

Mayhem 111

Chapter 111 – The Final Gate (2)

The Bright Blade King Son Yun remembered Mok Gyeong-un as clearly being at a mere third-rate level.

Of course, that didn't mean he considered him insignificant.

Mok Gyeong-un had learned the sword techniques of the Moon Vein, which had been lost a hundred years ago, and also possessed innate talent in sorcery.

Therefore, although Mok Gyeong-un was from the orthodox Yeon Mok Sword Manor, Son Yun had brought him to the Heaven and Earth Society.

It was not only important to draw out the Moon Sword Technique within his mind, but Mok Gyeong-un, who had been chosen by the secret manuals, could possibly become a talent of the Heaven and Earth Society.

However, he thought all of that had been ruined due to the whim of the Heaven and Earth Society's Leader.

[Send him to Corpse Blood Valley?]

[It's the Society Leader's order. Do you intend to disobey?]

[But...]

[Tsk-tsk.]

He couldn't understand the reason.

Why did the Society Leader order the two hostages from Yeon Mok Sword Manor to be sent to Corpse Blood Valley?

He didn't even meet them face-to-face.

The Bright Blade King Son Yun abandoned any lingering attachment to Mok Gyeong-un because of that.

Even if he had learned the Moon Sword Technique, the place he was being sent to was Corpse Blood Valley.

A place where more than 80% of those who enter come out as corpses.

How could a mere third-rate novice survive in that place teeming with trainees possessing first-rate qualifications or higher?

'It's over.'

Would the Moon Sword Technique be completely lost like this?

While he was feeling disappointed, yesterday, he couldn't hide his shock due to his disciple's honest report.

[What? Say it again.]

[Uh, it's not that I completely lost. I let my guard down, and...]

[No! The fellow's name.]

[M...Mok Gyeong-un.]

‘!!!!!!’

Mok Gyeong-un.

That boy was alive?

A mere third-rate fellow was sent to Corpse Blood Valley?

If it had been the youngest of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor hostages, Mok Yu-cheon, he would have understood.

He had acknowledged Mok Yu-cheon’s innate qualifications to that extent.

But Mok Gyeong-un had survived until now...

[Haa... How could this happen...]

[Master?]

[Shut your mouth.]

The day before yesterday, he had received a message requesting his attendance at the final gate and final ceremony.

But the fellow had not only reached the final gate but had also obtained the top disciple placard by winning against Yeop Wi-seon in the hidden treasure vault?

Even for him, who didn’t bat an eye at most things, he couldn’t help but be surprised by this.

At this, the Bright Blade King Son Yun fell into deep contemplation last night.

What on earth had happened in Corpse Blood Valley?

How could Mok Gyeong-un, who was merely a third-rate, become so strong in such a short time that he could defeat his youngest disciple Yeop Wi-seon, who had reached the Transcendent Realm?

Various questions overlapped.

However, without seeing it directly, there was no way to resolve these questions satisfactorily.

Therefore, Son Yun made a decision.

‘Let’s confirm it myself.’

He already had five outstanding disciples known as the Five Tigers, the top talents within the Heaven and Earth Society, including his chief disciple Woo Ho-rang.

Thus, he had no desire to accept any more disciples.

However, he decided to step forward to verify Mok Gyeong-un’s unusually rapid progress.

‘If...’

If Mok Gyeong-un demonstrates extraordinary qualifications surpassing his expectations upon seeing him, he had thoughts of accepting him as a disciple even if it meant being scolded by other executives.

He was a successor who had learned the Moon Sword Technique and survived despite being sent to Corpse Blood Valley by the Society Leader’s whim.

He couldn’t miss this opportunity.

Having finished his momentary recollection, the Bright Blade King Son Yun looked at Mok Gyeong-un, one of the six standing side by side in the plaza.

‘!?’

Son Yun slightly furrowed his brows.

It was difficult to give a definite answer due to the distance, but based on his energy perception, Mok Gyeong-un’s level seemed to have reached the end of the first-rate.

‘What is this?’

Of course, even this could be considered remarkable.

In a short time, he had progressed from the third-rate to the end of the first-rate.

However, at that level, it would be difficult to defeat his youngest disciple Yeop Wi-seon.

‘The gap between the Peak Realm and Transcendent Realm is distinct.’

Even if there were ten Peak Realm masters, it would be difficult to defeat a Transcendent Realm supreme master.

But by what means did Mok Gyeong-un defeat Yeop Wi-seon?

It was incomprehensible.

‘What technique did he use?’

As he was intently staring at Mok Gyeong-un, his eyes flickered with interest.

It was because he had discovered not only Mok Gyeong-un but also Mok Yu-cheon.

‘That child also survived?’

It was truly surprising.

As a result, both of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor’s hostage children had survived.

Of course, he had thought that Mok Yu-cheon, who possessed innate martial talent unfitting for his age, might survive if he was lucky.

But to think he had really survived...

And even entered the top six while overcoming the numerous talents belonging to the Heaven and Earth Society.

‘Yeon Mok Sword Manor... It wasn’t a place to be underestimated.’

It was really unexpected.

On the other hand, seeing the changed gaze in Mok Yu-cheon’s eyes, he was pleased.

