

Mayhem 101

Chapter 101

"I am Wi So-yeon, the third disciple of the Heaven and Earth Society's leader."

'!?'

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes shone with surprise.

He never expected to encounter someone so close to the leader of the Heaven and Earth Society in a place like this.

Moreover, a disciple.

He had thought it strange when she suddenly entered the treasure vault without regard for the rules, but now that he knew her identity, it made some sense.

'A candidate for the next leader.'

Mok Gyeong-un had briefly heard information about important internal figures through the Valley Master of the Corpse Blood Valley, Lee Ji-yeom.

The leader of the Heaven and Earth Society had three disciples who were qualified to be successors.

One of them was none other than the third disciple, Wi So-yeon.

Despite being a woman, she was known to possess a rare martial talent that appeared only once every few hundred years, which was why she was accepted as a disciple. She was said to have ambition and was aiming for the position of the leader.

‘To think I’d meet such a woman here.’

It was truly a coincidence.

Judging by Cheong-ryeong’s silence, it seemed that her emotions had been stirred upon hearing that Wi So-yeon was the Society Leader’s disciple.

When it came to matters related to the leader, she couldn’t contain her anger.

‘But her strength is no ordinary matter.’

Having gained enlightenment, he now knew how to handle the energy within his body.

However, unlike him, she was standing in an extremely ordinary posture while holding his wrist, yet there was not the slightest movement.

Moreover, she was holding another fellow with her other hand.

‘Is this the level of the Heaven and Earth Society Society Leader’s disciple?’

If the youngest disciple was at this level, he could roughly estimate the level of those above her.

And just how strong would the Society Leader of the Heaven and Earth Society be?

What was certain was that even though he had gained enlightenment, he had yet to reach the level of the Society Leader’s disciple.

At that moment, Yeop Wi-seon, the disciple of Bright Blade King, who had his wrist twisted and was in pain, pressed on.

“Haa... haa... What are you doing? How dare a mere disciple of the Corpse Blood Valley not show respect even after knowing the Young Lady’s identity...”

-Crack!

“Ack!”

Before he could finish his words,

Yeop Wi-seon’s wrist was completely twisted, and the bone was broken.

Since an intact bone had been broken, it was natural for a scream of pain to escape, but Yeop Wi-seon gritted his teeth with his face swollen as if the blood vessels were about to burst.

To him, Wi So-yeon, the third disciple of the Society Leader, spoke in a cold voice.

“I believe I told you to be quiet.”

“Ugh... I, I apologize.”

“Do I need to list out the things you have done with my own mouth?”

“Ugh... No, you don’t.”

In fact, Yeop Wi-seon had nothing to say even if he had ten mouths.

Not many had the authority to enter the treasure vault without regard for the rules.

Even though he was a disciple of Bright Blade King, one of the Five Kings, he naturally did not have access to this place. He had only entered by taking advantage of Wi So-yeon's authority as the Society Leader's disciple.

However, in the midst of that, he had gotten excited and damaged some of the original secret manuals in the treasure vault.

This alone had already crossed a line that he couldn't handle.

"Your foolish actions have also put me, who brought you here, in quite a predicament. So, if you open your mouth again, I will execute you on the spot."

"I will keep that in mind... huff."

Yeop Wi-seon firmly closed his mouth.

He shouldn't upset her any further.

-Pak!

Wi So-yeon, who had released Yeop Wi-seon's hand, similarly released Mok Gyeong-un's wrist.

And she said,

"I apologize. Forgive this person's rudeness. He is quite loyal, which is why I keep him around, but I never thought he would do such a foolish thing like today."

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un brought his wrist and examined it.

The handprint was still there.

Looking at it, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and then turned his gaze to Yeop Wi-seon, saying,

“A loyal but stupid dog must be quite tiresome for you.”

‘This bastard!’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Yeop Wi-seon’s face instantly distorted terribly.

However, he couldn’t open his mouth, knowing that if he disobeyed her words again, he wouldn’t be able to handle the consequences.

At that moment, Wi So-yeon chuckled.

“A loyal but stupid dog. Quite a fitting description indeed.”

‘Even the Young Lady...’

Yeop Wi-seon’s insides were boiling.

He had arranged this situation to make a better impression on her and deepen their relationship.

But in an instant, he had become a stupid dog.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un politely clasped his hands and said,

-Swish!

“Unit Leader Mok Gyeong-un pays his respects to Miss Wi So-yeon, the third disciple of the Society Leader.”

“Mok Gyeong-un?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s greeting, she tilted her head slightly.

The Mok (木) surname was quite rare throughout the martial world of the Central Plains.

She had never heard of it within the Heaven and Earth Society, and the only one she had heard of was the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, one of the righteous sect’s famous martial families.

‘Yeon Mok Sword Manor... It’s unlikely.’

Even she was unaware of the fact that the children of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor had been taken as hostages to the Heaven and Earth Society, as it was known only to a very few within the organization.

Moreover, who would think to send hostages to the Corpse Blood Valley?

She then said,

“If you’re a unit leader, you must be facing the final test.”

“That’s right.”

In fact, she had already heard through the senior warrior Gwak Mun-gi that Mok Gyeong-un was facing the final test.

However, she was only pretending not to know because she had become interested in Mok Gyeong-un.

Wi So-yeon looked at Mok Gyeong-un's face.

'… He's really handsome.'

She had never seen a man this beautiful before.

At a glance, Mok Gyeong-un's face was so handsome that he could even be mistaken for a woman, surpassing mere good looks.

However, she was more interested in Mok Gyeong-un's martial arts than his appearance.

'He doesn't seem to be older than seventeen, but if he's already at the level of a Sect Master, he should be able to pass the final test without any issues.'

In that case, he would be chosen by the executives.

As the successor structure was gradually emerging within the Heaven and Earth Society, she was trying to recruit as many useful talents as possible.

'He seems like a good talent.'

If he was a step above Yeop Wi-seon, who had been taught by Bright Blade King Son Yun, then his future was promising.

It wouldn't hurt to recruit him in advance at this opportunity.

She directly brought up the main topic.

"Your solid internal energy shows that you have the potential to reach the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm or even beyond in the near future."

“Oh, is that so?”

“So, I was wondering...”

“Ah! I apologize, but may I say a word, no, two things to you first?”

“Huh?”

When Mok Gyeong-un suddenly interrupted her, she momentarily frowned.

It was quite rude of him, even though he knew her identity.

However, since Yeop Wi-seon, whom she had brought along, had also been rude, and with the thought of wanting to make Mok Gyeong-un her person, she decided to tolerate it.

“Alright. Speak freely.”

“Ah. It’s fortunate that you are a magnanimous person.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, she smiled slightly.

If she could recruit a talented person as her own, she could show this much magnanimity.

“First, since you are the Society Leader’s disciple, I believe you have the authority. Originally, I was supposed to have the reward of choosing secret manuals here for an hour.”

“Ah...”

With these words, Wi So-yeon immediately understood what Mok Gyeong-un was saying.

Due to Yeop Wi-seon and herself, Mok Gyeong-un had been robbed of that time.

Perhaps he had mentioned authority to ask the keeper of the treasure vault to grant him that.

“Don’t worry. Even if you don’t mention it, I was planning to ask the keeper of the treasure vault, Valley Master Yang, about that matter.”

Of course, it wasn’t something she had just thought of, but it was true.

At Wi So-yeon’s words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled as if relieved.

Then he continued,

“Thank you for your consideration. The second thing is, thanks to the person sitting over there, I nearly lost my life, so I’d like to receive proper compensation.”

“What?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Wi So-yeon furrowed her brows.

That was because she had personally apologized and even broke Yeop Wi-seon’s wrist, who was a disciple of Bright Blade King.

Breaking his wrist here was also partly to show it to Mok Gyeong-un.

But he wanted compensation?

‘What nonsense is this bastard spouting now?’

Yeop Wi-seon glared at Mok Gyeong-un as if he was angry.

If it weren't for her warning, he would have wanted to engage in a rematch immediately.

At that moment, Wi So-yeon spoke.

“May I hear what you mean by proper compensation?”

“Since I nearly lost my life, to match the equivalent exchange, wouldn't it be right for me to receive his life in return?”

-Grit!

Was this guy crazy?

No matter how much humiliation he had suffered, he was a disciple of Bright Blade King Son Yun, one of the Five Kings.

Yet, he was saying that he should receive his life?

This bastard, really...

“That's what I thought, but if I do that, I would be making you lose your loyal and stupid dog, so I would be grateful if you could provide me with suitable compensation.”

“Suitable compensation?”

“Yes. Since I nearly lost my life, I think it's fair for me to receive that much from him, don't you think?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, not only Yeop Wi-seon, who was the subject of the conversation, but even Wi So-yeon couldn't help but snort.

She had seen many people within the organization, but this was the first time she had seen someone so brazen, even though he was just a disciple who had entered the Corpse Blood Valley.

He was requesting compensation from her, who could potentially become the next leader.

It was somewhat refreshing, but it also made her slightly annoyed.

'… Looks like he's not just talented in martial arts.'

Through the brief conversation, she judged that Mok Gyeong-un was a person who pursued his own interests more than he appeared.

Because of that, she lost a bit of interest.

What she wanted was someone who was not only outstanding in martial arts but could also swear unwavering loyalty to her.

But to bargain with the person who would become his lord?

'If he's that brazen, let's see how he responds to this.'

So she decided to test Mok Gyeong-un.

Since she had already confirmed his outstanding martial arts, she was going to see if his wit matched the boldness he had shown towards her.

"Life… Alright. There is some truth to your words."

“I’m glad that you are someone who understands reason.”

“Then kill him.”

“Excuse me?”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed slightly.

It was an unexpected response.

In fact, the reason Mok Gyeong-un had made such a request to her was to see the caliber of a successor who was aiming for the leader’s position.

But he didn’t expect her to tell him to kill Yeop Wi-seon on the spot.

“That’s unexpected.”

“What’s unexpected? I personally apologized and even broke this person’s wrist as a price for his rudeness. But if you say it’s not enough for the price of your life, there’s no choice, is there?”

“So you’re telling me to kill him?”

“That’s right. I can’t think of a compensation that can replace a life.”

At her words, Yeop Wi-seon’s expression instantly darkened.

To think that his lord, to whom he had sworn loyalty, would make him give his life to this bastard.

Was she being serious?

While he was thinking that, Wi So-yeon said,

“However, I cannot take responsibility for what happens after you kill this person.”

“Cannot take responsibility.”

“Yes. You don’t seem to know who this person is, so I’ll tell you his identity. He is Yeop Wi-seon, a disciple of Bright Blade King.”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un turned his gaze to look at Yeop Wi-seon.

Now he fully understood her intention.

It wasn’t that she was really telling him to kill.

‘She was saying to kill him if I had the confidence to handle the aftermath.’

She had bluntly stated it.

He was free to kill Yeop Wi-seon, but he would have to directly deal with the repercussions that would arise from killing him.

Those repercussions would naturally be the wrath of Bright Blade King.

“The choice is yours. However, I won’t hold you responsible for taking the life of someone who had sworn loyalty to me, so I believe that should be sufficient compensation.”

At her words, Yeop Wi-seon’s face slightly brightened.

Of course, how could she abandon him?

As expected, she had a plan.

‘Damn that bastard.’

Yeop Wi-seon glared at Mok Gyeong-un.

If this guy wasn’t a fool, he wouldn’t be able to lay a finger on him.

Yeop Wi-seon made a vow to himself.

He would definitely pay back the humiliation he was experiencing now many times over.

While he was doing that, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth.

“Hmm. If my ears aren’t mistaken, it sounds like you’re telling me not to do something I’ll regret and to choose wisely.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, she chuckled.

She naturally thought that he would have the brains to understand at least this much.

However, if he gave up on his boldness and the compensation he had demanded here, it would ultimately mean that he was just a guy who talked big.

That’s what she was thinking.

“If you are someone who holds a position as the leader’s disciple, you will surely keep your own words, right?”

At his words, she snorted and replied,

“Words carry weight. I take responsibility for what I say.”

“Is that so?”

“Have you made your decision?”

“Yes. I have no choice. I wanted to receive the price of his life for trying to take mine, but thinking about it, the repercussions from Bright Blade King bothers me.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, she lightly shook her head.

He was just a person of this caliber.

A fellow who schemed for compensation against her.

No matter how outstanding his martial arts were, he didn’t have the wit to navigate this situation and only lowered his head, showing that she had lost interest.

“Go...”

“Ah. Wait a moment.”

“What?”

It was at that very moment.

-Swish! Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un moved swiftly and kicked Yeop Wi-seon's chin with his foot.

“Ugh!”

Yeop Wi-seon, who was suddenly hit on the chin, shouted at Mok Gyeong-un in bewilderment.

“You bastard, how dare you!”

“Oh? You opened your mouth?”

“What?”

“Didn’t your lord just say that if you opened your mouth, she would execute you on the spot? You ignored that warning.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Yeop Wi-seon’s expression instantly froze.

This bastard, did he kick him with his foot just now to make him open his mouth?

While he was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un turned his head, smiled brightly, and spoke to Wi So-yeon in a sneering voice.

“Didn’t you say that words carry weight and that you take responsibility for what you say yourself?”

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“Didn’t you say that words carry weight and that you take responsibility for what you say yourself?”

Mok Gyeong-un spoke with a smile.

However, that smile was clearly filled with malice.

Looking at this, the expression of Wi So-yeon, the third disciple of the Society Leader, was distinctly different from earlier.

‘Ha.’

She was amazed.

She had thought he was just someone who coveted benefits.

In fact, no matter how much one racked their brain in this situation, it was difficult to come up with an answer.

However, Mok Gyeong-un had come up with a completely unexpected method.

‘…Borrowing a knife to kill.’

Borrowing a knife to kill someone.

It literally meant borrowing a knife to kill someone else.

When he realized that directly killing Yeop Wi-seon would be detrimental to him, he came up with this method.

[Your foolish actions have also put me, who brought you here, in quite a predicament. So, if you open your mouth again, I will execute you on the spot.]

She had sternly warned Yeop Wi-seon to keep his mouth shut.

However, this was not because she intended to kill him on the spot, but to let him know how angry she was.

But Mok Gyeong-un had used this.

‘Since killing him with my own hands would bring the repercussions of Bright Blade King, you’ll borrow my hand?’

Look at this guy.

In this brief moment, he had thought of a very bold method.

It wasn’t simply a level of cunningness, but his ability to think was no ordinary matter.

Mok Gyeong-un then said to her,

“Aaah. I was going to let him go because I’m afraid of Elder Bright Blade King, but it has turned out quite interestingly. To think that the Young Lady has to punish her loyal dog with her own hands.”

‘This, this bastard!’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Yeop Wi-seon couldn’t contain his anger.

Was this guy really desperate to kill him?

Yeop Wi-seon hurriedly looked at Wi So-yeon.

‘Young Lady.’

No matter what, he was a disciple of Bright Blade King and a subordinate who had sworn loyalty to her.

Did it make sense to kill someone like him because of this guy’s antics?

However, Wi So-yeon’s expression, faintly visible through the veil, seemed unusual.

‘Could it be... No way...’

Was she really going to kill him to keep her word?

Startled by this, Yeop Wi-seon hurriedly spoke to her.

“Yo-Young Lady... You’re not really going to do as this bastard says, are you? I... I have sworn loyalty to you.”

“...”

“Young Lady.”

She remained silent.

Desperate, Yeop Wi-seon prostrated himself before her and pleaded.

“Young Lady. This subordinate has indeed made a mistake, but is it something deserving of death? If you kill this subordinate, Master, no, Bright Blade King and all the Heaven and Earth Society people under him will not follow you. Please make a wise choice.”

With those words, Yeop Wi-seon raised his head and glared at Mok Gyeong-un.

Now that things had come to this, there was only one choice for him to survive.

That was to have Mok Gyeong-un killed.

‘The Young Lady has her own thoughts.’

No matter how much she publicly declared that she would keep her word, there was such a thing as weighing the options.

He was a disciple of Bright Blade King Son Yun.

If she were to kill someone like him, it would be no different from abandoning Bright Blade King and the forces under him.

