

‘!?’

-Pak!

Through the pierced door screen, someone could be seen holding the dagger.

At this, Ha Chae-rin’s eyes widened.

‘Oh... A bystander?’

-Kwang!

While she was astonished, that someone kicked open the door and revealed himself.

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

“Escort guard Go Chan. Were you in danger?”

For the first time, Go Chan thought this devilish fellow looked cool.

Chapter 40

Despite her fiery temperament, Ha Chae-rin had undergone rigorous training and education under Flying Killing Yama’s Guest, one of the Four Great Assassins of the Central Plains.

The essence of assassination lies in gathering information and preparation.

Therefore, she began investigating her target, Mok Gyeong-un, in various ways.

However, upon investigation, this Mok Gyeong-un was no different from a naive young master.

She had heard that his martial arts were so poor that he was considered third-rate, not even acknowledged by the other brothers or retainers of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

‘But how did such a fellow kill the twenty-ninth mid-level assassin?’

There were two possibilities she could surmise here.

One was that the real culprit could be someone else.

The person who leaked this information to them was from the same Yeon Mok Sword Manor, but he was another young master who had to compete for succession.

It was entirely possible.

And secondly,

‘Did he hide his true abilities for this day?’

She considered the latter less likely than the former.

This was because he was only 17 years old, and if he had to compete for succession, there was no reason for him to hide his strength.

The fact that the Yeon Mok Sword Manor Master was suffering from an illness was a recent development.

Thus, she was even more certain.

‘...This is completely unexpected.’

Ha Chae-rin momentarily doubted her eyes.

Although born a woman, she had reached the pinnacle of martial arts through her grandfather’s unwavering support and teachings.

Even she could not perform the Void Seizing technique.

Yet, the 17-year-old naive young master of the Mok clan, whom she had regarded as an ignorant child, was capable of this?

Ha Chae-rin’s eyes narrowed as she looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

‘But why?’

If he possessed profound internal energy to the extent of being capable of Void Seizing, he should have reached at least the peak of the supreme realm.

However, no matter how she sensed his aura, he seemed to be merely third-rate.

It was exactly as she had heard.

‘Strange.’

He demonstrated Void Seizing, yet his aura was third-rate.

But the atmosphere emanating from him was uncannily ominous.

Perhaps that was why she couldn’t gauge him at all.

It was possible that she couldn’t sense it because he had concealed his energy.

“Yo-young Master...”

At that moment, the bodyguard Go Chan called out to Mok Gyeong-un in a voice close to relief.

It was understandable, as he would have lost his life with his throat slit if it had been a bit later.

However, the crisis was not over.

-Pak!

“Heuk!”

Ha Chae-rin grabbed Go Chan’s throat and pulled him towards her.

The startled Go Chan tried to twist his body to break free, but he couldn’t resist due to the significant difference in their internal energy levels.

Holding Go Chan, she spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

“If you don’t want to see your bodyguard die, I advise you not to move, Young Master Mok.”

‘.....’

At her words, Go Chan let out a faint sigh.

That was because Ha Chae-rin knew nothing about that fellow.

Although he had just saved his life, that fellow was not the type to dance to someone else’s tune in the first place.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth.

“Who are you?”

To this question, Ha Chae-rin laughed and said,

“There’s no reason for me to tell you that, Young Master. Rather, I would like you to take a step back.”

She was keeping Mok Gyeong-un in check.

If it weren’t for the Void Seizing technique he had just displayed, she wouldn’t have been this cautious.

However, she needed to prepare for the worst-case scenario.

It was difficult to gauge Mok Gyeong-un’s exact martial arts level, and at this point, a normal assassination was already out of the question.

‘Should I retreat?’

As she pondered this, she felt the throat she was holding tremble slightly.

She noticed Go Chan moving his lips.

At this, she tightened her grip on his throat even more.

-Kwak!

“Kek!”

“Old Man Go seems to be intent on harboring animosity towards us. Seeing as you’re even doing this kind of thing.”

At those words, Go Chan found it absurd even in the midst of his suffering.

It was ridiculous to hear her babble about animosity when she was the one who had tried to kill him first.

“An assassin from the Flying Killing Sect? Hoh. So you were an assassin?”

-Eureuk

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, she made an annoyed expression.

He had nicely summarized and exposed her identity.

“Ah... this damn bastard.”

There was nothing worse than an assassin failing and having their affiliation revealed as well.

Now that things had come to this, she had to kill Mok Gyeong-un in some way.