When he saw Mok Gyeong-un, he was surprised by the advancement in his martial arts, but his expression and gaze were no different from before. In contrast, Mok Yu-cheon seemed to have become quite sturdy, and a murderous intent was even visible.

It was as if he had shed the shell of a gentle orthodox sect person after surviving Corpse Blood Valley.

'Coming here was the right choice.'

It had become interesting.

One fellow surprised him with his tremendous progress, and the other fellow surprised him with his transformation from back then.

To think the fellows from an orthodox sect, not those from the Heaven and Earth Society, would capture his interest...

It was truly a sight to behold after living a long life.

'It's regrettable.'

Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue as he looked towards the front of the stage.

That woman called the Summoning Sound Valley Master had appeared, and it seemed like something interesting was about to unfold, but it was thwarted midway.

By the appearance of the Bright Blade King Son Yun.

-Tsk-tsk.

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue at Mok Gyeong-un.

-There's no opponent as troublesome as a master of sound techniques. Unlike other martial arts, sound techniques take a completely different path, so there are no allies or enemies.

What did that mean?

While he was puzzled, she spoke as if reading Mok Gyeong-un's thoughts.

-It means it's impossible to target a specific person with sound techniques.

'A specific person? Ah...'

Indeed, the concept of sound techniques itself was to infuse true energy into sound and create shock waves.

However, sound isn't something that only certain people can hear or not hear.

Unless one is deaf, they have no choice but to hear it in some way.

He seemed to understand why Cheong-ryeong said those words.

'If that woman unleashes her sound techniques with determination, it will damage the entire surroundings.'

In that case, there would be an incident even before the final gate could be held.

However, this made Mok Gyeong-un curious.

Why would someone learn a martial art that indiscriminately harms both allies and enemies with such a risk?

'If sound techniques are the only focus, it's inefficient.'

It might be effective against a large number of opponents, but if there are many people around, the risk is too great.

But he didn't think that was all there was to it.

Even he, who had only been exposed to martial arts for a short time, could think of these shortcomings, so there was no way a specialist in sound techniques would be unaware of them.

Anyway, the interesting spectacle had disappeared, and an unexpected person had appeared.

The Bright Blade King Son Yun.

The very person responsible for bringing him to the Heaven and Earth Society.

He could see Son Yun staring intently at him.

Judging from his gaze, which didn't particularly show emotions of anger or joy, it seemed closer to trying to confirm something.

'Could it be that he came to see me?'

If that was the case, it was quite unexpected... Ah!

Mok Gyeong-un suddenly recalled the incident in the Corpse Blood Valley treasure vault.

Yeop Wi-seon, the disciple of the Bright Blade King Son Yun.

'It's that fellow.'

He only found out his identity after fighting him.

It seemed that Yeop Wi-seon had reported to his master about Mok Gyeong-un.

Otherwise, there was no way he would appear and stare at him out of nowhere.

The puzzling point here was,

‘Is he not angry?’

If he had come out of anger after his disciple was harmed, his gaze should have shown rage or something similar, but it didn’t.

In that case, it seemed there was no need for great concern.

Rather,

‘Is it not time yet?’

Mok Gyeong-un was waiting for someone.

The one he was waiting for was none other than Annihilating Poison King Baek Sa-ha, one of the Five Kings.

According to Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom, Annihilating Poison King Baek Sa-ha participated in the final ceremony almost every time, so there would be an opportunity.

But there was no sign of him appearing yet.

‘Hmm.’

What if a variable arises? That would be quite troublesome.

The most ideal situation right now was to pass the final gate as the top disciple and gain the right to choose.

The top disciple of the final gate is granted the right to choose an executive at the final ceremony.

Of course, whether they would be accepted as a disciple or subordinate depended on the executive's choice, but at least it would provide an opportunity to be close to them.

However, for some reason, he had a bad feeling.

'If a situation arises where he doesn't come...'

Mok Gyeong-un's gaze turned towards the executives sitting on chairs next to the stage.

According to Lee Ji-yeom, the middle-aged man wearing iron rings would be the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, the one next to him would be the Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang, and the one next to her...

'Was he called the Shadow Clan Master?'

It was quite unexpected.

According to Lee Ji-yeom's words, the Shadow Clan Master and the Summoning Sound Valley Master had rarely attended the final ceremony, and given their dispositions, the probability of them not coming this time was high.

But the ones who were said to be unlikely to attend had come to the final ceremony.

Among the expected individuals, the only one who matched was the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak.

‘Hmm.’

Mok Gyeong-un stroked his chin.

The final gate was about to begin soon, but at this rate, there seemed to be no way to become the disciple of Annihilating Poison King Baek Sa-ha.

‘Should I go with the alternative?’

Mok Gyeong-un had the benefit of obtaining three top disciple placards.

[Apart from the final gate, you can request teachings from one of the twelve elders, including the Five Kings, Three Chief Masters, and Four Valley Masters, who can be considered the top masters of this sect.]

Originally, he had intended to use this benefit to learn from one of the Five Kings who had received the title of Eight Stars, known as the top masters in the Central Plains, as suggested by Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom.

Cheong-ryeong had also agreed with this.