But that guy was completely different.

He had no backing, and if they created a suitable justification, even if he died, there wouldn’t be much trouble.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un spoke.

“For someone who is a disciple of Bright Blade King, you’re quite pathetic.”

“What?”

“Someone in your position should have honor and self-esteem, but not only are you pleading for your life, but you’re also trying to make the lord you serve go back on her words by bringing up your master. It seems that the Young Lady’s honor isn’t that important to you.”

‘This guy, really...’

He wanted to tear that mouth apart right away.

However, if he showed his anger here, he wouldn’t be able to evoke any sympathy from Wi So-yeon, so he had to keep his mouth shut.

Mok Gyeong-un looked at Wi So-yeon with an amused smile.

How would she respond?

Given her position and high self-esteem, people like her often strongly adhered to their own words.

However, if she considered the practical benefits, she would abandon her self-esteem and save her subordinate.

Whichever choice she made, it would be a choice that she herself couldn’t readily accept.

At that moment,

“Heh.”

A laugh escaped from behind the veil.

Wi So-yeon was laughing.

Seeing her like this, one of Mok Gyeong-un's eyebrows raised.

‘Hmm.’

What was it?

He had thought she would be quite cornered by her self-esteem, but he was inwardly puzzled by her unexpected reaction.

Why was she laughing?

While he was thinking that, she laughed for a while and then parted her lips.

“You really exceed my expectations.”

“Excuse me?”

“I thought you were just someone whose mouth moved faster than their brain, driven by self-interest, but you came up with an answer I never even thought of.”

“If that’s a compliment, I’ll gratefully accept it.”

“It is a compliment. But you’re really brazen.”

“What do you mean?”

“If things go wrong for you here, I am someone who has the capability and authority to kill you without any regard for conversation or anything else. In fact, if it were my second elder brother, he might have killed you on the spot for toying with him.”

“Kill me... Well, that could happen.”

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un’s calm reaction, she became even more interested.

Until just now, she had thought that Mok Gyeong-un was someone who only pursued practical benefits and played tricks.

However, her opinion had changed with his current move.

This fellow had the potential to become her Zhang Liang (a famous advisor to Liu Bang, the founder of the Han Dynasty) beyond his talent in martial arts.

It was more difficult to find a talented person with a good brain than a talented person with outstanding martial arts.

‘I like him.’

With this, she became determined to make Mok Gyeong-un her person.

While she was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un said to her,

“It’s strange.”

“What is?”

“You seem to be happy even though you’re losing a loyal dog.”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Yeop Wi-seon, startled, raised his head again and called out to her.

“Yo-Young Lady, are you really going to...”

“No. I won't kill you. So keep that mouth of yours shut.”

“Yes.”

At her words, Yeop Wi-seon tightly closed his mouth.

Yeop Wi-seon's face brightened after receiving a definite answer from her that she wouldn't kill him.

As expected.

How could she possibly kill him?

While he was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un asked in puzzlement.

“Then you're going back on your own words?”

At that question, Wi So-yeon shook her head.

Then she took something out from her waist.

-Swish!

She abruptly threw it, and Mok Gyeong-un, who caught it, slightly furrowed his brows.

What she had thrown was none other than a jade token.

It had the words Heaven and Earth Society (天地會) engraved on it, and below that was her name.

Judging by the quality and shape of the jade, it looked quite antique.

“Why this?”

As he was puzzled, Yeop Wi-seon’s bewildered expression was visible.

His eyes were wide open, staring intently at the jade token in Mok Gyeong-un’s hand. Why was he reacting like that?

While he was thinking that, Wi So-yeon said,

“It’s the price of Yeop Wi-seon’s life.”

“Excuse me?”

What did she mean by saying this jade token was the price of his life?

He had no idea what she meant.

To Mok Gyeong-un, who had a puzzled expression, she chuckled and said,

“Didn’t you say it yourself?”

“I did?”

“Yes. You said that either I pay a price equivalent to a life or hand over Yeop Wi-seon’s life.”

“Ah...”

Mok Gyeong-un smacked his lips at her words.

Wi So-yeon herself had also been put in a difficult position of choice due to her own words earlier, but Mok Gyeong-un himself had also first brought up a corresponding price to her.

He had thought she would only respond in two ways due to the atmosphere, but she had chosen to pay a price.

‘She’s not foolish.’

She hadn’t been swayed by the trap he had created.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled brightly and held up the jade token, saying,

“But what do you mean by saying this is the price of a life? I don’t understand.”

“Ha!”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Yeop Wi-seon made an expression as if he was frustrated or amazed.

Judging by his reaction, did the jade token have some special meaning?

While he was thinking that, Wi So-yeon said,

“When a martial artist entrusts their identity token to someone, it means that they will grant one request from that person within what they can accept.”

‘!?’

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes shone with surprise.

Was that the meaning?

No wonder Yeop Wi-seon had reacted like that.

“May I ask how far you can go in terms of what you can accept?”

“It's literally what I can accept. If it's within my means, I will definitely grant your request.”

“That's ambiguous.”

“Ambiguous?”

‘This insolent...’

Yeop Wi-seon wanted to smack Mok Gyeong-un on the head right away if it weren't for her orders.

In fact, he had been holding back the urge to do so several times.

While he was thinking that, Wi So-yeon clicked her tongue and said,

“It seems you want a definite answer. Alright. I won't accept requests like asking me to kill myself or someone related to me. And I will only grant requests that are realistically possible for me to fulfill.”

“Ah. I see.”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un nodded his head.

A request within what was realistically possible for her.

It was still vague and ambiguous.

While he was thinking that, Cheong-ryeong's voice reached Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

-Accept it. If you have that wench's identity token, you can use it in difficult situations within the organization if necessary. You can also use her authority when needed.

Authority.

Well, she was a candidate to be the next leader of the Heaven and Earth Society.

Even if not everything, there would be things he could use when needed.

At least it was better than killing a disciple of Bright Blade King.

Thus, Mok Gyeong-un politely lowered his head.

“I will gratefully accept it.”

“No need to be grateful. Think of it as an investment in a talent I want to recruit.”

“Excuse me?”

“Didn't you hear me? Then I'll say it bluntly.”

-Swish!

Wi So-yeon took off the bamboo hat with the veil she was wearing.

Her bare face was revealed.

The moment he saw it, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes narrowed.

‘This is...’

-Ha!

Cheong-ryeong also let out a voice as if she was amazed.

That was because Wi So-yeon's face was so beautiful that it wouldn't be an exaggeration to call her a peerless beauty.

However, her appearance was strikingly similar to Cheong-ryeong's.

They looked so alike that it wouldn't be strange to call them sisters.

The only difference was the aura emanating from their appearance.

‘If Cheong-ryeong gives off an arrogant, cold, and overwhelming feeling, Wi So-yeon has a brighter and more cheerful vibe.’

Additionally, Wi So-yeon looked younger.

However, excluding these aspects, anyone would consider them to be similar.

It was truly a coincidence.

But it couldn't be considered entirely strange.

‘Well... The real Mok Gyeong-un also resembled me.’

Their resemblance went beyond similarity; they had an appearance like twins that even close relatives couldn't distinguish.

Considering that, it wasn't particularly strange that she resembled Cheong-ryeong.

Of course, the person in question found it absurd.

While he was thinking that, Wi So-yeon said,

“Why are you staring at me like that? Could it be that you've fallen for my beauty?”

“...”

She seemed to have a very strong sense of self-esteem.

However, Mok Gyeong-un didn't mind it at all.

“As if.”

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders.

What she had said just now was a joke, but seeing Mok Gyeong-un respond as if it was nothing, she glanced at him, seemingly offended.

Then she shook her head and extended her hand, saying,

“There’s no point in talking about this and that, so I’ll cut to the chase. I intend to become the leader of this sect. To do that, I need more talented people.”

“Talented people...”

“Mok Gyeong-un. Join me. With your level of talent, I will provide you with treatment befitting it.”

At her proposal, Yeop Wi-seon bit his lip tightly.

As expected, she coveted Mok Gyeong-un as her subordinate.

‘Damn it.’

If Mok Gyeong-un became her subordinate, it would be troublesome.

He had planned to repay this humiliation someday, but if they became part of the same group, it would be difficult to openly touch him.

Yeop Wi-seon looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

‘There’s no way he’ll refuse.’

It wasn’t just anyone, but a proposal from one of the leader’s successor candidates.

Who would miss such a golden opportunity?

While he was thinking that,

“I apologize, but I must politely decline that proposal.”

“What?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s answer, Yeop Wi-seon looked at him with surprised eyes.

She was a candidate to be the next Society Leader and had directly offered to treat him as a talent, but he refused it in one go?

Was this guy really in his right mind?

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“I apologize, but I must respectfully decline your proposal.”

An unexpected refusal to what she thought would surely be accepted.

Wi So-yeon, the Society Leader’s third disciple, raised an eyebrow and asked in an uncomprehending tone, “Why?”

“There is no significant reason.”

“No reason?”

“Yes. If I must find a reason, it’s because I dislike conflicts by nature.”

“You dislike conflicts?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, she scoffed.

How could someone adamantly cling onto benefits and reap them until the end—even if Yeop Wi-seon indeed made the first move against him?

This Mok Gyeong-un she assessed was definitely not someone who disliked conflicts by nature.

Depending on the situation, he could readily create conflicts if he wanted to.

Yet refusing with such a reason...

‘Is he trying to avoid getting involved with me, the successor with the weakest power?’

That was her judgment.

The internal structure within the Heaven and Earth Society was already distinct.

The Chief Disciple Na Yul-ryang and the Second Disciple Jang Neung-ak had secured nearly 40% and 30% of the supporting forces respectively.

In contrast, she had a mere 10% to 20% at most.

If considering martial arts alone, she rapidly rose to a level almost comparable to Jang Neung-ak with her immense talent, but she still fell short in terms of power.

‘Becoming part of my faction is equivalent to rejecting all others.’

It wasn’t incomprehensible.

However, it hadn't been long since she gathered this 10% to 20% of power.

As such, Wi So-yeon was confident.

'...If I can at least unite the neutral forces under me, there's enough potential.'

From that perspective, Mok Gyeong-un was a desirable talent.

Not only were his martial arts and cunning aspects appealing, but his current situation could be considered optimal.

Mok Gyeong-un was currently in the midst of Corpse Blood Valley's final gate trial.

If he were to pass even the final gate as the top cadet in this situation, he would be given the choice to become the disciple of any executive present that day.

What if Mok Gyeong-un, in such a position, became her subordinate and entered the faction of an executive no one else followed?

The corners of Wi So-yeon's mouth twitched.

That was her true ulterior motive.

'An opportunity that doesn't come often.'

At this, she said, "Even if you dislike conflicts, there will surely come a moment when you must choose."

"..."

“I may not be immediately useful, but a future investment in your growth. However, the elders already have plenty of outstanding talents by their sides.”

“...”

“Do you think the choice you make then will be a great opportunity for you?”

At her words, a glint flickered in Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes.

He had seen those qualified as successors in a place called Yeon Mok Sword Manor, but they were incomparable to this.

Transcending gender, she undoubtedly had sufficient qualities to become the leader of an organization.

Even without lengthy words, she possessed the power to draw others in.

However,

“If I remain someone you desperately need even then, wouldn’t it still be an opportunity?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s response, Wi So-yeon let out a long sigh.

He was still just a Corpse Blood Valley trainee without any special position, yet he refused her direct appeal for recruitment.

What an extraordinary person indeed.

But his last words echoed in her mind.

‘Someone I desperately need even then...’

It sounded as if he was saying, regardless of now, he would prove his worth at any given moment.

Hearing it that way, her gaze towards Mok Gyeong-un sharpened.

Was he someone with such confidence in himself?

After staring at him for a while, she parted her lips and spoke in a slightly sulky voice, “You’re the first person to make me leave empty-handed without any special achievements, despite not even being an executive.”

“Your words make me even more apologetic.”

“Fine. I’ll look forward to seeing if you live up to your own declaration.”

“I will strive to meet your expectations.”

Mok Gyeong-un lightly bowed in response to Wi So-yeon’s words.

“Ah!”

Then she approached close to Mok Gyeong-un and whispered something in his ear before lightly leaping down from the upper floor.

“I’ll inform Elder Yang and the person waiting outside as promised, so consider another hour as having started now.”

With those words, she left the treasure vault as if her business was finished.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un smirked and turned his head.

“You bastard!”

There stood Yeop Wi-seon, glaring at Mok Gyeong-un with blazing eyes.

His expression seemed as if he was jealous.

No, he was jealous indeed.

‘She whispered in the ear of a lowly bastard like him?’

He was truly enraged.

Yeop Wi-seon spoke through gritted teeth, “...What did she just say to you?”

“If it was something I could say, she would’ve said it out loud, no?”

“What?”

“More importantly, aren’t you going to follow her? At this rate, you might lose your master.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Yeop Wi-seon rose to his feet and picked up his sword that had fallen to the floor.

Then, with a momentum as if he would swing it at any moment, he said, “Impudent bastard. I’ll let it slide today for her sake, but...”

“Spare me from cliche lines like making me regret it someday and leave magnanimously while you still can.”

“You little...!”

Yeop Wi-seon was momentarily provoked and almost swung his sword.

However, he managed to endure it with superhuman patience.

If he caused more trouble here, the aftermath – no, just damaging those secret manuals would be hard to handle, so he had no choice but to quietly back down.

“You will regret not accepting her proposal.”

He put his sword back in its scabbard and tried to leave with these words.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said to him, “Ah, I forgot to mention.”

“What?”

“Make sure to repay the life debt you owe me later.”

“…What nonsense are you spouting? You smooth-talked your way into getting her identity tag in the heat of the moment.”

“I let that slide, didn’t I?”

“Let it slide? What...”

“You’re still under the wrong impression. She tried to gloss over it by offering a life price or whatnot to save you, but my stance on instant execution for not keeping your word remains unchanged.”

‘!?’

At those words, Yeop Wi-seon's expression stiffened.

After Yeop Wi-seon left the treasure vault, Cheong-ryeong's voice reached Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

-Why did you not do as I instructed?

“Ah. You mean pretending to yield, genuinely or not, and becoming that third disciple's subordinate?”

Cheong-ryeong had told Mok Gyeong-un to become her subordinate.

She said that by doing so, he could quickly establish himself internally and make contact with the upper echelon.

-Right.

“Well, it didn't seem like the right time yet.”

-Time? Do you think such an opportunity will come easily?

“Is there any guarantee that an opportunity that came once won't come again?”

-Opportunities are not called opportunities if they seem like they will come easily.”

“You sound quite regretful.”

-I'm saying that even if it's difficult right now, if you seize that wretched woman's body, you could bring the timing even closer.

She had developed a desire for Wi So-yeon's body, which closely resembled her own.

It almost felt as if her own dead body had been revived.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un said, "So you coveted that body after all. But you two don't just resemble each other a lot, but look extremely alike. Could she perhaps be your descendant?"

-...I have no descendants. I didn't even... No, I couldn't hold a wedding in the end, so what nonsense are you talking about!

"How would I know whether you got married or had children? You keep saying it's not the right time and evading the topic."

-Hmph!

She snorted at Mok Gyeong-un's words.

She was already upset that he didn't follow her words, causing the opportunity to slip away.

'She seems quite disappointed.'

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled inwardly without showing it.

In fact, he had expected Cheong-ryeong to naturally covet Wi So-yeon's body.

It had the most similar appearance to herself when she was alive and the strongest martial arts among the women encountered so far.

It would be stranger if such desire didn't arise.

However, Mok Gyeong-un had no intention to do so.

‘Sorry, but until it's a sure bet, I don't think it's right to get involved.’

Mok Gyeong-un's foremost goal was revenge.

To find out if the man named “Ghost Blade” was the real culprit behind his grandfather's death and take revenge if it was true.

However, if he were to become the subordinate of the Society Leader's third disciple right now, he would make enemies with the other successors and their followers.

‘Is there a need to take the hard path?’

According to Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom, the most likely successor was indeed the Chief Disciple Na Yul-ryang.