No, the goal was to kill him even if she had to retreat and change her approach.

Once designated as a Hundred-Day Hundred-Kill target, if she couldn't kill him, she wouldn't be able to receive the title of the Four Great Assassins or become the Sect Leader of the Flying Killing Sect.

‘Do I have to finish it?’

Although she still couldn't be sure of Mok Gyeong-un's martial arts level, she did have a secret technique as a last resort.

It was the Extreme Killing Needle attached to her wrist.

Since it was specially made, it could only be used once, but if used within a distance of three jang, even skilled martial artists would find it difficult to block with their protective qi.

She was told to use it when her life was in danger, but it might not be a situation to hold back.

‘If I let my guard down, I could be the one to suffer.’

Without lowering her guard, she slowly lowered her left hand.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un spoke.

“Let him go.”

“What?”

“If you release the Guard Go Chan, I'll let you go this time. It's very rare for me to let someone who targeted my life go.”

‘What?’

Go Chan was inwardly surprised.

He didn't expect that devilish fellow to let an assassin who had come to take his life go for his sake.

Wasn't he just a pawn to be used by that guy?

He thought he would naturally be abandoned, so it was truly unexpected.

'Just let him go? Ha!'

On the other hand, at Mok Gyeong-un's words, one of Ha Chae-rin's eyebrows arched upward.

His attitude, as if bestowing mercy, was annoying.

However, she also thought it was rather fortunate.

The fellow had made a mistake.

The fact that he was willing to let go of an assassin who had targeted his life to save a single bodyguard was proof that he didn't take Go Chan lightly.

Still holding Go Chan's throat, she took a step back and said,

"Young Master Mok. It seems you care a great deal for your bodyguard."

"No. Not particularly. It's just my whim that I don't want to let a useful person like Bodyguard Go Chan die right away."

"Whim. Hmph."

Scoffing, she said to Mok Gyeong-un,

"Well then, if you want to save this person's life according to your whim, move back ten steps and kneel down. Then, I'll release the bodyguard as soon as I leave the estate."

As she spoke, she used the hidden angle to switch the trigger on her wrist and loaded the Extreme Killing Needle.

She had already visualized the unfolding situation several times in her mind.

The moment Mok Gyeong-un stepped back, she planned to use Go Chan as a shield and push forward, firing the Extreme Killing Needle from her hidden angle.

"Hurry up and step ba-"

'!?'

It was at that very moment.

She discovered that Mok Gyeong-un's gaze was not directed at her but slightly behind her.

At the same time,

-Flinch!

Sensing something strange behind her back, she hurriedly switched her wrist and shot the Spectral Needle.

-Poof poof poof pook!

However, there was nothing behind her.

'What?'

She was sure she had felt something approaching from behind just now.

It was an eerie sensation, but what on earth...!?

-Pak!

"Kek!"

In an instant, she grabbed Go Chan, whose throat she was holding, and twisted her body to one side.

At that moment, a dagger brushed past her right side.

Seeing Ha Chae-rin's appearance as she dodged, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes gleamed with interest.

'Faster than Mok Yu-cheon.'

And more sensitive in perception.

Cheong-ryeong, who had targeted Ha Chae-rin's back, spoke.

-The senses of a peak-level expert are incomparable to those of a first-class martial artist. My ghostly aura is too strong, so it's not easy to approach within one jang.

It seems so.

Throughout Mok Yu-cheon's narration, he kept glancing at Cheong-ryeong's location from time to time.

Upon reaching the peak realm, it seemed that one becomes more adept at manipulating energy, to the point of being sensitive even to spiritual energy.

Then, Ha Chae-rin spoke to Mok Gyeong-un with sharpened eyes.

“Young Master Mok. You had an accomplice.”

“...”

She was certain.

The eerie and unfamiliar sensation she had felt from behind.

She didn't know what it was, but her senses couldn't be wrong when she was already on high alert.

And she realized one thing.

‘It was weak.’

The dagger Mok Gyeong-un had thrown earlier was a surprise attack, but the force behind it was weak.

If a martial artist above the peak level had thrown it with intent, she would have been hit on the shoulder in that fleeting moment.

Something was strange.

It was a perfect opportunity, yet he let it slip.

‘Could it be?’

Perhaps the Void Seizing technique he had demonstrated earlier was not Mok Gyeong-un's skill.

It could have been the help of this unfamiliar entity that couldn't be sensed.