[An opportunity to receive teachings from a Transformation Realm true grandmaster won’t come easily.]

Mok Gyeong-un also thought there was truth to those words.

Cheong-ryeong always told Mok Gyeong-un.

There was no need to be fixated on one thing, and one should have a broad scope of thinking.

Martial arts could also provide an opportunity to broaden one's thinking by listening to the views of various masters.

'But I might not be able to do that.'

If Annihilating Poison King Baek Sa-ha doesn't show up at the final ceremony, he would have to use this benefit.

Only then could he inquire about the Ghost Blade from him.

About two hours passed.

The only ones who appeared before the start of the final gate were Bo Hyuk-so, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, which was ranked fifth among the hundred martial clans of the Heaven and Earth Society, and Dae So-man, the Elder of the Scarlet Blood Clan, which was ranked seventh.

Among the hundred clans, the elders of the clans ranked within the top ten were given the title of Grand Elder.

Their treatment could be considered equivalent to that of a quasi-executive.

'No choice.'

Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue as if he was disappointed.

In the end, he had to choose among the Bright Blade King Son Yun, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, Shadow Clan Master, Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang, Flame Demon Clan's Grand Elder Bo Hyuk-so, and Scarlet Blood Clan's Elder Dae So-man.

Of course, this was under the assumption that he would pass the final gate as the top disciple.

Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom stepped onto the stage and opened his mouth.

"Now that all the observers have gathered, we will commence the final gate."

Lee Ji-yeom lightly flicked his finger.

Then, warriors in red belts brought a large wooden board and placed it right next to the stage.

It had several lines drawn horizontally and vertically, with blanks left in various places.

Seeing this, the trainees' eyes narrowed.

'A tournament bracket?'

It seemed to be a tournament bracket.

If names were filled in the blank spaces, it would form a perfect tournament bracket.

In other words,

"To clarify, this is a tournament bracket for sparring."

'Ah...'

The final gate was revealed.

It was none other than sparring.

Unlike the previous ones, it was the most primitive method of testing.

“The trainees have tested their own limits through various gates until now, and as a result, they stand here. And the final gate is now an opportunity to showcase your potential to the observers.”

Martial arts competition.

Through this, they would have the chance to display their respective martial arts.

How much they showed here would determine the range of choices available to them.

‘Sparring...’

The trainees’ eyes became serious.

Unlike before, they had to prove their skills in front of the executives.

It was only natural for them to feel nervous and have exceptional motivation.

However, there was one problem here.

‘The number doesn’t match.’

The number of trainees was six.

If they were to have matches, eight would be the most ideal number.

That way, eight would compete, then four, and then two, allowing them to determine the final winner.

But since there were six, inevitably...

‘Advancement without a match.’

Advancement without a match.

In other words, two people could reach the final match with just one bout.

At that moment, the senior warrior Gwak Mun-gi went to the tournament bracket and began writing numbers.

一, 二, 三, 四, 五, 六.

Among them, the ones who drew 五 (five) and 六 (six) could reach the final match with just one bout.

Then, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom pointed to a table placed in front of the stage.

On it was a wooden box with circular holes on top.

“As you can see, since the number doesn’t match, we will draw lots to determine the tournament bracket...”

Suk!

Then, someone raised their hand.

It was Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate.

Unlike the previous gates, this was the final gate, and the executives were watching, so he stepped forward without hesitation.

“May I ask one question?”

“Speak.”

“Those who advance without a match and those who advance after two bouts will be at a disadvantage in terms of stamina and everything else. Will it be valid?”

Everyone nodded in agreement with these words.

Then, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom smirked and soon spoke.

“Naturally, it will be difficult for those who have to fight two bouts to manage their stamina, so they will certainly be given sufficient time to circulate energy and recover. And the final match to determine the winner will only be a contest of techniques without internal energy.”

Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate lowered his hand, seemingly somewhat convinced by his words.

If they were to suffer injuries, the story would be different, but it seemed like an attempt to eliminate the disadvantageous conditions to some extent.

At this time, Mok Gyeong-un muttered softly.

“Couldn’t we all just fight at once?”

“Tsk-tsk.”

At these words, Mok Yu-cheon, who was right next to him, openly clicked his tongue.

If that were to happen, who would everyone here consider as the first target to deal with?

It would be none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

In a group match, they would try to eliminate the most dangerous opponent first, so it wouldn't be a fair match.

Of course, Mok Yu-cheon still didn't know.

The fact that two out of the six were Mok Gyeong-un's subordinates.

Then, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom continued speaking.

“Now, the trainees will come forward in order and draw the metal balls inside the wooden box.”

The time for the drawing had come.

The first opportunity to choose was given to those who had the lowest scores in the previous gate.

They were Mok Yu-cheon and Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate.

Perhaps because he was afraid of being told he had the lowest score if he went first, Yeon Mu-ung didn't step forward right away.

So Mok Yu-cheon was the first to draw a metal ball from inside the wooden box.

Mok Yu-cheon's number was,

“Six (六).”

At these words, Yeon Mu-ung from the Esoteric Realm Gate showed a slightly disappointed expression.

No matter how fair they tried to make it, the advantage of being able to fight for the championship with just one match as 五 (five) and 六 (six) was inevitable.