Among the 40% of forces, there was Seo Un-cho the Martial King, one of the Eight Stars known as the top masters in the Central Plains, one of the Five Kings, one of the Three Chief Masters, and two executives of the Four Valley Masters following him.

As a result, the tide was said to be greatly in his favor.

[If Chief Disciple Na Yul-ryang gains the support of another Five Kings of the Eight Stars title-holder who remains neutral, his position as the successor will likely become firm.]

In that case, there was no need to become Wi So-yeon's subordinate.

Mok Gyeong-un sought a sure bet rather than a potentially viable one, so if he were to enter someone's faction, it would be better to aim for the one closest to succession, Na Yul-ryang.

‘Annihilating Poison King.’

The only existence in the Heaven and Earth Society who confronted the Ghost Blade and survived while maintaining a neutral position that no one currently supported.

Mok Gyeong-un aimed to pass the final gate and become his disciple.

By becoming the disciple of Baek Sa-ha, Annihilating Poison King, he could uncover his secrets and attempt to make contact with Na Yul-ryang, who was closest to the Society Leader position.

This was the plan Mok Gyeong-un had in mind for now.

Mok Gyeong-un whispered to the disgruntled Cheong-ryeong, “So you won’t help me?”

-...Annoying mortal.

This brat only asks for help when he needs it.

Anyhow, she really disliked him.

Having gained an extra hour, Mok Gyeong-un leisurely perused the secret manuals on the third floor of the treasure vault.

To say he perused them was an understatement; he fell into a state of selflessness, becoming one with the original martial artists through their handwriting, absorbing them at a rapid pace.

This could be considered an absurd talent that other martial artists did not possess.

The more secret manuals he read, the broader Mok Gyeong-un's insight and perspective on martial arts grew, and his experience increased as if he had practiced countless martial arts.

Here, Cheong-ryeong discovered an astonishing point.

‘This brat’s body is...’

Mok Gyeong-un in a state of selflessness.

His muscles were visibly changing little by little in real-time.

It was an extremely subtle change that would go unnoticed without close observation, but Cheong-ryeong was able to detect it due to one phenomenon while Mok Gyeong-un was immersed in selflessness.

That was none other than sweat.

‘Sweat?’

It wasn’t present on the second floor, but as he read the secret manuals in the treasure vault’s third floor, sweat poured down Mok Gyeong-un’s face.

Even his clothes became soaked with sweat.

While wondering why that was, she suddenly noticed his wrist muscles trembling slightly and their density changing.

‘Haa...’

It was astonishing.

She, too, had once heard of it.

A strong will and spirit can sometimes greatly influence the body.

There was an anecdote like this.

Someone suddenly and unexpectedly poured water from a teapot onto another person, and that person suffered burns.

But the surprising thing was that the water was not hot, but cold.

In the end, the person’s strong belief that it was hot alone caused burns on their body.

‘To think this could be materialized to such an extent. This fellow is truly...’

Inhuman.

Just by being immersed in the secret manuals and becoming one with them in his mind, it influenced his body, causing changes in his muscles.

Is such a thing possible?

There was a time limit, so the number would ultimately be limited as well, but what if this fellow seriously read all the secret manuals in this treasure vault, taking his time?

‘It piques my curiosity.’

Right then,

Mok Gyeong-un finished reading a secret manual and closed it.

As he was about to put it back on the shelf, he suddenly turned his head to the side.

“Wait a moment.”

“Why?”

“Something has been bothering me for a while, and I think I definitely hear it coming from over there.”

“Over there?”

Mok Gyeong-un was looking towards the corner of the third floor of the treasure vault, where another small cavity was formed.

Inside, there seemed to be bookshelves with secret manuals, but...

‘A red line?’

There was a red line drawn in front of it.

[Ah. And there's a place marked with a red line. That place is... Try not to enter it if possible.]

[Pardon?]

[In the past, something... No. You don't need to know that much. Anyway, if you cross the red line, you'll see something truly spine-chilling. So don't ignore my warning.]

The warning from the treasure vault keeper, Elder Yang Mu-won, came to mind.

That must be the place he mentioned.

‘Something scary...’

“Hmm. That red line doesn't seem ordinary at all.”

Mok Gyeong-un agreed with Cheong-ryeong's words.

When red ink is ground together with white rice and salt, it can serve as a barrier.

That way, it becomes possible to create a disconnection centered around the line.

“I'm getting curious.”

-It seems your curiosity has been piqued.

“I hear a sound coming from inside.”

-Sound?

Being inside the wooden puppet, she couldn't hear sounds from far away.

So she asked, “What sound do you hear?”

“We'll know if we go and see.”

Mok Gyeong-un furtively glanced towards the entrance of the cavity below.

There was no one there.

In fact, earlier, he had entered the treasure vault, read about thirty secret manuals that Yeop Wi-seon had cut in half, and left the treasure vault with an almost dumbfounded expression.

With no watchful eyes, it seemed alright to take a quick look around.

Mok Gyeong-un crossed the red line and entered the small cavity.

“Kuurururururu!”

-Ah! You hear this sound?

Cheong-ryeong spoke as if she understood.

Now that he was inside, a bookshelf was shaking strongly enough for her to hear.

At the very top of that bookshelf, there was no secret manual, but a rolled-up wooden box was placed there, and...

Strange energy was flowing out from there.

Mok Gyeong-un could clearly see this.

“…It's here.”

-Here?

It wasn't the energy of the dead. The ominous energy wafting from that scroll was the demonic energy (妖氣) that could only be felt from malevolent spirits.

Mok Gyeong-un approached it.

‘How peculiar.’

Ordinary people may not sense it, but why was such an object placed here? Aren't there even diviners within the Heaven and Earth Society?

At that moment, a voice reached Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

“Jeong-ah. Jeong-ah.”

‘!?’

The instant he heard this voice, Mok Gyeong-un's expression stiffened. It was none other than,

“Grandfather?”

The voice of his dead grandfather. What on earth was happening? Why was his grandfather's voice coming from that box?

“Jeong-ah... Jeong-ah... Help this old man.”

“Grandfather?”

“Jeong-ah... It’s so stifling.”

From the way it called his name to the voice itself, it was undeniably his grandfather.

Right then, a rebuke poured into his ears.

-Snap out of it!

Mok Gyeong-un promptly furrowed his brows.

-Get a grip. You keep saying grandfather this, grandfather that. It seems you’re hearing auditory hallucinations.

“Cheong-ryeong, you can’t hear it?”

-Not at all.

“Ahhh. Then it must be an auditory hallucination indeed.”

-Surely you wouldn’t fall for a mere hallucination, would you?

“Of course not.”

Mok Gyeong-un was extremely rational. He was simply puzzled by how it could call out in his grandfather’s voice and his true name without even making contact.

-Don’t get swayed by some ridiculous hallucination...

Right at that moment,

“How dare a wretched evil spirit interfere with me!”

This was heard loud and clear.

Cheong-ryeong also seemed to have heard it, as she muttered in an absurd tone,

-Wretched evil spirit? How dare it...

As she was about to express her anger, a voice continued from the wooden box.

“Human. Open the wooden box. If you do so, I, the ruler of the seas, shall grant your wish.”

At this, Mok Gyeong-un scoffed and muttered, “You’re really blatantly peddling the bait.”

Chapter 104 – Lord of the Western Sea (1)

“Human. Open the wooden box. If you do so, I, the ruler of the seas, shall grant your wish.”

‘!?’

At the voice coming from the wooden box, Mok Gyeong-un scoffed and muttered,

“You’re really blatantly peddling the bait.”

“...”

This was an enticement.

It was no different from openly asking him to open the wooden box.

Cheong-ryeong spoke in an astonished tone,

-How can someone who can't even take care of their own body grant wishes?

“I agree with those words. But what could it be?”

-It seems they sealed away an evil creature. However, to think its voice can be heard even while sealed. This is the first time I've seen such a case.

She had lived as a vengeful spirit for a hundred years.

And she had also been sealed away like the wicked thing in this wooden box.

But this was the first time she encountered such a case.

Usually, once sealed, all energy and everything else is blocked, so the inside and outside are meant to be isolated.

Yet the fact that this thing's voice could be heard meant...

“Ah. There's a crack.”

-A crack?

There was a partial crack on the upper part of the wooden box that Mok Gyeong-un pointed to.

-I see. But this wooden box...

“It’s strange that there’s no talisman or anything.”

-You noticed it too.

It was a peculiar situation.

As Cheong-ryeong said, there was no talisman or anything to seal the demonic energy on the wooden box.

Then by what means was this ominous being trapped in this wooden box?

It was incomprehensible.

While he was perplexed, a voice was heard.

“Damn it. I thought it was some luck that you could hear my voice, but judging from your mention of talismans, you must be a Taoist who has mastered sorcery.”

“A Taoist? What do you mean by that?”

“Don’t pretend otherwise. Do you think you can deceive me?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, but you can think of me as a diviner who is learning sorcery.”

“A diviner? Ah. You must be the same kind as that human wearing diviner’s robes who came last time.”

‘The same kind?’

Based on the way it spoke, it seemed someone had come before.

Indeed, there was no way a diviner who had mastered sorcery would fail to detect such ominous demonic energy.

In the first place, the red line was a technique that only a diviner could create.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un asked,

“Who came before?”

“Someone did come. It was an ominous fellow with three eyes. It was the first time I saw someone with those eyes that were said to have disappeared after the ancient times.”

“Three eyes? What is that? Cheong-ryeong, do you know?”

-Do you think I know all the principles of the world?

At Cheong-ryeong’s words, Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head.

If you literally interpret “three eyes,” it means having three eyes.

Such a deformed being had come here before?

While he was puzzled, a voice came from the wooden box.

“How would the likes of you evil spirits and lowly humans know about matters from the ancient times?”

-..You've been calling us evil spirits, you evil creature.

“Wait a moment.”

-What?

Mok Gyeong-un stopped her anger and said,

“So what exactly are these ‘three eyes’?”

-It's literally a three-eyed being. It is a deformed creature born from a human womb. There is a saying that misfortune arrives when it is born.=

“Misfortune?”

-But it's quite interesting. Even in ancient times, a three-eyed being would barely survive a day after birth before being killed.

It was difficult to understand what it was talking about.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un summarized,

“I don't quite understand what you mean, but are you saying that diviner wearing robes who had three eyes put you here?”

“That's right. I don't know what that person did, but after he came, no one could perceive me.”

“Not being able to perceive means...”

“From the beginning, they treat it as if it doesn't exist.”

“As if it doesn’t exist?”

At the words that flowed from the wooden box, Cheong-ryeong strongly denied,

-That can’t be. No matter how much human sorcery has advanced over time, erasing perception goes against the principles of the world.

“Oh-ho. For an evil spirit, you seem to know quite a bit.”

-Evil spirit? You damned evil creature!

Cracks appeared on the wooden puppet that sealed Cheong-ryeong.

She seemed ready to break out and smash the wooden box at any moment.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un dissuaded her.

“Cheong-ryeong. Endure it.”

-If I were you...

“Rather than continuing like this, wouldn’t everything work out if we make it mine first?”

-Yours? Hmm.

At Mok Gyeong-un’s whisper, Cheong-ryeong muttered as if tempted.

The expression of making it his own ultimately meant turning it into a servant spirit.

Mok Gyeong-un had the ability to turn even high-ranking vengeful spirits into servant spirit.

If it was a weakened malevolent spirit trapped in a wooden box, he might be able to turn it into a servant spirit.

He had already confirmed this being's potential through absorbing resentment.

-Still, be careful. It's best to reduce the demonic energy without disturbing the seal as much as possible.

“That's what I was thinking.”

Mok Gyeong-un had the same thought as her.

In the case of demonic energy, it was condensed evil energy, so absorbing it would be helpful.

While doing so, a voice came from the wooden box.

“Hey. Human.”

“Yes.”

“Being trapped here, do I seem insignificant in your eyes? I am the lord who rules over the Western Sea.”

“And?”

“If you just free me from here, I will grant any wish you desire. Did you mention a grandfather earlier?”

“...”

“Don’t you miss that grandfather?”

At this voice, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes sharpened, unlike before.

He disliked pranks in general, but he really disliked anyone bringing up his grandfather.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un approached the wooden box without answering.

And he picked it up and placed it on the floor.

“That’s right. Break the wooden box.”

“That’s what I intend to do. Ah. Of course, before that...”

Mok Gyeong-un placed his palm on the cracked part of the wooden box.

And he inwardly recited the Ritual of Binding incantation.

Then, the ominous demonic energy that had been flowing out from the crack began to flow into Mok Gyeong-un’s palm.

“Shuuu!”

‘!?’

Sensing this, the voice didn’t hide its bewilderment.

“Human... What are you doing...”

“Despite being trapped for a long time, your energy is quite substantial. Share some with me.”

“Stop!”

“Too late.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un absorbed the flowing demonic energy as it was.

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes flickered with interest at the considerably vast amount.

‘So much.’

There was far more energy than he expected.

He didn’t anticipate the energy flowing out through the cracks to be this much.

By absorbing just a little, he had already absorbed the equivalent of twenty people’s worth of evil energy.

Just what level of malevolent spirit was it to possess such strong demonic energy even while trapped?

“S... Stop it. You lowly human dares to absorb my energy...”

“It’s almost done, so wait just a bit longer.”

The energy flowing out through the cracks was almost completely absorbed.

It was demonic energy amounting to nearly fifty people's worth of evil energy.

There was already a certain amount of evil energy consumed and needed from creating undead using the Six Yin Strengthening Technique, so it seemed his luck was good.

The demonic energy stopped flowing out.

Based on this, it seemed he had absorbed most of the energy of the being trapped inside.

“You... bast... ard...”

Hearing the being's voice, its strength had significantly diminished.

It seemed to lack the energy to even get angry.

“It seems weakened. Now, make it your servant spirit.”

“Yes.”

Mok Gyeong-un brought his blade finger toward the cracked part of the wooden box.

The air around his blade finger trembled.

He had invoked aura.

As it didn't seem like an ordinary wooden box, he intended to cut it with aura.

Mok Gyeong-un placed his blade finger, imbued with aura, against the wooden box.

Right at that moment,

“Paang!”

“Ugh!”

Along with a strong repulsive force, Mok Gyeong-un’s body was pushed back nearly five steps.

‘What is this?’

-What happened?

Cheong-ryeong also asked in surprise.

Mok Gyeong-un looked at his blade finger.

Fortunately, his finger was unharmed, but the moment he tried to pierce the wooden box with aura, he was pushed back by an unknown force.

‘What?’

He was certain that he had absorbed all the demonic energy flowing out from the crack in the wooden box.

But what was going on?

While he was puzzled, a voice was heard.

“Did you think the wood made from sacred spirit trees would break so easily?”

“Sacred spirit trees?”

“Seeing that you don’t even know that, it seems the Immortals no longer remain in the afterlife.”

“Immortals? What are you talking about?”

“If you don’t know, forget it. Rather, the method to break the sacred spirit wood...”

At that very moment,

The area around the crack in the wooden box split apart before the voice could finish speaking.

“What?”

Then, starting from the split area, the wooden box began to rot and crumble like ashes.

It was a strange occurrence, as it had been perfectly fine until just a moment ago.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un looked at his blade finger.

‘Is it because of the evil energy?’

His aura wasn’t formed from ordinary inner energy but from the evil energy of death itself.

Evil energy was the opposite of the energy of life, so it caused it to scatter.

It was difficult to accurately predict whether it was due to that or if the crack had already existed and the force added to it caused it to break.

However, regardless of the reason, the wooden box was shattered.

“Isn’t that a scroll?”

-It seems so.

Something buried in the ashes of the shattered wooden box caught his eye.

It was a rolled-up scroll.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un approached and picked it up.

It was a considerably old scroll, and based on its length, it seemed to have poems or paintings drawn inside.

“The scroll... Open the scroll.”

The voice was heard then.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un smirked and tried to put the scroll into his mouth while reciting the Ritual of Binding incantation with the hand holding the scroll.

-...What are you trying to do now?

“I’m going to eat it.”

-What?

He had no intention of playing along with the evil creature's tune.

If this scroll was the main body related to the malevolent spirit, he intended to eat it and make it his servant spirit.