As her thoughts reached this point, the corners of her mouth curled up slightly.

If Mok Gyeong-un was not the kind of expert she should be wary of, she could definitely kill him.

‘Extreme Killing Needle!’

In a split second, killing intent rose from her.

Sensing this, Mok Gyeong-un spoke in a cold voice.

“It seems you’ll become the most wicked person.”

“No. Not at all!”

With those words, Ha Chae-rin pushed Go Chan towards Mok Gyeong-un as she was.

-Papapapak!

And as she approached within three jang, she struck Go Chan’s back with her left palm.

-Paaaaaang!

A sound of something exploding rang out.

“Kek!”

The Extreme Killing Needle that penetrated Go Chan’s back flew accurately towards Mok Gyeong-un’s forehead.

The power of the Extreme Killing Needle flying at a tremendous speed was at a level that could pierce through the protective qi of decent internal energy experts.

However,

-Whirik!

The flying Extreme Killing Needle twisted its trajectory upwards and penetrated Mok Gyeong-un’s raised right palm.

-Pook!

‘!?’

Ha Chae-rin’s eyes widened.

The flying Extreme Killing Needle changed its trajectory, what on earth was happening?

As she was puzzled, she heard a woman’s voice in her left ear.

-You should have left when he said he’d let you go, foolish one.

Startled by the voice right next to her, she leaped to the right and shot the Spectral Needle.

However, there was nothing there.

-Poof poof poof pook!

She was sure she heard a voice right beside her.

But why couldn't she see anything?

As she was bewildered, something pulled her body to the ground with immense force.

-Pak! Kwang!

"Ack!"

A final scream burst out from Ha Chae-rin's mouth as she hit the ground.

The startled Ha Chae-rin circulated her energy and tried to gather as much internal power as possible.

Then, she tried to generate a repulsive force to shake off the power pressing down on her body.

However,

"Heok!"

At that moment, an unbelievable thing occurred.

-Bubble bubble!

The surroundings of Ha Chae-rin, who was pressed against the ground, were filled with rising blood, and everything turned red.

At the same time, a foul stench of blood filled the air, making it hard to breathe.

Faced with this bizarre situation she had never experienced before, she couldn't understand what was happening.

-Kkadeuk! Kkadeuk!

'!!!!!!!'

For a moment, she doubted her eyes.

Dozens of red hands emerged from the ground, grabbing and pulling at her arms and legs, making her heart feel like it would burst.

It was so terrifying that she couldn't even scream.

-Squirm squirm!

All she could do was twist her body.

Looking at Ha Chae-rin like this, Cheong-ryeong sneered.

-Since it's the body I'll be using, I'll try not to leave too many scratches.

She was enjoying this.

Watching Cheong-ryeong, who was delighted, and Ha Chae-rin, who was suffering from fear, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head.

"I told you you'd be the most wicked person."

He had clearly warned her.

He had even given her a chance to live by holding the bodyguard Go Chan's throat and threatening him.

However, in the end, she had missed this opportunity.

"Cough cough."

Mok Gyeong-un examined Go Chan, who was turning bluer and colder, with blood filling his mouth.

Blood continuously flowed from his pierced chest, and it seemed his heart had been penetrated, leaving no hope.

Looking at him, Mok Gyeong-un spoke in a dry voice.

"What a pity. I thought we could have been together a little longer."

He had done his best to save him.

But he was really unlucky.

Mok Gyeong-un looked down at the dying Go Chan and continued,

"You've worked hard. I won't forget Guard Go Chan's efforts."

"Cough... Young... Master... I don't want to... die..."

Go Chan muttered something with difficulty.

It was the intense desire to live of a dying human being.

Mok Gyeong-un stared at him indifferently and said,

“Your attachment to life is strong.”

“Cough cough... Please...”

As Go Chan’s eyes gradually became hazy, Mok Gyeong-un looked down at him and muttered, his lips twitching.

“There might be room for us to be together a little longer.”

With those words, he took something out from his waist.

Something was written in red ink, but Go Chan’s vision was getting blurry, making it difficult to see clearly.

Mok Gyeong-un placed that talisman on Go Chan’s forehead.

Then, placing his palm on Go Chan’s chest, he said,

“According to the ghost Summoning Technique, vengeful spirits are born not only from strong resentment but also from the overflowing resentment and death energy at the place of death.”

As soon as he finished speaking,

A chilling and ominous energy surged from Mok Gyeong-un’s palm.

-Goooooo!