‘Haa...’

Mok Yu-cheon looked at the six he had drawn and scoffed.

Should this be considered good luck?

While he was doing that, Yeon Mu-ung drew a number tag.

It was,

“...Four (四).”

Unfortunately, the advancement without a match had flown away.

It was disappointing, but there was no other choice.

Next, Mo Ha-rang from the Demon Fire Hall came forward and drew a metal ball.

“Three (三).”

‘!?’

At those words, the corners of Yeon Mu-ung’s mouth twitched.

She was an opponent he had wanted to face at least once, as they had always been compared in this Corpse Blood Valley gate.

Next, Mu Jang-yak walked forward.

Mu Jang-yak didn’t mind either way.

After all, while winning was important in this gate, it was also an opportunity to showcase one’s talent to the observers.

Tak!

“One (一).”

The number Mu Jang-yak drew was one.

Next, Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave walked forward.

The Demonic Monk possessing Yeom Ga had no particular thoughts about this drawing, so he expressionlessly put his hand in and drew a metal ball.

The number was,

“Five (五).”

At those words, the expressions of two people changed.

Mok Yu-cheon, who already thought he owed a debt to Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave, showed a delighted expression as Yeom Ga became his opponent in the bracket.

And the other person was none other than Mu Jang-yak.

Naturally, without even drawing lots, he sighed as he looked at Mok Gyeong-un, who had become his opponent.

‘It ended up like this.’

He had thought the day would come when he would directly face Mok Gyeong-un.

But it had already arrived.

‘The first match against the most difficult opponent...’

Mu Jang-yak shook his head back and forth.

The person he had considered as someone who would be troublesome if he became an enemy among his peers was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

But to think they would face each other like this.

Kwak!

His fists naturally clenched.

It wasn't particularly out of fear.

He didn't think he would lose right away.

He had a secret technique that no one could defeat, after all.

This elevated sensation was simply overconfidence.

Mu Jang-yak approached Mok Gyeong-un and spoke while extending his hand.

“We ended up facing each other like this. Regardless of who wins, let's do our best.”

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed his hand and spoke as if it was troublesome.

“Uh. That seems difficult.”

“What?”

“If I do my best, the match will become too boring, so I'll go easy on you. So you do your best.”

‘!?’

What nonsense was this guy spouting?

Was he provoking him now?

Chapter 112 – The Final Gate (3)

As Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave drew 五 (five), Mok Gyeong-un naturally became 二 (two).

Mu Jang-yak, who was confident in winning despite drawing the most troublesome opponent, extended his hand to Mok Gyeong-un and said,

“We ended up facing each other like this. Regardless of who wins, let’s do our best.”

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed his hand and spoke as if it was troublesome.

“Uh. That seems difficult.”

“What?”

“If I do my best, the match will become too boring, so I’ll go easy on you. So you do your best.”

‘!?’

Mu Jang-yak always had a relaxed demeanor, but at this moment, one of his eyebrows twitched, revealing his emotions.

Was Mok Gyeong-un provoking him now?

Mu Jang-yak looked straight into Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes.

Unlike his own heightened state, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes showed no particular emotion.

Seeing this, Mu Jang-yak calmed his briefly surging emotions and regained his composure.

‘…Has it already started?’

It was undoubtedly a clear provocation.

The fellow was as good at strategy as he was, if not better.

Perhaps he was trying to unsettle him before the match to gain an advantageous position.

At this, Mu Jang-yak spoke with a smile.

“I’m grateful that you’re going easy on me. I was already at an advantage, but if that’s the case, I’ll have an overwhelming advantage. Are you not interested in the top disciple position in the final gate?”

This was an eye for an eye.

Mu Jang-yak also deliberately provoked Mok Gyeong-un.

However, Mok Gyeong-un showed no particular reaction to Mu Jang-yak’s provocation.

Rather, he smirked and turned his head away.

‘.....’

Seeing this, Mu Jang-yak clicked his tongue inwardly.

Since childhood, he had often been told that he was as cunning as he was talented in martial arts.

So he was confident that he wouldn’t lose to anyone in a battle of wits or arguments, but strangely, whenever he had a conversation with this fellow, he felt like he was being swayed.

‘No need to fall for the provocation.’

The outcome would be decided in the match anyway.

He also intended to ignore it and move on.

However,

“...Hey. Mok Gyeong-un.”

Mu Jang-yak called out to Mok Gyeong-un while looking ahead.

After calling out, Mu Jang-yak inwardly regretted his actions, but since he had already called out, he thought it couldn't be helped.

“Why are you doing this?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, Mu Jang-yak said,

“Since we're having a match, how about we make a bet?”

“A bet?”

“Yeah.”

“Why should I do that?”

Mok Gyeong-un spoke in a tone as if he didn't understand.

At this, Mu Jang-yak smirked and replied,

“You don’t have to do it if you’re not confident.”

“Confidence?”

“Yeah. I thought it would be more interesting to have a bet rather than just a match, but if you’re not confident, there’s no need to do it.”

It was a clear provocation.

He could have just let it slide, but Mu Jang-yak, who thought he should clarify this relationship in this match, tried to draw Mok Gyeong-un into a bet.