Just as he was about to put the end of the scroll into his mouth,

“You fool!”

Blue flames erupted from the scroll like lightning.

Along with that, the scroll bounced out of Mok Gyeong-un's hand, rolled on the floor, and began to unfold on its own.

“Catch it!”

Mok Gyeong-un reached out with his burned hand toward the scroll and unleashed the Ritual of Binding incantation.

He thought it would be pulled over, but it resisted in midair.

Then, the fully unfolded scroll floated in the air.

‘Ah!’

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes flickered with interest as he looked at it.

That was because a landscape painting was drawn on the scroll, and it was so beautiful that it seemed like looking at a paradise.

Mist shrouded the majestic mountain peaks, and flower-bearing trees were scattered there.

‘Beautiful.’

However, there was one uniquely disturbing part.

It was because a white-haired middle-aged man was sitting cross-legged with his eyes closed on top of the peak in the center of the landscape painting.

‘Why did they have to draw a person here...’

At that moment,

The white-haired middle-aged man in the painting opened his closed eyes.

Then,

He stepped on the mist and walked out from within the painting.

‘!?’

The moment it came out, Mok Gyeong-un felt a chill down his spine for the first time in his life.

As the white-haired middle-aged man passed through the painting, an immense demonic energy emanated, which seemed like countless death energies gathered into one.

-Impossible.

Cheong-ryeong muttered in a perplexed tone.

She had never shown any fear or unease no matter what kind of malevolent spirit or vengeful ghost appeared.

But why was she reacting like this? While he was puzzled, she spoke with difficulty.

-...How can there be a malevolent spirit at the level of a Spirit Beast?

‘Spirit Beast?’

The Classic of Mountains and Seas describes it like this:

In the world, there are countless malevolent spirits that humans cannot see.

Among such malevolent spirits, there are those that reside in a higher realm that not only humans but even those spirits cannot dare to approach.

They are the Spirit Beasts that have lived for an incredibly long time.

Chapter 105 – Lord of the Western Sea (2)

The Classic of Mountains and Seas states:

In heaven and earth, there are countless malevolent spirits that humans cannot see.

Among such malevolent spirits, there are those that reside in a higher realm that not only humans but even those spirits cannot dare to approach.

They are the Spirit Beasts that have lived for an incredibly long time.

‘Spirit Beasts?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes flickered with interest as he looked at the white-haired middle-aged man.

That was because if it was a Spirit Beast, excluding the divine beasts in myths, they were beings called legends in the hierarchy of malevolent spirits.

But what was this appearance?

On the surface, it didn’t look like a Spirit Beast but no different from a human.

-Mortal, it’s not an opponent you can fight against.

Cheong-ryeong spoke in a whisper.

Unlike usual, her tone was tense to the point of being stiff.

She, who always showed an arrogant and domineering demeanor, was feeling fear toward the being before her eyes.

‘…Wasn’t all the energy absorbed?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed.

He thought it had weakened since he had absorbed all the ominous demonic energy flowing out from the cracks in the wooden box.

But to emit such immense demonic energy to this extent...

At that moment, the white-haired middle-aged man spoke while arrogantly brushing his hair back.

“Are you trembling? Human.”

“Well.”

He wasn’t trembling.

In the first place, Mok Gyeong-un was someone who didn’t place great significance on or fear death.

However, the tension due to the clear difference in power was inevitable.

“For something that was sealed, your power is overflowing.”

“Power overflowing? Hah.”

The white-haired middle-aged man scoffed.

Then, he raised his hand, clenched and unclenched his fist, and said,

“Although I’ve weakened to the utmost after being sealed in this scroll for thousands of years, do you think lowly insects like you can dare to approach me?”

‘Insects?’

Mok Gyeong-un slightly furrowed his brows.

But rather than feeling offended, he simply grasped the reality that the being before him judged him as nothing more than an insect.

‘To this being, I am merely at the level of an insect.’

It was hard to deny.

The demonic energy emanating from this being was at an immeasurable level.

Was there another sky above the sky?

If this was its weakened state, he couldn’t even imagine how strong this monster would be if it regained all its power.

No, this could be close to a disaster.

Right at that moment,

The white-haired middle-aged man extended his hand.

In that instant,

Two wooden puppets tore through Mok Gyeong-un’s chest clothing and flew out.

‘Ah?’

At this, Mok Gyeong-un urgently reached out and unleashed the Ritual of Binding incantation.

However, there was no way to withstand the force pulling them with overwhelming demonic energy.

Despite unleashing the Ritual of Binding incantation, the two wooden puppets that flew away without stopping landed in the white-haired middle-aged man’s hand.

“M-Master!”

Inside were Green Spirit Gyu Soha and Cheong-ryeong.

Even while inside the wooden puppets, the demonic energy was so strong that even the Green Spirit showed evident fear.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un calmly said,

“You’re making things difficult. Can you give them back?”

“Hmm. You’re a peculiar human. Seeing that a living being is accompanied by these evil spirits.”

“...”

“...”

Normally, Cheong-ryeong would have reacted angrily, but she didn’t open her mouth.

Perhaps she became cautious, not wanting to provoke the being and cause an unforeseen calamity.

Cheong-ryeong found this situation extremely troubling.

‘This is the worst.’

Unlike vengeful spirits, who have a somewhat different concept of consuming energy after becoming spirit bodies, malevolent spirits rapidly weaken when they consume demonic energy.

In that regard, if it had been sealed for a long time, she thought it would have significantly weakened.

But who would have imagined that the being sealed in this wooden box would be a Spirit Beast?

‘What should I do?’

If it was a Spirit Beast that had reached a higher realm to the point of being able to transform into a human form, it could be said to have reached a realm similar to an almost enlightened Immortal.

No matter how much it had weakened, it far surpassed the realm that even she could handle.

‘Is this the end...’

She felt a sense of despair.

Could misfortune manifest in such a way?

Just when she thought she had finally grasped an opportunity to appease her resentment, she encountered a being akin to a disaster in such a place.

‘Mok Gyeong-un...’

Normally, she would have placed her hopes on the brat’s cunning mind.

But the opponent was too unfavorable.

It was a non-human existence and had lived for such an incredibly long time that it would be difficult to overcome this situation with some eloquence.

Perhaps even he might be feeling fear for the first time in his life.

Facing an absolute being he encountered for the first time.

Right at that moment,

“I was just getting hungry, so thank you for bringing me a meal.”

“What?”

“Ah.”

With those words, the white-haired middle-aged man put the wooden puppets sealing Cheong-ryeong and Gyu Soha into his mouth.

Right at that instant,

The wooden puppet that was entering his mouth shattered, and Cheong-ryeong flew out from inside at a tremendous speed, grasping Gyu Soha’s wooden puppet and flying forward.

However,

The white-haired middle-aged man grabbed Cheong-ryeong’s leg and threw her onto the ground.

Although she couldn’t feel physical pain, for some reason, when she was slammed onto the ground, she let out a groan of agony.

“Ugh!”

“I am the Lord of the Western Sea. A being born from the gathering of delusions. Offer your spiritual power for the sake of your master. Hahaha.”

As soon as those words ended, a red haze rose from Cheong-ryeong's body, which had collapsed on the ground, and was sucked into the white-haired middle-aged man's mouth.

Then, as if in pain, she screamed.

“Aaaaagh!”

Right at that moment,

Mok Gyeong-un flew his body and thrust his blade finger, imbued with aura, towards the white-haired middle-aged man's brow.

He was trying to take advantage of a moment of carelessness, but...

At that instant, the white-haired middle-aged man lightly caught Mok Gyeong-un's right wrist.

Then, he made a gesture as if lightly lifting him up,

Mok Gyeong-un's body dug into the cave ceiling by nearly half a zhang before falling to the ground.

“Kuhaak!”

Blood coughs poured out from Mok Gyeong-un's mouth as he fell to the ground.

Although he had instantly protected his body with evil energy, he had suffered some fractures and internal injuries from the previous blow.

-Mortal!

“Cough... Cough... This is really... Cough... bad luck.”

Mok Gyeong-un shook his head as if in disbelief.

Looking down at him, interest flickered in the white-haired middle-aged man's eyes.

“You're a peculiar human.”

He felt puzzled by the face that held a smile despite feeling pain.

If an ordinary human were to be in this situation, they would likely be terrified with fear, but looking at this fellow's face, he didn't seem particularly so.

At this, the white-haired middle-aged man made a lifting gesture with his chin.

Then,

Mok Gyeong-un's body, which had been lying face down on the ground, floated into the air.

“Ah?”

It was clearly visible to Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

The immense demonic energy flowing out from the white-haired middle-aged man was enveloping and lifting him up.

“Human. I want to see fear spreading across your face.”

The white-haired middle-aged man raised the corners of his mouth sardonically and tried to bring his hand to Mok Gyeong-un's shoulder.

Right at that moment,

Iron chains created from spiritual power erupted from the ground and instantly restrained the white-haired middle-aged man's arms, legs, and body.

The iron chains moved like snakes and wrapped around the middle-aged man's neck.

‘Gyu Soha?’

This was the power of Green Spirit Gyu Soha.

Gyu Soha shouted,

-Let go of our master! Otherwise...

The iron chains wrapping around the white-haired middle-aged man's body shattered in an instant and scattered like ashes.

It was too easy to the point of being futile, the iron chains of a spirit body being shattered.

Gyu Soha's eyes shook wildly.

“You’re an evil spirit with some tricks. But you’ll have to pay the price for touching my sacred body.”

The white-haired middle-aged man flicked his finger towards Gyu Soha.

At that moment,

Gyu Soha's arms exploded and disappeared.

As the arms composed of a spirit body burst from the demonic energy, a scream erupted from Gyu Soha's mouth.

-Aaaaaaaah!

She seemed to be engulfed in immense pain.

‘This is...’

Cheong-ryeong, who was lying face down on the ground after having her spiritual energy absorbed, was astounded.

No matter how much of a Spirit Beast it was, it was so overwhelmingly strong that it was doubtful whether it had just been unsealed.

As the being said, no matter how much they struggled, it might be at the level of an insect flapping its wings.

‘…Even if we use that, is there any hope?’

But at this rate, they were all going to die.

In that case, it would be better to try everything possible...

At that moment,

“No. What is happening here?”

At the voice coming from somewhere, everyone's gazes turned in that direction.

It was outside this small cavity.

Elder Yang Mu-won, the keeper of the treasure vault, was standing outside the red line with a surprised expression.

He doubted his eyes at the strange sight unfolding inside the cave.

‘Who is that white-haired middle-aged man?’

He had already been startled by the loud noise and rushed up.

The source of the sound was none other than that place.

He had repeatedly warned not to enter, but they had caused an accident after all, so he ran over in a single breath, but what on earth was happening?

‘Who is that person?’

Judging from the fact that Mok Gyeong-un was floating in the air with internal injuries, it was undoubtedly a void creature.

Within the Heaven and Earth Society, only those at the level of the Five Kings or above could display such high-level techniques.

At this, Yang Mu-won became perplexed about what to do.

How could such a supreme master infiltrate this place and cause such a commotion?

While he was thinking,

“Right. I need to eat you too.”

The white-haired middle-aged man gestured with his chin towards Elder Yang Mu-won.

Instantly, the startled Elder Yang Mu-won drew upon his true energy and took a defensive stance.

But nothing happened.

‘What?’

While he was wondering, the white-haired middle-aged man raised an eyebrow, looked at the red line drawn on the floor, and muttered,

“Is this the doing of that Three-Eyed fellow?”

With those words, leaving Mok Gyeong-un suspended in the air, he walked towards the red line.

“S-Stop.”

Elder Yang Mu-won shouted as he saw the being approaching him.

Of course, the white-haired middle-aged man had no intention of stopping.

The white-haired middle-aged man continued walking and tried to pass through the red line drawn on the floor.

At that moment,

With a strong pressure, the space distorted, and the white-haired middle-aged man's body was repelled backward, smashing the bookshelves inside.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un's body, which had been restrained in the air, fell to the ground.

‘What?’

He didn't know what was going on, but the white-haired middle-aged man, whom Cheong-ryeong called a Spirit Beast, was unable to pass through the red line and was repelled back.

In that case,

“Let's go!”

This was the opportunity.

At that cry, as if they had been waiting, Cheong-ryeong and Gyu Soha, whose arms had exploded, threw their bodies outside.

The movements of the spirit bodies were much faster than Mok Gyeong-un's.

He thought they might get caught by the red line, but...

The two vengeful spirits passed the line without difficulty.

Right at the moment when Mok Gyeong-un also tried to pass through the line while using lightness skill,

Right in front of him, Mok Gyeong-un's body stopped.

-Mortal!

Cheong-ryeong shouted with a perplexed expression.

‘Ugh.’

Mok Gyeong-un struggled to turn his head.

There, through the shattered bookshelves, the white-haired middle-aged man was raising his body with his hand extended.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“Haa... Haa... You’re really a troublesome person.”

“The one troubled is me. To think a herald of misfortune, not even an Immortal, would possess this much power.”

The white-haired middle-aged man clicked his tongue while looking at the red line.

He was feeling displeased that he, who had been freed from the seal, was unable to pass through it and was repelled back.

“Mortal!”

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong, who was outside the red line, hesitated before trying to reach her hand inside, which was visible.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un hurriedly shook his head.

In the current situation, if she were to come inside, she would be caught like him.

While they were doing so, the white-haired middle-aged man spoke as if regretful, licking his lips.

“Your situational judgment is good. If you had been a bit later, I would have devoured that evil spirit.”

At those words, Cheong-ryeong, who had stopped reaching out her hand, flinched.

Mok Gyeong-un’s judgment was correct.

The moment she reached out her hand, the being would have pulled her inside.

However, they couldn’t leave Mok Gyeong-un inside like this either.

If Mok Gyeong-un were to lose his life, they would also perish due to the servant spirit bond.

‘Damn it!’

It was truly the worst situation.

While they were doing so, Mok Gyeong-un glanced at the red line on the floor.

From the outside, he didn’t know, but the red line on the floor was drawn throughout the entire small cavity.

As if to prevent the being from escaping.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un looked at the white-haired middle-aged man and opened his mouth.

“By any chance, is the proposal you made earlier still valid?”

Chapter 106 – Lord of the Western Sea (3)

The red line drawn on the floor throughout the entire cavity.

Glancing at it, Mok Gyeong-un said to the white-haired middle-aged man,

“By any chance, is the proposal you made earlier still valid?”

“Proposal?”

“Yes. In a way, it’s thanks to me that you came out of there, isn’t it?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the white-haired middle-aged man twitched his lips and soon let out a vicious laugh.

“Hahaha! You think it’s thanks to you that I’m out?”

“Ultimately, yes.”

“What a funny kid. How can your intention to satisfy your human greed be considered a favor?”

“After being trapped for thousands of years and finally being released, for someone who has lived that long, can’t you let it slide in a good mood?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the white-haired middle-aged man scoffed.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un was at best an insect crawling on the ground.

Just as humans don't have emotions towards insects or pay special attention to them, the white-haired middle-aged man had no particular feelings about what Mok Gyeong-un said.

However, there was something intriguing.

“You’re a truly peculiar kid.”

“What?”

“Why do you have no fear?”

“Fear?”

That was the white-haired middle-aged man’s question.

Even before and now in this isolated situation, Mok Gyeong-un didn’t fear him at all.

Despite being in a situation where fear should well up as he could die at any moment.

The white-haired middle-aged man approached with narrowed eyes and said,

“Do you not fear death? Or are you under the delusion that you won’t die even in this situation?”

“Well. I can tell you it’s not the latter.”

“Not the latter?”

“Yes.”

“So you’re saying you don’t fear death?”

“Everything that lives is bound to decline anyway, so what’s the point of fearing it?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the white-haired middle-aged man found him peculiar.

Even beings who live eternally like himself fear extinction.

Yet a mortal says he doesn’t fear death.

At this, the white-haired middle-aged man extended his hand and said,

“Is that so? Then we can test whether you truly don’t fear death.”

The white-haired middle-aged man lightly waved his hand.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un’s left arm, which was floating in the air in a running posture, bent backward.

His arm was completely bent beyond its range of motion.

Just looking at it was horrifying.

-M-Master!

Gyu Soha shouted at the sight of Mok Gyeong-un’s bent left arm.

However, the person in question, Mok Gyeong-un, only let out a slightly rough breath without showing any particular change in expression.

At this, one of the white-haired middle-aged man's eyebrows raised.

‘He’s enduring this?’

No matter how strong his patience was, he thought he would at least let out a groan.

But it was completely unexpected.

While they were doing so, Elder Yang Mu-won, the keeper of the treasure vault who had been watching this sight, hurriedly tried to run somewhere.

“The mechanism... The mechanism...”

Yang Mu-won muttered.

He was trying to activate the mechanism installed in the treasure vault.

‘I need to activate the mechanism and quickly send a signal requesting help from the main sect.’

He couldn’t handle a supreme master of that level with his own strength.

However, the mechanism installed in this treasure vault was designed to handle hundreds of intruders and even Transcendent Realm supreme masters.

As he was about to go to the activation device of the mechanism,

“Ugh!”

A chill ran down his spine, and he felt something cold seeping into his body.

As a master close to the pinnacle-stage of the Peak Realm, he had felt a cold and invisible presence around him for a while.

But what was this unpleasant sensation?

“Gah!”

Elder Yang Mu-won’s body trembled violently as if having a seizure.

Then his eyes rolled back.

The blood vessels on his face bulged black as Yang Mu-won.

A reddish blood color seeped into his rolled-back eyes, and soon his face returned to normal.

‘That was close.’

The one who had taken over his body was none other than Cheong-ryeong.

Upon hearing Yang Mu-won’s muttering, she realized the situation and possessed his body.

She was aware of the mechanism installed in the main sect’s treasure vault.

So if the mechanism here was the same or superior to the one she knew and was activated carelessly, Mok Gyeong-un, who was currently captured, would be in danger.

“Haa... Haa...”

As Mok Gyeong-un was catching his breath, the white-haired middle-aged man said,

“Seeing that you can easily endure this much, it seems better to tear it off rather than break it. This time, one of your legs...”

“Tearing it off is up to you, but how will you get out once I’m dead?”

“Out?”

“Yes. From what I see, even someone as powerful as you seems unable to cross that red line.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the white-haired middle-aged man silently stared at the red line drawn on the floor.

Then he opened his mouth again.

“You’re talking as if you’ll open that for me.”

“…If we can come to a mutual agreement.”

“Agreement? It sounds as if you’re saying you’ll make that disappear if I spare your life.”

“Let’s say that’s the case.”

If he had the upper hand, he would have tried to gain some benefit from the deal, but the opponent was a Spirit Beast-level malevolent spirit who could kill him at any time.

Knowing that provoking it would do no good, Mok Gyeong-un intended to receive the minimum price to save his life.

Then the white-haired middle-aged man smirked and said,

“Why would someone who claims not to fear death want to save his life as a price?”

“…I have something I must do.”

“Something you must do?”

“There’s someone I need to kill.”

“Revenge, is it?”

“…”

There was no answer, but it was clearly an affirmation.

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the white-haired middle-aged man approached him, grabbed his chin, and lightly lifted it up.

“In other words, you want to prolong your life even a little for the sake of revenge.”

“Of course, everything depends on your choice. If you want to kill me, I’ll die, and if you accept my deal, I’ll be able to get out of this cavity.”

“Get out of here...”

The white-haired middle-aged man stared intently at Mok Gyeong-un.

In fact, his mood was close to its peak.

That was because he had been sealed inside that scroll for a staggeringly long time of thousands of years.

But now he had come out of it.

He had gained freedom.

If he could break even that red prohibition...

“It’s tempting. Is saving your life the only thing you want?”

“…Yes. It doesn’t seem like a situation where I can ask for anything else.”

“You’re quick to understand your place. Good.”

The white-haired middle-aged man lightly nodded his head.

Then Mok Gyeong-un’s body, which had been floating in the air, fell to the ground.

“Huu... Huu...”

Mok Gyeong-un, who had fallen to the ground, grabbed his left elbow that had been bent backward.

No matter how strong his endurance against pain was, it was impossible not to feel pain when a perfectly fine arm was bent in the opposite direction.

‘For now...’

He bent his arm, which had been bent backward, back to its original direction.

His face turned slightly red, but he still didn’t show any signs of pain.

‘It’ll take time to recover.’

As the arm was bent, the bones near the elbow cartilage had cracked and shattered, making it impossible to move properly.

Mok Gyeong-un looked at the line drawn on the floor.

‘One chance.’

There was only one chance.

Although he had proposed a deal, he had no intention of actually releasing the being.

If the red line, which seemed to be a barrier, were to be lifted, there was no telling how this vicious Spirit Beast would come out.

Therefore, Mok Gyeong-un inwardly recited the first incantation of the Eight Shattered Techniques.

If he could create even a momentary gap...

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un’s arm rose upward on its own.

‘!?’

Then his body started moving on its own.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un frowned and said,

“What are you doing?”

“By the way, human. Is there any need for me to make such a deal with you?”

“...”

“I can just move your body like this.”

The white-haired middle-aged man waved his hand, and Mok Gyeong-un’s body moved on its own as if it had become a puppet.

‘This is troublesome.’

Mok Gyeong-un let out a soft sigh.

He himself wasn’t the type to trust others easily, but it seemed this Spirit Beast was the same.

Moreover, it didn’t give him the slightest opening, as if it hadn’t simply lived for thousands of years.

Perhaps this time, he might have to prepare himself.

‘Grandfather.’

Perhaps he wouldn't be able to take revenge...

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un saw Cheong-ryeong coming out of Yang Mu-won's body.

Seeing that,

At that instant, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes turned cold.

Why did he think for a moment that he might not be able to take revenge for his grandfather?

Does dying mean he can't take revenge?

There were Cheong-ryeong and Green Spirit Gyu Soha, who would become vengeful spirits to take revenge even after death.

Was his resentment towards the one who killed his grandfather only this much?

“Ha...”

Self-anger and self-mockery.

As it grew, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes came alive as if they were burning.

“Huu.”

Mok Gyeong-un drew upon the death energy within his body.

Compared to the vast demonic energy of the white-haired middle-aged man, it was just a drop in the bucket, but what if he concentrated it all in one place?

Like the death energy concentrated in the danjeon.

The energy from the lower danjeon and middle danjeon was concentrated solely in his right hand.

As all the death energy was concentrated in one place,

‘What is this kid doing now?’

The white-haired middle-aged man frowned while looking at Mok Gyeong-un’s right hand.

That was because Mok Gyeong-un’s right hand had somehow turned pitch black.

‘More... More...’

The death energy concentrated and materialized into one.

It took on a completely different form and color from aura.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong’s eyes widened.

‘Energy more condensed and concentrated in one place than aura.’

It was none other than true energy.

She couldn’t hide her astonishment upon seeing this.

Although he had gained enlightenment about energy in the treasure vault, Mok Gyeong-un was still at the Peak Realm.

But true energy, which was only possible at the supreme Transcendent Realm, had been formed.

What on earth was going on?

‘What is that color?’

The peculiar thing was that ordinary true energy had a blue color like the stars of the Big Dipper.

But the energy concentrated in Mok Gyeong-un’s hand had a black color as if everything would be sucked into it.

Was it a phenomenon that occurred as the death energy was concentrated?

At that moment, the hand that had been bound by demonic energy was freed.

At the same time, as Mok Gyeong-un struck his blackened hand towards the floor, fragments flew in all directions with a loud noise.

However, those fragments didn’t reach the white-haired middle-aged man.

As if an invisible barrier had been created, the fragments were blocked and oxidized on the spot.

Then, in an instant, the white-haired middle-aged man disappeared and appeared at the entrance of the cavity where the red line was drawn.

The white-haired middle-aged man extended his hand forward.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un’s body, which had been charging forward like a spear with his black hand extended through the fragment dust, was repelled backward.

“Ugh!”

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been repelled, collided with a bookshelf and knelt on one knee on the floor.

Black blood flowed from the mouth of Mok Gyeong-un, who had suffered internal injuries.

He had concentrated all the death energy in his body into one hand to increase destructive power, but that also meant there was less energy to protect his body.

‘I can’t close the gap at all.’

Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue while looking at the white-haired middle-aged man blocking the entrance.

He thought it might be possible for a moment, but it didn’t work.

While they were doing so, the white-haired middle-aged man looked at Mok Gyeong-un with interest and said,

“How truly strange. I didn’t realize it before, but how does a living being possess the energy of the dead like that?”

The white-haired middle-aged man hadn’t been able to detect this when Mok Gyeong-un was circulating energy only within his body.

However, when the energy was concentrated in his hand and materialized, he realized that it had little to do with the true energy that Taoists and Immortals cultivated through life-nurturing techniques.

“Strange. Strange indeed. I’ll have to examine your body.”

The white-haired middle-aged man made a pulling gesture towards Mok Gyeong-un.

Then, in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, he saw the vast demonic energy trying to grasp him in the form of a giant hand.

Right at that moment,

In an instant, the entire room was covered in blood.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes trembled.

‘The realm of ghostly intent?’

A space made of blood.

This was Cheong-ryeong's realm of ghostly intent, the Blood Realm.

The blood surged up like a geyser and instantly trapped the white-haired middle-aged man.

Behind that whirlpool of blood, Cheong-ryeong was visible.

‘Why?’

Mok Gyeong-un looked at her with an uncomprehending expression.

Why did she come in here?

No matter how much she had reached the level of Cheong-ryeong, she absolutely couldn't compare to a malevolent spirit at the level of a Spirit Beast.

But why did she come in?

Then she shouted at Mok Gyeong-un,

“Run!”

Upon hearing this, Mok Gyeong-un threw his body towards the entrance without a moment to think.

He couldn't miss the opportunity she had created for him.

Right at that instant,

The whirlpool of blood scattered in all directions and disappeared as if oxidized.

The white-haired middle-aged man had a contemptuous expression.

“What a foolish act. Catch...”

-Don't underestimate me. Spirit Beast.

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong's entire body was covered in blood, and she transformed into a human form seemingly made of blood.

Then, the spiritual energy emanating from her became incomparably stronger than when she had unfolded the Blood Realm.

It far surpassed Cheong-ryeong's level.

Seeing this, Gyu Soha muttered in a surprised voice,

-Re...sentment?

The blood droplets floating around simultaneously rushed towards the white-haired middle-aged man.

Along with that, Cheong-ryeong, who had transformed into a blood incarnation, hugged the white-haired middle-aged man from behind, holding him in place.

However,

The white-haired middle-aged man lightly moved his hand while still bound by her,

The blood droplets flying in from all directions stopped midway.

Then they lost strength and fell to the ground.

‘To this extent...’

Cheong-ryeong’s eyes, which were like blood, trembled.

By detonating all her spiritual energy, she was able to exert a power close to the Blue Spirit level for a moment, but even that didn’t work against this Spirit Beast.

Then the white-haired middle-aged man spoke as if impressed,

“I thought you were an ordinary evil spirit, but your strength is far greater than most high-ranking malevolent spirits. If I take your energy, it will quench my hunger a bit.”

With those words, he took a deep breath.

Then Cheong-ryeong, who had been hugging him, writhed as if in pain.

-Aaagh!

The spiritual energy was being absorbed at a tremendous speed.

Despite the pain, Cheong-ryeong mumbled with her lips,

-G...o...a...way...

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes narrowed as he looked at this sight.

‘Why?’

No matter how much of a servant spirit she was, why was she trying to sacrifice herself for him?

What was the reason for trying to save him to this extent, even though he didn't move according to her will?

Once she herself was extinguished, everything would be meaningless, so he couldn't understand it.

Did she believe that if he survived, he would take revenge on her behalf until the end?

That couldn't be.

But why was she going this far?

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes met hers as she lost strength and returned to her human form.

Her eyes held complex emotions.

Why did the gaze of someone sacrificing themselves for another make him feel so concerned?

‘…How annoying.’

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been smirking with his lips, shouted,

“It seems it would be better for you to remain trapped in here.”

With that cry, in an instant, Mok Gyeong-un thrust his hand towards his own chest.

The white-haired middle-aged man couldn’t hide his bewilderment at the sight of this.

“You bastard!”

He had never expected Mok Gyeong-un to suddenly perform an act of self-destruction by thrusting his hand into his own chest.

At this,

The white-haired middle-aged man pushed aside Cheong-ryeong, whose spiritual energy had weakened, and ran towards Mok Gyeong-un.

“Kuhk!”

Mok Gyeong-un coughed up a mouthful of blood and collapsed backward.

“This crazy human bastard!”

This fellow had to stay alive to remove that red line and go outside.

There was no way for the vengeful spirits to remove it.

Therefore, the white-haired middle-aged man couldn’t help but become desperate.

He bent his knees, lowered his posture, approached Mok Gyeong-un, and grabbed his right hand to pull out the hand thrust into his chest.

Right at that moment,

“Huh?”

At that instant, the palm he grabbed seemed to stick like suction, and the demonic energy was escaping at a tremendous speed.

Mok Gyeong-un, whose mouth was covered in blood, smiled sardonically and muttered,

“Cough, cough... It’s really hard to grab a hand.”

Chapter 107 – Lord of the Western Sea (4)

“Cough, cough... It’s really hard to grab a hand.”

Mok Gyeong-un, whose mouth was covered in blood, smiled sardonically and muttered.

He had contemplated in an instant how to approach this being called a Spirit Beast.

‘How can I approach it?’

The being had seen him absorbing energy.

That’s probably why it tried to control him in a detached state through demonic energy and attacked.

In this situation, by what means could he make it approach?

It was a suspicious being, so unless he drew his last breath, it would never come close...

‘Ah!’

The method he came up with as a last resort was none other than this.

‘Lucky me.’

This method was a kind of gamble with his life on the line.

The being regarded him as an insect while also considering him the key to getting out.

So he was certain that it would try to keep him alive in any way possible.

And that certainty was confirmed.

Demonic energy beyond imagination was being sucked in through the palm by the Ritual of Binding incantation.

It was incomparable to fierce beasts or monstrous beasts.

The concentration and vastness were beyond imagination.

It was hard to believe that this was a weakened state after being sealed for thousands of years.

Then, at its peak, just how powerful would it be?

Cheong-ryeong, whose spiritual energy had been drained and weakened, staggered and looked at Mok Gyeong-un with a haggard face.

She always felt that he was a fellow who surpassed expectations.

Who in the world would risk their life and do such a crazy thing?

‘Only that mortal is capable of it.’

It was the result of combining cunning, insight, and the boldness to make it a reality.

That Spirit Beast had to keep Mok Gyeong-un alive no matter what.

Only then could it get out of here.

‘This won’t do.’

Although she had reached a perilous state by having more than 80% of her spiritual energy drained, helping Mok Gyeong-un now would increase the chances of survival even more.

A bloody light flowed from her near-dead eyes.

Right at that moment,

“Stop it right now!”

The white-haired middle-aged man urged Mok Gyeong-un.

His hair, which had been flowing down alluringly, was standing on end as if his anger had reached its peak.

‘These insect-like beings!’

How dare they deceive him and aim for his demonic energy?

He had to detach the fellow’s hand somehow.

The white-haired middle-aged man nodded his head to detach Mok Gyeong-un’s adhered hand and invoked demonic energy.

However,

‘Damn it...’

After adhering to the human fellow, the energy wasn’t being controlled properly.

It seemed to be escaping too quickly.

‘In that case.’

At this, the white-haired middle-aged man tried to forcefully detach Mok Gyeong-un’s adhered wrist with his other hand.

But at that very moment,

The cavity transformed into a space filled with blood.

“This is...”

It was Cheong-ryeong’s realm of ghostly intent, the Blood Realm.

The white-haired middle-aged man turned his head and made an absurd expression.

Cheong-ryeong, who was on the verge of death, created a realm of ghostly intent by detonating all her remaining spiritual power.

The blood that had opened the Blood Realm flew in like whips and seized the white-haired middle-aged man’s left arm and both legs.

The sticky blood whips turned tough like leather and restrained the being.

“You evil spirit!”

The white-haired middle-aged man, exploding with rage, tried to forcefully shake it off.