“Hmm.”

Mok Gyeong-un stroked his chin and then smirked, saying,

“What kind of bet do you want to make?”

At these words, Mu Jang-yak inwardly cheered, although he didn’t show it, thinking that Mok Gyeong-un had fallen for his provocation.

Since the opponent had fallen for his provocation, all that was left was to set the stakes.

Mu Jang-yak used his brain in an instant.

Although he had suggested a bet to provoke him, he didn’t want to create a situation where the opponent would resent or be angry even if they lost.

So the idea he came up with was,

“How about the loser of the match calling the winner ‘big brother’?”

“Big brother?”

“Yeah. Isn’t it about clearly establishing a hierarchy between us?”

“Hierarchy...”

“It’s not a bad bet, right? No matter how much of a competition it is, we’re not mortal enemies or enemies that need to be killed, so there’s no need to raise the stakes of the bet.”

It was enough to create a sense of urgency that he had to win.

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un let out a soft groan and said,

“Hmm. That’s a rather boring bet.”

“It’s boring?”

“Yes. Is there even a need to make a bet with such a thing?”

Did he fall for it or not?

Mu Jang-yak asked in puzzlement,

“...Then what do you think is an interesting bet?”

“Well. How about the loser of the match becoming the faithful dog of the winner?”

“What?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Mu Jang-yak’s expression stiffened.

He had mentioned the bet at a level where both of them wouldn’t feel too offended in case of any eventuality, but the fellow went a step further.

Becoming a faithful dog basically meant crawling under him.

‘He’s not just good at provocation but excessive.’

He was someone who usually laughed off and let go of most things, but this time, it was difficult to laugh.

He was the one who first proposed the bet.

But if he were to avoid it now that the stakes of the bet had been raised, he would look ridiculous.

Mu Jang-yak slightly turned his head and looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

‘Is he that confident? Or is he going to provoke me until the end?’

It didn’t matter either way.

The latter was definitely effective.

From the moment he suggested making a bet to determine who would be the elder or younger brother, he had already been caught in the fellow’s provocation.

Mu Jang-yak clenched his fist as if he had made up his mind and said,

“Are you sure you won’t regret it?”

“That’s what I want to ask you.”

“...You’re really something. I’ve never been caught by anyone in an argument or something like this. Fine. Let’s do it. The bet about becoming a faithful dog if you lose.”

It would be fine as long as he won.

Although Mok Gyeong-un had a special power, this was a match where martial arts would be compared.

He was confident that no one could match him if it was solely based on martial arts.

Because he had ‘that’.

And so, the two trainees belonging to the first bracket of the final gate walked to the center of the plaza, faced each other, and stretched their bodies.

They were Mok Gyeong-un and Mu Jang-yak.

The observers sitting next to the stage in the plaza had various expressions on their faces.

Among them, the Bright Blade King Son Yun, who had come to confirm Mok Gyeong-un’s martial arts skills, was surprised by something unexpected.

Son Yun gestured for one of the red-belted warriors to come and asked,

“What was that child’s name again?”

“It’s Mu Jang-yak.”

“Mu Jang-yak? Do you know which martial clan he’s from?”

“He seems to be from a small to medium-sized faction under our sect, but I don’t know much else.”

At the warrior’s words, Son Yun’s eyes narrowed.

Such a child was from a small to medium-sized faction that wasn’t well-known?

At that moment, the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, who was sitting right next to the Bright Blade King Son Yun, also spoke in a surprised tone,

“This is surprising. Was there such a child?”

“You noticed it too, my lord?”

The energy emanating from Mu Jang-yak as he was stretching his body.

They sensed it through their energy perception.

‘That child... has reached the pinnacle-stage of Peak realm.’

For a trainee who was only seventeen or eighteen years old to have reached the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm...

If their energy perception wasn't wrong, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he was the most outstanding among those six.

It was truly unexpected.

For such an outstanding martial talent to emerge from a small to medium-sized faction...

‘The opponent is unfavorable.’

After looking at Mu Jang-yak like this, the Bright Blade King Son Yun, who turned his gaze to Mok Gyeong-un, clicked his tongue inwardly.

He had wanted to confirm the extent of Mok Gyeong-un's skills, who had defeated his disciple Yeop Wi-seon, but the opponent was too bad.

Of all people, he had to face such a monstrous fellow.

‘If he hasn't prepared anything, it might end uneventfully.’

It was difficult to judge everything based solely on energy perception, but there was too much of a difference in the energy emanating from them.

No matter how much Mok Gyeong-un had honed his energy, it seemed difficult for him to be a match.

On the other hand, the Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, who had no particular interest in Mok Gyeong-un from the beginning, clicked his tongue while looking at Mu Jang-yak.

‘...Was I too hasty?’

He had come with the sole purpose of bringing the child from the Esoteric Realm Gate.

So he had already reached an agreement with a few of the observers beforehand.

But to think there was such a talent...

Although he tried not to show it, he felt regretful.

‘I can’t back out now.’

Won Byeong-hak glanced at the other executives.

The Shadow Clan Master and the Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang were sitting side by side, separated from them on the left side.

The two of them also seemed to be having a conversation while looking at Mu Jang-yak.