The blood whips stretched due to the immense force.

However, Cheong-ryeong’s Blood Realm, which was prepared even for extinction, was not to be taken lightly either.

More blood transformed into whips and seized the body of the white-haired middle-aged man, who was trying to shake it off.

“Aargh!”

The white-haired middle-aged man’s anger reached its peak.

If he had regained even 30% or 10% of his strength from before being sealed, he could have exterminated such insects with a single gesture.

But now, he couldn’t do that.

He didn’t know what this insect-like human fellow was doing, but the demonic energy within his body had become unstable and couldn’t be properly controlled.

Even in the midst of that, the demonic energy was continuously being drained.

It had already exceeded 30% of what remained.

At this rate, it might become difficult to even maintain his current form.

‘Damn insects.’

It was a situation where he was caught between a rock and a hard place.

If his life wasn’t in danger, he could have detached his hand first, but if he did that, this weakened human fellow would draw his last breath.

However, if he didn’t detach from this fellow, his demonic energy would continue to be drained.

‘If only that damn evil spirit wasn’t interfering...’

He could stop it by tearing off the energy-absorbing arm with his other hand.

But that evil spirit wasn't budging an inch, as if it was prepared for extinction.

At this, the white-haired middle-aged man decided to take a bit of risk.

“Fine. If so...”

The only part he could move was the hand and arm holding Mok Gyeong-un.

The white-haired middle-aged man lifted Mok Gyeong-un up.

And then he struck down Mok Gyeong-un's head to hit the floor first.

‘I'll knock him out.’

He was about to knock Mok Gyeong-un out to stop the absorption of demonic energy.

However,

“This insect...”

Even though he slammed his head hard enough to break the floor and blood was flowing out, Mok Gyeong-un didn't lose consciousness.

“Haa... Haa...”

Instead, he was staring intently at him with rough breathing.

That gaze was extremely irritating.

How dare a being no different from an insect look at him with eyes filled with such malice?

Was he looking down on him?

“Fine. Let’s see who wins.”

The white-haired middle-aged man lifted Mok Gyeong-un up again and slammed him onto the floor.

This time, he made his entire body collide.

The white-haired middle-aged man slammed him down so hard that cracks appeared and the stone floor caved in.

“Cough... Cough...”

The complexion of Mok Gyeong-un, who had been slammed onto the floor, turned pale.

And blood didn’t stop flowing from his mouth.

His internal injuries were already severe, so naturally, his wounds worsened when he was slammed down.

The white-haired middle-aged man repeatedly threw Mok Gyeong-un onto the floor.

Cheong-ryeong tried to stop this by pushing herself even harder to create blood whips to restrain the white-haired middle-aged man’s right arm as well, but...

The blood wrapping around the right arm liquefied and melted away, perhaps due to the Ritual of Binding incantation.

Therefore, there was nothing she could do about this.

“Kuhk!”

For the first time, a cry of pain escaped Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth.

As he continued to collide with the stone floor in a defenseless state, not only his internal organs but also his bones were breaking, and his body was being torn apart.

At this point, he should have lost consciousness, but...

The white-haired middle-aged man looked at Mok Gyeong-un with absurd eyes.

His gaze didn’t die in the slightest.

With a bloody and near-dead face, he was glaring at him intensely, and for a moment, he even felt a chill down his spine.

‘A chill down my spine?’

Instantly, the white-haired middle-aged man’s expression distorted frighteningly like an evil spirit.

Was that the emotion of fear?

Did he feel such an emotion towards a mere human being no different from a lowly insect?

‘Impossible. It can’t be.’

Even thousands of years before being sealed, there weren't many things that made him feel fear.

No, rather, those things possessed unimaginable strength.

Didn't even the Immortals of ancient times and those called heroes fear that golden fox and monstrous divinerey?

But compared to those beings, this fellow was an insect, no, a parasite, so how did he make his spine chill?

Had he become so weak after being sealed for thousands of years?

The white-haired middle-aged man ground his teeth forcefully.

The energy the fellow had already sucked in was close to 50%.

Now it was truly perilous.

At this, the white-haired middle-aged man suddenly pulled Mok Gyeong-un, who was glaring at him, towards himself.

“You parasite-like insect. It's all your own doing.”

Then he headbutted Mok Gyeong-un with his forehead.

What kind of act was this?

At that moment, something strange was captured in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

Something hazy suddenly flowed out from the white-haired middle-aged man's body.

It was as if...

‘A spirit body?’

It had a form similar to a soul.

But that form wasn't like the appearance of humans during their lifetime, but rather like a star with light protruding and jutting out.

Then that spirit body, which was assumed to have suddenly popped out...

It penetrated through Mok Gyeong-un's forehead.

“Huh.”

The moment it penetrated, Mok Gyeong-un threw his head back as if his head had been pierced by something sharp.

“Ah, no!”

Cheong-ryeong, who saw this, shouted.

Unfortunately, she saw the moment it penetrated Mok Gyeong-un's head from behind.

It was undoubtedly...

‘Out-of-body experience.’

It was the out-of-body experience of the Spirit Beast.

All living beings possess a spirit body, which can be called a soul, in addition to a physical body composed of molecules. After the physical body dies, the will is transferred to the spirit body, whereas in a living state, the will cannot be placed in the spirit body.

However, there are occasionally beings who awaken to this and make it possible.

‘Is it trying to possess and control the body?’

It seemed that the Spirit Beast was trying to directly possess Mok Gyeong-un with its spirit body through out-of-body experience and interfere.

‘I have to stop it.’

Cheong-ryeong tried to shake and tilt the Spirit Beast’s physical body to disrupt this.

However...

The white-haired middle-aged man’s body didn’t budge at all.

Rather, it was maintaining a tense state by exerting force.

‘How can this be?’

How could it simultaneously grant will to both the spirit body and physical body?

It wasn’t called a Spirit Beast that had lived for thousands of years for nothing.

While they were doing so, convulsions occurred in Mok Gyeong-un's head.

‘Mortal!’

It seemed that the Spirit Beast's spirit body and Mok Gyeong-un's soul had collided.

Her expression darkened.

She wanted to help somehow, but she had consumed so much spiritual energy that her body was becoming hazy, putting her on the verge of extinction.

Holding onto the being was her limit.

‘Ahhh.’

Could Mok Gyeong-un really endure this?

No matter how special Mok Gyeong-un's constitution was, the opponent was a Spirit Beast that had lived for thousands of years.

There is also a level to souls.

That being was infinitely close to a god, so its will was on a different dimension from that of a human like Mok Gyeong-un.

Perhaps it would be a futile resistance.

And as if that prediction was precisely fitting...

Black blood vessels bulged on Mok Gyeong-un's skin, and a phenomenon of his body being dominated by possession occurred.

‘No.’

This was the worst.

The moment Mok Gyeong-un's body was seized, everything would be over.

His rolled-back eyes were trembling madly, and black blood flowed from his mouth.

Was it indeed impossible for human will to withstand the will of a Spirit Beast that had lived for thousands of years?

At that moment, the blood whips she had been maintaining with all her might were severed one by one.

She couldn't endure any longer as most of her spiritual power was exhausted.

Now there was no hope.

It was a moment so despairing that everything felt futile.

Right at that moment...

The black blood vessels that had been bulging all over Mok Gyeong-un's face began to subside.

‘Could it be?’

While she was thinking that...

The rolled-back eyes that had been trembling wildly soon returned to normal.

At that instant...

The spirit body in the form of starlight that had penetrated Mok Gyeong-un's forehead popped out and penetrated back into the white-haired middle-aged man's head.

Then, the white-haired middle-aged man suddenly let out a scream.

“Aaaargh!”

What on earth was happening? While she was puzzled, the white-haired middle-aged man opened his mouth with eyes filled with tension, no, fear, his arrogant expression nowhere to be seen.

“W-What in the world are you?”

“Haa... Haa... What... are you... talking about?”

“That thing inside you...”

Before he could finish his words, the white-haired middle-aged man suddenly made a pained expression.

Then he began to writhe violently.

‘!?’

What in the world was happening?

Suddenly, the white-haired middle-aged man's skeleton began to change rapidly.

What was this phenomenon?

As the skeleton rapidly grew, fur even sprouted all over his face, no, his entire body.

The speed was so fast that the fur seemed to tear through his clothes and cover his entire body in an instant.

Even a tail sprouted.

The skeleton and fur that had grown large enough to reach the ceiling of the cavity.

It was becoming a form that could no longer be seen as human.

As if...

‘A raccoon dog?’

That's right.

The white-haired middle-aged man transformed into a giant raccoon dog about twice the size of a human.

Was this the true identity of this Spirit Beast?

As the body grew, the hand holding Mok Gyeong-un became much larger and took the form of grasping.

Because of that, the hand unleashing the Ritual of Binding incantation felt like it would break.

“Ugh!”

The white-haired middle-aged man, no, the Spirit Beast that had turned into a monstrous raccoon dog, spoke in an enraged voice,

“You bastard. I will definitely...”

At that moment, the eyes of the Spirit Beast that had turned into a monstrous raccoon dog trembled.

That was because something made of faint light was somehow filling the Spirit Beast’s neck, arms, and legs.

The Spirit Beast turned its head with trembling eyes.

There, the scroll it had escaped from was floating in the air, and white string-like things were coming out of it, connected to the light shackles restraining the Spirit Beast’s neck, arms, and legs.

Seeing this, the Spirit Beast shouted in a perplexed voice,

“T-This can’t be. I clearly broke the seal and came out...”

Before those words could even finish...

In an instant, the white string-like things pulled the Spirit Beast that had turned into a monstrous raccoon dog at a tremendous speed, and its body began to be sucked into the scroll.

“No, nooooo!”

In response, Mok Gyeong-un hurriedly withdrew the Ritual of Binding incantation and kicked the being with his foot.

“You bastaaaard! Let’s go together!”

The Spirit Beast being pulled by the white strings tried to grab Mok Gyeong-un’s ankle, but...

At that moment, something grabbed Mok Gyeong-un’s wrist and pulled him.

It was none other than Cheong-ryeong.

‘!!!!!!’

The eyes of the Spirit Beast, who had lost Mok Gyeong-un in an instant, widened as if they would tear.

However, it was no longer a situation where it could do anything.

“Aaaaaargh!”

With a mad scream, the Spirit Beast was eventually sucked into the scroll.

As the Spirit Beast was completely sucked in, a large raccoon dog that wasn’t originally there was now depicted on a cliff in the landscape painting of the scroll, howling.

The scroll that had imprisoned the Spirit Beast fell to the ground as if it had finished its job and rolled up on its own.

Seeing this, the hazy Cheong-ryeong spoke with difficulty,

-The seal... wasn’t completely... broken. It seems like... true luck... Mortal?

At that moment, her expression stiffened.

The skin on Mok Gyeong-un's wrist that she was holding onto was crumbling.

When she let go, his arm fell as if it had lost strength.

“You...”

The cracks spread throughout Mok Gyeong-un's collapsed body in an instant.

Like the bare branches of winter, no, like a dying tree, the outer shell shattered and scattered.

And from within that shattering shell,

A new skin filled with luster was rising.

Looking at this, Cheong-ryeong couldn't hide her excitement and muttered,

-Rebirth through transformation.

Chapter 108 – Fateful Luck (1)

Mok Gyeong-un's collapsed body was crumbling like tree bark.

And from within that shattering shell,

A new skin filled with luster was rising.

Looking at this, Cheong-ryeong couldn't hide her excitement and muttered,

-...Rebirth through transformation.

Rebirth through transformation.

It literally means changing the bones and shedding the womb.

It's a phenomenon where the body undergoes a rapid change in response to enlightenment, and a truly strange thing had occurred.

'It's something that could only happen when one reaches the Transformation Realm.'

Originally, rebirth through transformation is only possible after gaining enlightenment at the wall called the end of the supreme Transcendent Realm and achieving Three Flowers Gathering at the Crown and Five Energies Paying Homage to the Origin.

Through these two enlightenments, when the Conception and Governing Vessels are opened, one becomes able to handle energy incomparable to the supreme transcendent realm, and the body undergoes a rapid reconstruction to withstand it.

'Haa...'

However, Mok Gyeong-un had not crossed the wall.

He had merely absorbed the demonic energy of the raccoon Spirit Beast who called itself the Lord of the Western Sea.

Yet, to think that rebirth through transformation occurred to withstand that energy...

'Strange. Strange indeed.'

How could such a body exist?

He hadn't even crossed the wall, yet his body was reconstructed to withstand that demonic energy...

One couldn't help but click their tongue in amazement.

‘…Different.’

The sequence of this fellow's growth process was completely different from that of ordinary martial artists.

Indeed, from the beginning, he had accumulated death energy, which could be called evil energy, in his danjeon, and even controlled it with a reverse energy circulation technique.

Perhaps it was natural for it to be different.

‘I might be witnessing the birth of a master with a completely different form from the martial arts world thus far.’

Having this thought, a smirk unknowingly escaped her lips.

She wondered what it would have been like if she had accepted him as a disciple while alive, not after death.

However, if she had been alive until now, she would have been a hunched old granny.

As the dead skin completely peeled off, Mok Gyeong-un raised his body.

Skin dust falling off.

“Ah...”

His entire body felt light.

He sensed that his body's energy was not only full but had surpassed its limits.

Just a moment ago, it had been painful as if his insides were being burned by fire, but there was no more pain.

Even his broken bones had all healed, as there was no abnormality in his movements.

‘Was I lucky?’

This time, he had been prepared to die.

But fortunately, contrary to that resolution, a fateful encounter had come, and he had become even stronger.

‘Stronger...’

It was truly fascinating.

The Spirit Beast that had been sealed for thousands of years and weakened.

Just by absorbing the power of that Spirit Beast, his energy had increased so explosively.

At this level, even a master who had reached the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm wouldn't be a problem.

Mok Gyeong-un suddenly recalled the words of Jo Ui-gong, the diviner.

[You heard there was no one?]

[Yes.]

[I don't know who you heard it from, but it's not entirely impossible.]

[It's not impossible?]

[Yes. I, too, didn't believe it at first. But it is real. Among the diviners who have received the title of 'God,' there are two who have subdued Spirit Beasts and made them their servant spirit.]

[Two?]

[Yes. Two of them. It's astonishing. Ah, I'm saying this just in case, but Asura. They are beings from outside the world. To begin with, one of them is a human and a malevolent... No. Anyway, Spirit Beasts have surpassed the realm that humans can handle. They are disasters themselves.]

Jo Ui-gong had said.

He said that among the Six Divine diviners, considered the pinnacle of diviners, two diviners had Spirit Beasts as their servant spirit.

Recalling this, he thought he still had a long way to go.

He couldn't even handle a Spirit Beast that had been sealed for a long time and weakened.

It was fortunate that the power of the seal still remained; otherwise, he would have lost his life here.

‘But what did that being mean by those words?’

He remembered the words spoken by the monstrous raccoon Spirit Beast when it came out of his body.

[What in the world is that thing inside you?]

What did it mean by saying there was something inside me?

Mok Gyeong-un was puzzled.

Come to think of it, most of the vengeful spirits that had tried to possess him also seemed to have a shocked reaction after discovering something.

What could be inside him that even a Spirit Beast would say such a thing?

It was puzzling.

At that moment,

-Mortal...

Mok Gyeong-un looked at Cheong-ryeong.

“Ah?”

Mok Gyeong-un frowned at her hazy appearance.

She had become more transparent than when she had grabbed his wrist and pulled him, and she was gradually becoming more so.

“Cheong-ryeong?”

-Rebirth... through transformation... This is quite interesting.

“Hmm?”

-Despite having learned martial arts... for only a short time... You... entered the initial-stage of Transcendent Realm... but reconstructed your body through rebirth...

“...”

-At this rate... You might really... reach Transformation Realm... within 2 years... as you boldly... declared.

“Cheong-ryeong... Your spiritual energy has greatly weakened.”

-Trying to save you... I ended up like this.

“...”

-I didn't do it... to hear words... of gratitude... So you don't need to pity me.

She was reciting as if making her last words while struggling to speak.

It was clearly visible to Mok Gyeong-un's eyes as well.

Her spiritual energy, which was like a blazing flame, was gradually diminishing like a dying candle.

To her, Mok Gyeong-un asked in an uncomprehending tone,

“I told you not to come in, so why did you?”

-...If you die... we all die anyway, so what do you expect me to do?

Cheong-ryeong answered as if hesitating for a moment.

At her appearance, Mok Gyeong-un stared intently at her face.

At this, Cheong-ryeong spoke in a burdened tone,

-Why are you... staring at me like that? Surely you're not... feeling sad that I'm being extinguished?

“Being... extinguished?”

“...Yes. There is no more hope for me.”

Cheong-ryeong was somewhat aware of it.

Her spiritual energy had already weakened to the point where she couldn't maintain her own spirit body.

She had a vast amount of spiritual energy to live as a vengeful spirit for 100 years, but having lost most of it, how could she remain?

-Mortal... With your personality... You wouldn't grieve over the death of a servant spirit... So just listen to one request.

“...”

-I don't desire anything else... Just the Heaven and Earth Society...

Before Cheong-ryeong could finish her words,

Mok Gyeong-un grabbed her hand.

And he said,

“Let's talk about that after you recover first.”

-What?

As soon as that question ended, a majestic energy surged in from Mok Gyeong-un's hand.

It was an energy quite different from her spiritual energy.

‘Demonic energy?’

That's right.

It was the demonic energy Mok Gyeong-un had seized from the raccoon Spirit Beast.

Mok Gyeong-un had absorbed enough demonic energy to reconstruct his body, refine it into evil energy in his danjeon, and still have some left over.

As the demonic energy surged in, her eyes trembled.

‘What is this?’

A strange thing occurred.

Unlike malevolent spirits that could swallow and devour even vengeful spirits, vengeful spirits couldn't accept or absorb the demonic energy of those higher entities close to them.

But the demonic energy was surging in through Mok Gyeong-un's palm.

And that demonic energy was filling her entire body.

‘Ahhh!’

Her spirit body, which had been becoming transparent, gradually became denser.

Then, it quickly returned to its usual appearance.

But it didn't end there.

-Mortal... Wait... You...

“Concentrate.”

The amount of demonic energy surging in exceeded the level of spiritual energy she originally possessed.

‘This fellow...’

At this, despite being a spirit body, she sat cross-legged.

And as if circulating energy like when she was alive, she focused on making the incoming energy her own.

-How can this be...

Watching this from outside the red line, Green Spirit Gyu Soha's eyes widened.

It was clearly visible to Gyu Soha's ghostly eyes.

Cheong-ryeong's spiritual energy was rapidly increasing, and it was trying to raise her level beyond her original limits.

And eventually, it truly materialized.

A chilling energy that rippled and spread around Cheong-ryeong.

Due to that, the bookshelves around the cavity shook violently.

As her level rose even higher, the spiritual energy flowing from her spirit body greatly influenced even the world with substance.

Cheong-ryeong opened her closed eyes.

A fierce bloody light that gave an even greater sense of pressure to the onlookers.

-Ah...

Even she herself let out an exclamation as if feeling that her level had risen higher than before.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un let go of her hand and said,

“It seems I’m not the only one with good luck.”

-...What did you do? It could have been dangerous.

“It turned out well. At least better than being extinguished, right?”

-You, really...

She couldn’t finish her words.

She had been prepared for extinction, but her level as a vengeful spirit had risen.

It couldn’t be more ironic.

To such Cheong-ryeong, Mok Gyeong-un said,

If my eyes aren’t mistaken, it seems your level has risen even higher. Should I call you Indigo Spirit now?”

Indigo Spirit.

The Basic Writings of the School of Yin and Yang states the following:

A vengeful spirit that has existed for more than three hundred years.

Its spiritual power reaches a level where it materializes beyond auditory and visual hallucinations, and it is a being close to a disaster, almost on par with high-ranking malevolent spirits such as demonic beasts.

To subdue it, at least a hundred diviners are required, but even that is uncertain.

‘Should this also be called fateful luck?’

Mok Gyeong-un was still connected to Cheong-ryeong through the servant spirit bond.

But the fact that her level had become strong enough to reach that of a Blue Spirit was no different from his power increasing by another level.

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong spoke,

“…Forget it. Just call me Cheong-ryeong.”

“Pardon?”

“If you keep changing it back and forth, it’ll be confusing, so just call me Cheong-ryeong.”

As she spoke bluntly and turned her head away for no reason, Mok Gyeong-un smirked and said,

“Could it be that you like the name Cheong-ryeong?”

“What nonsense are you spouting?”

Cheong-ryeong glanced at Mok Gyeong-un and snorted.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders as if to say, “If you say so.”

While they were doing so, someone’s voice was heard.

“Master…”

There, Green Spirit Gyu Soha, with both arms missing and half-transparent, was teary-eyed.

Seeing such Gyu Soha, Cheong-ryeong narrowed her eyes and sighed, saying,

“…Do you have any demonic energy left?”

“I’ll be waiting, so please make sure to come and get me.”

Elder Yang Mu-won, the keeper of the treasure vault, spoke to Mok Gyeong-un, who was about to pass through the formation at the entrance, as if earnestly pleading.

As evident from his changed tone, Gyu Soha had possessed his body.

They had to take this measure because Elder Yang Mu-won had witnessed something and couldn’t just leave it alone.

However, despite verbally pleading to come and get him, Gyu Soha’s expression was quite gleeful.

“She’s in high spirits. In high spirits indeed.”

“Well, that’s understandable.”

That’s because Gyu Soha, who had absorbed the remaining demonic energy Mok Gyeong-un possessed, had astonishingly risen from a Green Spirit to a Blue Spirit.

She was originally close to a Blue Spirit, but the high-purity demonic energy had properly acted as an uplifting force.

Anyway, after entrusting this place to Gyu Soha, Mok Gyeong-un passed through the formation at the cavity entrance and descended the cliff.

There, Senior Warrior Gwak Mun-gi was waiting with a bored expression, leaning against the cliff.

Then,

When someone tapped his back, he was startled and tried to take a defensive stance while keeping a distance, but...

“Oh? You?”

“Did you wait long?”

Mok Gyeong-un asked with a bright smile.

At his appearance, Gwak Mun-gi’s expression stiffened.

‘What in the world...’

Although Mok Gyeong-un had qualified as a provisional elder, the energy he sensed was at best only first-rate, so he had considered him a step below himself.

But what was happening?

‘...I can’t sense it.’

He could barely sense the energy of Mok Gyeong-un in front of his eyes.

Both his presence and energy were faint.

He was right in front of him, so what was going on?

Could it be that he had gained some enlightenment in the treasure vault?

Chapter 109 – Fateful Luck (2)

Gyu Soha, who had possessed Elder Yang Mu-won, the keeper of the treasure vault, was diligently carrying rock fragments and cleaning.

She had to erase the traces of what had happened here as much as possible.

Throughout doing these chores, a smile didn't leave Gyu Soha's lips.

That was because not only had her level risen, but she had also gained a body, albeit temporarily, and even had free time.

Moreover, it was in this treasure vault overflowing with vast amounts of secret manuals.

“Hehehe.”

Although she had become a vengeful spirit, Gyu Soha was originally a martial artist at her core.

Naturally, before her death, she had aimed for a high realm, so this place filled with secret manuals was no different from paradise.

As Gyu Soha was organizing the small cavity where the red line was drawn, she looked at a bookshelf with only a lone wooden box placed on it, without anything else.

‘Hmm. What could it be?’

The wooden box was none other than the one containing the scroll that sealed the Spirit Beast.

That wooden box said to be made from sacred spirit wood.

Strangely, the box that had shattered and turned to ashes had returned to its original state.

‘Is it truly the power of Immortals?’

Mok Gyeong-un, Cheong-ryeong, and Gyu Soha had all witnessed the sight of something already broken and decayed returning to its original state.

It had occurred at the moment when Mok Gyeong-un was pondering what to do with the scroll in his hand.

As if time was being rewound, the surrounding dust gathered and formed the shape of the wooden box, returning it to its original state.

‘It’s truly fascinating.’

Even Gyu Soha, a vengeful spirit, found it peculiar.

Should it be said to have transcended the realm of sorcery?

Thanks to that, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been contemplating what to do with it, ordered Gyu Soha to stay here for a while and guard the wooden box.

[Hmm. I think I’ll have to leave it here for a while.]

[You won't eat it?]

[No. It might cause trouble if I eat it.]

[...]

[I'm joking.]

I know it's not a joke.

The master likes to eat these things.

[Anyway, it seems best not to touch this for now. If anyone comes in here and tries to touch or look for the wooden box, please let me know.]

[Yes! Master!]

Mok Gyeong-un was interested in the one who had left the sealed wooden box here.

Why had they left such a dangerous thing in this place?

Perhaps by guarding this place as instructed by the master, she would find out.

Whether that person with three eyes mentioned by the raccoon Spirit Beast would appear or not.

It was late at night in the inner city of the Heaven and Earth Society.

In the garden of a large estate located in the southwest of the city, there was a middle-aged man with a sharp impression and a small stature, standing with his hands behind his back, gazing at the moon.

As he was immersed in appreciating the moon, someone's cough was heard behind him.

“Ahem.”

At this, the middle-aged man with a small stature turned around as if he knew.

And he put his hands together and bowed in greeting.

“Ah. I am honored that Thunderbolt Fist King, one of the Five Kings, has come to this humble place.”

The middle-aged man with a mustache, who appeared to be in his mid-50s, had no sleeves visible on his arms, and he wore strange iron rings on his muscular arms.

He was Won Byeong-hak, the Thunderbolt Fist King, one of the Five Kings, the highest-ranking executives of the Heaven and Earth Society.

Won Byeong-hak also bowed with his hands together and spoke to the middle-aged man.

“It's been a while. Shadow Clan Master.”

The identity of the middle-aged man with a small stature was the Shadow Clan Master[1].

Although his position was one level below the Five Kings, he was one of the Three Chief Masters, a high-ranking executive of the Heaven and Earth Society.

Unlike other Chief Masters, his name was attached due to confidentiality, so everyone called him by his title, Shadow Clan Master.

“Ohoho. It’s been a while since the grand meeting two months ago.”

At the Shadow Clan Master’s ingratiating voice, the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak subtly frowned as if he wasn’t used to it.

That was because this man’s way of speaking was never easy to adapt to, no matter how many times he heard it.

It reminded him of the eunuchs in the imperial palace, and because he mixed in a tone that women would use, it sometimes even gave an unpleasant feeling.

‘He’s truly a peculiar one.’

Even the face he was seeing now wasn’t real.

It was a human skin mask.

A human skin mask was a thin mask similar to skin, made using human or pig skin to create a form that was difficult to distinguish from a real human face.

The Shadow Clan Master was the only one in the inner city who was allowed to wear this human skin mask.

‘Even if he’s in charge of intelligence and secrets...’

Was there a reason for him not to show his real face even to them?

The Shadow Clan Master changed his human skin mask about every three months, so the only one who knew his real face was said to be the Society Leader.

‘Huu.’

Anyway, what was important wasn’t his real face.

The Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak said,

“Shadow Clan Master. I must first apologize for rudely visiting at such a late hour.”

“Not at all. I heard you came and went a couple of times while I was away, so how could it be you who should apologize? I should be the one feeling sorry.”

“Thank you for saying that.”

“Ohoho. Then, may I ask the reason for your visit at such a late hour?”

“Of course. In fact, since it might be a request more discourteous than visiting late at night, I brought this as a bribe and gift to the Shadow Clan Master.”

The Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak held up a white wine bottle in one hand.

At this, the Shadow Clan Master asked in puzzlement,

“What is that?”

“This is Firewood Wine that has been aged for 25 years.”

“Oh-ho. Is that true?”

Firewood Wine.

It was one of the famous Shaoxing wines, along with Nu'erhong Wine, and was called a famous liquor.

It was a wine that became deeper in fragrance and stronger in flavor depending on the aging period, and it was also a wine used to celebrate special occasions.

The Shadow Clan Master accepted the wine bottle as if he was grateful and said,

“I don’t know if I should receive this.”

“Since it’s a bribe I brought, of course you can accept it. I drank Nu’erhong Wine at my daughter’s engagement ceremony, and I brought this Firewood Wine after much contemplation.”

Firewood Wine was a wine that was brewed and buried when a son was born, and then taken out and enjoyed with relatives and friends on the day the son grew up and took the civil service examination, passed as a top scholar, or got married.

However, the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak had no son.

He had buried it along with Nu’erhong Wine 25 years ago before his daughter was born, so he had been wondering when to take it out and drink it. Since the Shadow Clan Master liked aged wine, he brought it here.

“For you to bring such a precious item that you cherished, it would be difficult to refuse the request even before hearing it.”

“It may be discourteous, but perhaps it won’t be a big request for the Shadow Clan Master.”

“Not a big request?”

The Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak bowed with his hands together and politely said,

“I know it’s rude, but if there is a trainee from an Esoteric Realm Gate at tomorrow’s final ceremony of Corpse Blood Valley, I hope you can yield to me.”

“Esoteric Realm Gate?”

“That’s right. It’s a child I’ve had my eye on for a long time, so I came late at night, risking rudeness.”

The Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak’s request was just that.

At the final ceremony tomorrow, the executives participating will have the right to select the trainees who passed the final gate as their subordinates.

Here, Won Byeong-hak had already set his sights on a trainee from an Esoteric Realm Gate.

At this, the Shadow Clan Master said,

“We don’t know the results yet, but judging from your words, that trainee seems to be a quite outstanding talent.”

“A child with potential.”

‘Someone with the qualifications to complete the True Source Thunderbolt Fist.’

He already had one disciple.

However, he failed to complete the final stance of the True Source Thunderbolt Fist and ended up with a crippled right arm.

That’s how difficult it was to even learn his unique skill.

‘So you’ve been going around asking other executives who will be at Corpse Blood Valley tomorrow.’

In fact, the Shadow Clan Master had predicted his purpose to some extent.

Due to the nature of the Shadow Sect, which dealt with intelligence and secret agents, he was always keeping an eye on the city, so he had guessed that he was going around asking for something related to tomorrow’s final ceremony.

And that guess was correct.

‘I see. Alright.’

However, he didn’t reveal this.

If he found out that his movements were being tracked, it would only upset the Thunderbolt Fist King’s mood.

“I know it’s a rude request, but...”

“Not at all. After receiving such a precious wine, how could I refuse the Thunderbolt Fist King’s request?”

“Oh, so you can do that for me?”

“Of course. Ohoho.”

At the Shadow Clan Master’s ingratiating laughter, the Thunderbolt Fist King lightly bowed his head to express his gratitude.

That's how much he coveted that talent.

To him, the Shadow Clan Master said,

“By the way, if it's not too rude, may I also make a request to the Thunderbolt Fist King on this occasion?”

“A request?”

“Actually, since there is only one right to choose, it's fine, but I'm telling you in advance in case you change your mind.”

“What do you mean?”

“Yes. I also have one talent I covet. So I'm participating in tomorrow's final ceremony to take them as my disciple.”

At those words, the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak nodded his head.

He had expected that to be the case.

The Shadow Clan Master had never participated despite having several opportunities.

The fact that he was participating this time meant...

“Could it be that child? From the Demon Fire Hall...”

“Yes. That's right.”

“Ah. As expected.”

His prediction was correct.

The Demon Fire Hall was once called the Four Great Assassin Groups.

The rumor that a girl with tremendous talent from there was participating in the gates of Corpse Blood Valley had spread even among the executives.

“You don’t need to worry about that. I only want a boy with a physique capable of properly utilizing the Thunderbolt Fist.”

“Ohoho. Thank you for saying that. It’s a relief and I’m grateful.”

The Shadow Clan Master clapped his hands like a woman and spoke.

His voice was so androgynous that the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak inwardly wondered if he might be a woman.

Although her talent was outstanding, the fact that he was choosing a girl made it even more so.

But he was contemplating whether he should tell him or not.

That fearsome woman was also coveting the girl from the Demon Fire Hall.

Mo Ha-rang of the Demon Fire Hall slightly furrowed her brows.