Hang Yeo-ryang spoke to the Shadow Clan Master in an interested tone,

“I came to take a girl, but there’s a not-so-bad boy among the boys.”

“A girl? Could it be that you’ve set your eyes on the child from the Demon Fire Hall?”

“Hohoho. I heard she’s a promising talent.”

“Hmm. This is quite troubling. I also came to Corpse Blood Valley after a long time because I was attracted to the child from the Demon Fire Hall.”

“Oh my. Is that so? We have overlapping interests.”

“It turned out that way unintentionally. Ohoho.”

The Shadow Clan Master laughed like a woman, covering his mouth.

Following the Shadow Clan Master, the Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang also laughed, giggling.

They were both laughing, but for some reason, it sounded like they were having a battle of wits.

Then, Hang Yeo-ryang pointed at Mu Jang-yak and said,

“Clan Leader, why don’t you take that child instead? In terms of talent, he seems to be the best among this class.”

“Well.”

The Shadow Clan Master showed a contemplative expression while stroking his chin.

At this, the Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang spoke in a tone as if she couldn’t understand,

“Is there a reason to hesitate? Could it be that you’re worried about the Thunderbolt Fist King and the Bright Blade King snatching him away?”

“Ohoho. That’s one reason, but my eyes are drawn to that child.”

“That child?”

At the Shadow Clan Master's words, the Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang looked at Mok Gyeong-un, who was lightly stretching his body on the opposite side of Mu Jang-yak.

Although they were far apart, she was quite surprised by his handsome face.

However, that was all.

Based on energy perception, he seemed to be only at the first-rate level.

At that age, being first-rate wasn't weak, but it was definitely not a level worth coveting as a disciple.

At this, she said,

“His appearance is quite pleasing, but that's all. Surely you're not interested in him because of his appearance, are you?”

“Ohohoho. As they say, beauty is the icing on the cake, so it's good if the appearance is outstanding as well.”

“If that's all, it's meaningless.”

“Since he has come this far, wouldn't he have a hidden technique or two?”

“Well, that could be possible.”

In the martial world, secret techniques and hidden skills existed.

However, the opponent was too strong.

Based on energy perception alone, that child named Mu Jang-yak had the potential to reach the initial-stage Transcendent Realm at any time as long as he was supported by enlightenment.

Although she had originally set her sights on Mo Ha-rang, he was desirable to the point of coveting.

Then, Hang Yeo-ryang spoke as if it was for amusement,

“Then, Shadow Clan Master. Shall we have a light bet?”

“A bet?”

“Yes. From what I hear, it seems you see potential in that child as well, so let’s bet that the match will be decided within three moves. Of course, the winner will be that child named Mu Jang-yak.”

“Hmm. What are the conditions of the bet?”

“How about betting the ownership of that girl?”

“So that was your objective, Valley Master.”

“Hohoho. You caught me.”

Hang Yeo-ryang preferred girls over boys.

Since they both wanted the same thing, she proposed a bet to resolve it amicably.

At this, the Shadow Clan Master smiled and said,

“Not a bad idea. But since anyone can see the clear gap between those two children if we bet on the outcome, let’s do it this way.”

“What do you mean by ‘this way’?”

“I will bet that the match won’t be decided within three moves.”

At the Shadow Clan Master’s words, the Summoning Sound Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang twitched her lips and then nodded.

“You won’t go back on your word, right?”

“Ohoho. A man’s word is as good as a thousand gold pieces.”

“.....”

It seemed like a phrase that didn’t suit him, but it didn’t matter.

Hang Yeo-ryang was confident that the match could be decided in just one move, let alone three.

The gap between the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm and a First-Rate Realm was too large.

It might not even take one move, but if done well, the outcome could be determined in just one move.

Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom, who was on the stage, raised his hand and shouted,

“Now, exchange greetings with each other.”

At this, Mok Gyeong-un and Mu Jang-yak, who had been stretching their bodies, looked at each other and cupped their hands together in a salute.

As it was a match, they were told to exchange greetings as a sign of mutual respect.

While saluting, Mu Jang-yak glanced at someone next to the stage.

‘The Thunderbolt Fist King.’

He was the one Mu Jang-yak wanted to have as his master.

The Thunderbolt Fist King was one of the top three masters in the Heaven and Earth Society when it came to bare-handed techniques.

His family was skilled in leg techniques and fist techniques, so Mu Jang-yak wanted to become his disciple and reach an even higher level.

To make that happen as he wished, he had to become the top disciple in the final gate.

Mu Jang-yak turned his gaze and looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

Although he seemed to be only at the first-rate level based on appearance, after observing him several times, Mok Gyeong-un was estimated to be at Peak Realm.

He didn’t know how he had concealed his martial arts, but he definitely wasn’t first-rate.

Mu Jang-yak steeled his resolve while looking at Mok Gyeong-un.

‘Establish a clear superiority.’

For the sake of the bet, he absolutely couldn't lose.

Mu Jang-yak began to rapidly circulate the internal energy from his danjeon throughout his body.

It was to decide the match early on, along with the signal from the Corpse Blood Valley Leader.

‘Absolutely no carelessness.’

From the start, he would use his full strength to break the fellow's will and achieve victory.

While they were doing so, Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom lowered his raised hand and shouted loudly,

“Begin!”

As soon as Lee Ji-yeom's signal fell,

Pat!

Mu Jang-yak, who had been preparing by circulating energy throughout his body, kicked off the ground and launched himself towards Mok Gyeong-un.

‘Fast.’

Mok Yoo-cheon, who was watching this, exclaimed in admiration.

He had guessed that Mu Jang-yak would be strong, but his current movement exceeded expectations.

Indeed, he seemed to have reached the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm.

‘Flowing Water Stirs Chaos[1]!’

Papapapapak!

Mu Jang-yak, who had charged in front of Mok Gyeong-un in an instant, unleashed a palm technique.

The elegant palm strikes, like gentle ripples, beautifully weaved a pattern, targeting the vital points on Mok Gyeong-un’s upper body.

‘How will you respond?’

Mu Jang-yak thought as he glared at Mok Gyeong-un.

Even if they had reached the same Peak Realm, those who had reached the peak were completely different in terms of strength and speed.

Tak!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un moved back about half a step.

Then,

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

‘!?’

Mu Jang-yak’s eyes narrowed.

Mok Gyeong-un secured a distance of half a step and flexibly moved his upper body, dodging all the palm strikes.

To easily evade the Flowing Water Swaying Disorder, where it was difficult to distinguish between false and true strikes?

It was an unexpected response.

“Oh my.”

The Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, who was watching their confrontation from beside the stage, couldn't hide his astonishment.

Mok Gyeong-un's movement was not at all that of a first-rate martial artist.

To dodge techniques in such a manner, one had to be at a somewhat equal level.

‘Did he conceal his martial arts?’

He had thought the match would end blandly.

However, with the movement Mok Gyeong-un had shown now, it became difficult to predict the outcome.

‘...As expected.’

The Bright Blade King Son Yun was also intently watching Mok Gyeong-un's movement.

He had thought there would be a hidden technique, and indeed, Mok Gyeong-un was showing movements that surpassed the first-rate level.

If it was to that extent, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he had reached the proficient-stage of the Peak Realm or was close to the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm.

‘Can he conceal his energy?’

Even he, who had reached the Transcendent Realm, couldn't accurately assess Mok Gyeong-un's martial arts.

It meant one of two things.

Either Mok Gyeong-un was a peerless master far superior to himself, or he had a special technique to conceal his energy.

However, the former was impossible based on common sense, so the latter was more likely.

‘No wonder that child was pushed back.’

Mok Gyeong-un's current movement was a step above Yeop Wi-seon.

It could be confirmed just by seeing how he dodged the techniques.

With this, it became difficult to predict who would win between the two of them.

Papapapak!

“An opening.”

Mok Gyeong-un, who had dodged all the palm techniques, stepped forward and threw a punch, aiming for Mu Jang-yak's face.

In response, Mu Jang-yak leaped back to avoid the punch, and at the same time, he kicked off the ground and raised his foot towards Mok Gyeong-un's chin.

Pak!

Mok Gyeong-un blocked Mu Jang-yak's instep and simultaneously tried to grab it.

However,

Swish!

Mu Jang-yak twisted his body and kicked Mok Gyeong-un's shoulder with his foot.

Bam!

Shuaaa!

Mok Gyeong-un's body was pushed back about five steps.

Landing on the ground and seeing this, the corners of Mu Jang-yak's mouth slightly rose.

He was now certain about this.

Mok Gyeong-un's internal energy was weaker than his own.

In that case,

‘Let’s decide the match.’

Pat!

Mu Jang-yak kicked off the ground and unleashed a fist technique with his right hand towards the pushed-back Mok Gyeong-un.

‘Accumulating Fists, Dancing to Completion[2]!’

As the fists overlapped, they flew in with several false strikes, swaying like a butterfly.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un tried to increase the distance by using footwork.

However, Mu Jang-yak’s fist technique, like the Hundred Steps Divine Fist of Shaolin, imbued with energy, pierced through the air as much as the distance widened and charged forward.

‘I have no choice but to block.’

There was no other way; he had to use his hands.

Mok Gyeong-un raised his energy and extended his palm to block the fist technique.

But at that moment,

Bam!

From an angle he had never imagined, Mu Jang-yak’s palm strike pierced Mok Gyeong-un’s right rib cage.

‘Huh?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s body bent sideways to the right.

Along with that, Mu Jang-yak’s Accumulating Fists, Dancing to Completion’s fist technique struck his chest.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

Consecutive strikes were delivered, and Mok Gyeong-un’s body was pushed back more than ten steps.

Shuaaa!

“Ha!”

Exclamations of admiration flowed from various parts of the spectator seats.

That was because the technique Mu Jang-yak had shown just now was something no one had expected.

Even the Bright Blade King Son Yun muttered in amazement,

“...Right Fist, Left Palm[3].”

With his right hand, he unleashed a fist technique, and with his left hand, he unleashed a palm technique.

It was unbelievable.

It wasn’t that he was using the same technique with both hands, but he was using different techniques with each hand.

“Oh my...”

The Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak also couldn't hide his astonishment at Mu Jang-yak's bizarre technique.