Suddenly, her right ear felt itchy, and if this wasn't Mok Gyeong-un's room, she would have wanted to stick her finger in and scratch it vigorously.

“Your expression looks like your ear is itchy.”

“...”

She inwardly flinched at Mok Gyeong-un's words but tried her best not to show it.

Anyhow, he was remarkably good at reading others' thoughts.

But why did he suddenly call for her?

And at such a late hour.

Could it be because of the final gate tomorrow?

‘Unless there's a special variable, there's no way someone monstrous like you would fail to pass the final gate.’

In the end, she asked out of curiosity,

“...But why did you call for me?”

After agreeing to become a faithful 'dog' or 'slave,' she treated Mok Gyeong-un with the utmost respect.

To her question, Mok Gyeong-un replied,

“Ah. It's nothing much. Can you be my light sparring partner?”

“Sparring partner for what...”

She unknowingly swallowed her saliva.

It was slightly suspicious that he had called her alone late at night when he usually didn't.

Could it be that calling her in the middle of the night...

“Can you spar with me?”

“Sp... Spar?”

For a moment, she let out a soft sigh.

Should it be said that she was slightly relieved?

Indeed, if this devilish man had seen her as a woman, he wouldn't have treated her like a faithful dog or slave after poisoning her.

But what's with this sudden talk of sparring?

He had already sparred with her once, so sparring would be largely meaningless...

‘Or not?’

Thinking about it, it might not be so meaningless.

Come to think of it, the final gate might be a pure test of martial arts, unlike the previous ones that tested survival skills and potential.

In that case, using sparring to sharpen one's senses beforehand could also be a method.

And,

‘…I did want to get my revenge.’

Although she had pledged loyalty due to the poison, she had vowed to break free from it someday.

And with her own righteous skills at that.

Mo Ha-rang's eyes changed as she looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

Her eyes were already moving back and forth, searching for Mok Gyeong-un's weaknesses.

‘It's different from back then.’

Back then, she couldn't accurately gauge Mok Gyeong-un's level.

But now, after observing him closely several times, she had an idea of his martial arts level and what he was skilled at.

She was already picturing it in her mind.

To fight against Mok Gyeong-un, she had to avoid directly clashing with him as much as possible.

Usually, when his true energy and trajectory differed, even a slight collision would cause the martial power to scatter.

It was the same for her master.

‘If I don’t give him an opening.’

A somewhat lethal picture could be drawn.

Back then, she had approached the fight with the intention of not killing Mok Gyeong-un, so she didn’t use killing techniques or secret skills.

But if she approached it with the real intention to kill, it might be possible.

“Your eyes are brimming with enthusiasm.”

“Ah...”

“Well, if that’s the case, you can attack me with the intention of really killing me.”

“What?”

“If you subdue me, I’ll give you the antidote.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Mo Ha-rang’s expression changed significantly.

Just a moment ago, it was merely a hypothetical situation she had envisioned, but if there was a reward at stake, the story would be different.

If the Linked Kill and the secret sword technique of the Killing King, the Flash Shadow Flying Dagger Technique, were combined, she was confident she could kill anyone at her level.

“…Do you really mean that?”

“Yes. I promise. If you can subdue me right now...”

Before Mok Gyeong-un’s words could even finish,

Small daggers in the shape of hidden weapons popped out from the sleeves of her right and left arms.

It was a preemptive strike.

She intended to make the first move before Mok Gyeong-un could react and decide the match.

The origin of her martial arts was assassination.

Therefore, the key was to disrupt the opponent’s timing rather than openly fighting against them.

However,

Thud!

‘!?’

Mo Ha-rang’s expression instantly stiffened.

‘What… is this…’

What was going on?

She was certain that she had moved first as soon as he finished speaking.

But somehow, Mok Gyeong-un's blade finger was already touching her neck.

‘…I didn't see it.’

Back then, she had thought that she was far superior at least in terms of speed.

But now, she couldn't see Mok Gyeong-un's movements at all.

She couldn't even perceive it, yet the tip of his finger was touching her.

“You're slow.”

Drip!

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, a drop of cold sweat trickled down Mo Ha-rang's fair cheek.

It felt like her neck would be pierced with the slightest movement.

Chapter 110 – The Final Gate (1)

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“You're slow.”

Drip!

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, a drop of cold sweat trickled down Mo Ha-rang's fair cheek.

It felt like her neck would be pierced with the slightest movement.

Inwardly, she was perplexed.

Although she acknowledged that Mok Gyeong-un possessed a strange power that differed from others, she hadn't considered it as superiority in martial arts.

But what was this?

‘…He has changed.’

What on earth had happened overnight?

Even if she excluded judging Mok Gyeong-un’s martial arts through energy perception since it was impossible in the first place, what was going on?

The sharp energy transmitted from the tip of his blade finger was almost akin to the feeling one would get from masters who had reached the realm of Ascension.

‘This feeling, it’s similar to Father’s, no…’

It was similar to what she had felt from the Clan Leader of the Demon Fire Hall.

The only supreme master of the Transcendent Realm she could contend with, the Clan Leader of the Demon Fire Hall.

That feeling emanated from Mok Gyeong-un.

‘No. It can’t be.’

Mo Ha-rang instantly denied it.

No matter how talented one was, reaching the initial-stage Transcendent Realm at a mere seventeen or eighteen years old wasn't a simple feat.

Even if he had gained enlightenment, how could he become so strong overnight...

'Ah!'

Could it be because he ate that?

The Heavenly Earth Pill.

It was an elixir made from the secret recipe of the Heaven and Earth Society, and just eating one pill could grant 10 to 15 years' worth of internal energy.

The gap between 10 and 15 years was absolutely insurmountable.

'...But can such a difference occur just from this?'

Mo Ha-rang continued to be confused.

Seeing her like that, Mok Gyeong-un was inwardly satisfied.

Due to the overlapping fateful encounters in the treasure vault, he had entered the Transcendent Realm, but he still couldn't accurately judge his level.

So he had initiated a sparring match with Mo Ha-rang, whom he had previously fought, to confirm how much he had improved.

‘Not bad.’

The gap had definitely widened, as Cheong-ryeong had said.

The saying that Transcendent Realm supreme masters and Peak Realm masters were incomparable realms now made sense to him.

Her every movement was too clearly visible, unlike last time.

“You’re still far, mortal.”

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong’s voice rang in his ears.

“You may have shed your novice shell, but even within the Transcendent Realm, the difference between the early, proficient, and pinnacle stages is distinct. You still have a long way to go.”

‘…It should be that way.’

Of course, he had no intention of letting his guard down.

The target of his revenge might be a peerless master at the peak of the supreme transcendent realm, close to Enlightenment, so his current level was not yet satisfactory.

However, apart from that, a different emotion arose.

Mok Gyeong-un had considered martial arts and sword techniques as mere tools for revenge.

But upon reaching a higher realm, he developed an interest in this thing called martial arts.

How much stronger could he become through martial arts?

‘More... I want to taste more.’

It was a pure emotion he hadn’t felt in a long time.

While he was doing so, Mo Ha-rang spoke to Mok Gyeong-un,

“…Did you perhaps consume the Heavenly Earth Pill?”

“Ah. That.”

Mok Gyeong-un took out a small pouch from his bosom and showed it to her.

The Heavenly Earth Pill was inside it.

Cheong-ryeong disliked calling it the Heavenly Earth Pill.

So in front of her, he called it the Moonlight Pill.

“I haven’t eaten it yet.”

“Whattt?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Mo Ha-rang frowned as if surprised and stared at the pouch.

She had naturally assumed that Mok Gyeong-un had consumed it.

But he had become so strong in a short period without even eating it?

‘…Is he a monster?’

She had thought she would never be inferior in martial arts, but for some reason, she felt conflicted.

Could she really escape from the clutches of this devil?

Around noon the next day.

In the plaza behind the dormitory of Corpse Blood Valley, several chairs were placed around the stage, and guests from the inner city were arriving one by one.

Interest flickered in the eyes of Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom, who was standing on the stage.

It was because an unexpected person had appeared.

‘The Shadow Clan Master?’

A middle-aged man with a small stature and a sharp impression.

He had been puzzled by the unfamiliar face, but upon hearing his identity, he couldn’t help but be surprised.

That was because the Shadow Clan Master had never participated in the final ceremony before.

Considering his position and his extremely secretive nature, as well as the peculiar rumors surrounding him, Lee Ji-yeom had been curious about him.

However,

‘…He exceeds expectations.’

He had tried to gauge his level to some extent through energy perception, but it was difficult to accurately discern.

That meant the Shadow Clan Master’s martial arts were either almost on par with his own or perhaps even higher.

If this was true, it was quite unexpected.

Lee Ji-yeom had gained enlightenment from the secret technique Mok Gyeong-un had given him in the past few days, further advancing his martial arts.

But if even he couldn’t gauge the Shadow Clan Master’s level...

Ting!

At that moment, a sound that pierced the eardrums.

At this sound, the gazes of those who had arrived earlier turned towards the entrance of the plaza.

There, a beautiful woman was lying in a seductive pose on a four-person sedan chair.

At first glance, she appeared to be in her late twenties or early thirties, but the aura she exuded was extraordinary.

Ting!

As the string sound rang out once more, an executive sitting on a chair shook his head.

That executive was none other than the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, one of the Five Kings.

‘It’s starting again.’

She was a truly unpredictable woman.

If it weren’t for that self-centered personality of hers, she would have risen to the position of the Fourth Clan Leader, but due to her uncontrollable nature, she couldn’t enter the inner city despite receiving the title of Valley Master.

In terms of skill alone, she could have become a Clan Leader or even higher.

Ting!

As the string sound rang out once more, a few of the red-belted warriors nearby frowned.

It was due to the true energy infused into the sound each time she plucked the string.

She, who could infuse internal energy into sound, was the Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang.

Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom clicked his tongue inwardly.

‘Even that woman has come.’

Unlike the Shadow Clan Master, Lee Ji-yeom knew her well.

In the orthodox sects and even in the martial arts world, there were those with unique martial arts lineages, and one of them was sound techniques.

In reality, there were only a handful of people in the Central Plains martial arts world who could properly utilize sound techniques, and the Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang was one of them.

Ting!

The Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang, lying in a seductive pose on the four-person sedan chair, plucked the string of the lute with her finger.

Then, the ripple that had spread through the sound earlier grew larger.

As a result,

“Ugh.”

Some of the red-belted warriors with relatively weaker internal energy couldn’t endure it and covered their ears.

‘She hasn’t changed.’

It was truly a bad habit.

She would often unexpectedly infuse sound techniques into the lute strings, making those around her uncomfortable.

Even the good-natured Vice Clan Leader had strongly warned her about it.

Of course, she must have ignored that warning, as she continued this bad habit.

‘Huu.’

Anyway, feeling that he couldn't just leave her be, Lee Ji-yeom cupped his hands and spoke loudly,

“It's been a while, Summoning Sound Valley Master.”

“Valley Master~ Valley Master~ Valley Master~”

His voice echoed throughout the entire plaza like a reverberation.

The majestic true energy contained in his voice caused interest to flicker in the eyes of the Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang, who had been lying seductively.

No, the executives who had arrived earlier were the same.

With just this greeting, they could infer that Lee Ji-yeom's internal energy had deepened compared to before.

Of course, it was the same for Hang Yeo-ryang.

She spoke as if surprised,

“Corpse Blood Valley Leader's internal energy has deepened since the last time we met.”

“How could that be?”

“Your modesty is excessive.”

“It’s not modesty. Rather, upon hearing the beautiful sound of the lute strings, I feel that the Summoning Sound Valley Master’s cultivation is deepening day by day. The power infused in the sound makes even my insides churn.”

“Hohoho. Is that so?”

Although he spoke indirectly, his true intention was simple.

The people around could suffer internal injuries, so stop infusing power into the strings and cease it.

That was the meaning.

She also instantly understood this, but...

Ting!

“Then, as an apology to the Valley Master, I should play a proper tune for you.”

‘This woman, really...’

It was truly a troublesome situation.

As per custom, he had sent an invitation letter asking for her attendance, but naturally, he had assumed she wouldn’t come given her personality.

But she suddenly appeared and acted as she pleased according to her unique temperament, making it extremely difficult for him.

At this, Lee Ji-yeom looked at the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, one of the Five Kings, seeking his help.

He was asking for a higher-ranking executive to intervene.

However,

‘!?’

He saw Won Byeong-hak sitting still, turning his head away and feigning ignorance.

No matter how self-centered she was, if he, a superior executive and one of the Five Kings, stepped forward and warned her, it would be difficult for her to ignore it.

But he couldn't understand why he was acting like this.

‘I'm sorry, Corpse Blood Valley Leader.’

In fact, Won Byeong-hak had met her beforehand and received a confirmation that she wouldn't touch the child from an Esoteric Realm Gate.

They had things to give and take, so he couldn't bring himself to intervene.

If she, with her self-centered nature, became displeased and targeted the child from the Esoteric Realm Gate that he had his eyes on, it would become troublesome.

Seeing that the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak wasn't intervening, Lee Ji-yeom reluctantly looked at the Shadow Clan Master, one of the Three Chief Masters, a level above him.

But the Shadow Clan Master merely covered his mouth with his hand and laughed like a woman.

He didn't seem to have any intention of intervening.

‘No other choice.’

Lee Ji-yeom clicked his tongue inwardly.

Since it had come to this, even if he became uncomfortable with her, it seemed he had no choice but to take a strong stance.

Towards her, who was plucking the lute strings...

“Summoning Sound Valley Master. That’s enough.”

At that moment, someone’s voice was heard.

At this, she, who had been plucking the lute, frowned and turned her head.

The one standing there was none other than...

‘The Bright Blade King?’

The Bright Blade King Son Yun, one of the Five Kings, was standing there with a large sword on his shoulder, glaring at her with a grim expression.

His imposing presence, with a larger build than the average person and covered in scars, was unmatched among anyone present.

“The Bright Blade King... has also come.”

The Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang stopped plucking the lute and bowed with her hands together.

Lee Ji-yeom inwardly welcomed Son Yun's appearance.

Son Yun was renowned for his resolve even among the Five Kings.

He disliked crossing the line and had a clear sense of likes and dislikes. He had clashed with the self-centered Hang Yeo-ryang several times before.

There were even rumors that she had nearly lost her head to the Bright Blade King Son Yun's sword.

In a way, he could be considered her natural enemy.

“Did I come to a place I shouldn't have?”

“No, how could that be?”

“Then, do it in moderation and sit in your seat. Isn't the Corpse Blood Valley Leader unable to proceed with the final gate because of you?”

At his sharp tone, Hang Yeo-ryang's eyes sharpened.

It seemed the rumors about their poor relationship weren't false.

The atmosphere had become quite cold.

It was almost a touch-and-go situation.

At that moment, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom stepped between the two and spoke with his hands cupped,

“It’s an honor to have the Bright Blade King also observe.”

The heavy atmosphere was temporarily alleviated.

The Bright Blade King Son Yun, who had been intensely staring at Hang Yeo-ryang, turned his head, relaxed his expression, and said,

“Corpse Blood Valley Leader. It’s been a while.”

“It has been a while. I didn’t expect the Bright Blade King to come to the final ceremony.”

The reason Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom said this was simple.

The Bright Blade King Son Yun already had outstanding disciples.

Especially in the case of his chief disciple Woo Ho-rang, his talent was so exceptional that he was considered one of the top five promising successors within the Heaven and Earth Society.

But for him to participate in the final ceremony was puzzling.

“There’s a reason for that.”

“A reason?”

At Lee Ji-yeom’s words, the Bright Blade King Son Yun turned his head and looked at someone among the six boys standing in the plaza.

That someone was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

[What? He lost to whom?]

Until just the day before, he had no intention of coming here.

However, upon hearing that his youngest disciple Yeop Wi-seon had not only caused a major incident but had also been defeated by someone, his mind changed.

‘Haa...’

Not long ago, Mok Gyeong-un was just a Peak Realm master.

Yet he had defeated Yeop Wi-seon, who had reached the Transcendent Realm and had received martial arts instruction from him?

He couldn't help but come here.