At a glance, it seemed like a simple principle, but those who had learned martial arts knew that this was nearly impossible.

Using different techniques with each hand meant having to think two things simultaneously, and if not careful, the energy circulation system could get tangled.

‘To have mastered such a bizarre technique.’

He was truly an amazing child.

Using two different techniques with one body.

It was no different from facing two masters who had reached the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm.

‘The match has tilted.’

Regardless of how he did it, if it had come to this, it was no exaggeration to say that the situation had already tilted in Mu Jang-yak's favor.

Even without this, Mok Gyeong-un's cultivation seemed to be a step below Mu Jang-yak's, so by what means could he defeat such a monster?

‘...That will be difficult.’

The Bright Blade King Son Yun also shared the same opinion.

It was surprising that Mok Gyeong-un had concealed his skills, but the opponent was too bad.

However,

‘What?’

Mu Jang-yak, who had landed two techniques that were practically fatal blows to Mok Gyeong-un, didn’t have a good expression.

He had accurately hit two techniques with his hidden skill, Right Fist, Left Palm.

The rib cage and the center of the chest.

It was no exaggeration to say that these were fatal blows.

However, at the same time he landed the techniques, he felt a strange sensation of his cultivation dispersing for a moment.

‘...Is it my imagination?’

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been pushed back about ten steps, straightened his body and cracked his neck.

Crack! Crack!

Then, he muttered as if talking to himself,

“Ahh. I was going to finish it by dealing with you moderately, but this was unexpected.”

‘What?’

Mu Jang-yak furrowed his brows.

After being hit by unexpected killing techniques consecutively, he was still putting on such a pretentious act, which was really something.

It seemed he needed to finish it decisively.

‘I’ll put an end to that pretentiousness.’

Pat!

Mu Jang-yak launched himself towards Mok Gyeong-un.

Having revealed his hidden skill, he now intended to unleash it openly.

‘Right Fist, Left Palm[3]. Fists Vast as the World[4]! Flowing Water, Moving Clouds[5]!’

Simultaneously unleashing fist and palm techniques.

It created a situation as if two masters were attacking together.

‘It’s over!’

Just as he was certain of that,

“Is this roughly how it’s done?”

Papapapapak!

At that moment, Mu Jang-yak couldn't hide his shock.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been staring intently at him as he charged forward, nodded his head and then, like Mu Jang-yak, started using different techniques with each hand.

‘!!!!!!!!!!’

Chapter 113 – The Final Gate (4)

At the moment when Mok Gyeong-un was pushed back, his ribs and chest were struck by Mu Jang-yak's secret technique.

-Swoosh!

“Ha!”

In an instant, exclamations of astonishment erupted from the spectators' seats beside the platform where the duel was being observed.

And they were not alone.

Even the other cadets waiting for their turn to duel couldn't help but be amazed by the scene unfolding before their eyes.

‘...So this is what it meant.’

Mok Yu-cheon clicked his tongue as he watched Mok Gyeong-un being pushed back.

He had only one chance to gauge Mu Jang-yak's martial prowess, and that moment came to mind.

[Are you perhaps left-handed?]

[Who knows.]

At the time, he had been puzzled by that ambiguous response for a moment before forgetting about it.

However, after witnessing the Right Fist, Left Palm technique, each employing different techniques, it made sense.

This was not a method anyone could casually attempt.

‘Impressive.’

Mok Yu-cheon was genuinely amazed.

If one could wield different martial arts with each hand, it meant they could perform the work of two people alone.

Since it wasn't being executed by two individuals in the first place, it could become even more precise.

Of course, the very act of pulling it off was difficult, as it required splitting one's thoughts.

In any case, witnessing this aspect of Mu Jang-yak's potential, Mok Yu-cheon's heart raced with excitement, even giving him goosebumps.

-Thump! Thump! Thump!

Indeed, the world was vast.

To think such a monster existed among his peers.

‘I was nothing more than a frog in a well, after all.’

Coming here and having his eyes opened didn’t mean he could afford to be complacent.

Mok Yu-cheon clicked his tongue as he looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

It seemed he had truly met his match.

‘It’s futile.’

Even if he had mastered a unique technique, this duel was meant to demonstrate one’s martial prowess, plain and simple.

The reason for his sudden improvement remained unknown, but the opponent was too formidable.

Mu Jang-yak could genuinely be called a true genius.

-Bam!

Now, it appeared Mu Jang-yak was about to end it.

As he unleashed his Right Fist, Left Palm technique, even Mok Yu-cheon felt at a loss as to how he would counter it if he were in Mok Gyeong-un’s place.

At the moment, other than creating distance...

‘!?’

Mok Yu-cheon’s eyes widened in that instant.

-Pow!

He was so astonished that he sprang up from his seat.

‘This is insane...’

For a moment, he doubted his own eyes.

Mok Gyeong-un was employing different martial arts techniques with each hand, just like Mu Jang-yak.

With his right hand, he executed sword techniques, and with his left hand, he wielded fist techniques.

‘...Is this possible?’

He wasn’t just clumsily imitating; he was genuinely displaying proper techniques.

Mok Yu-cheon couldn’t help but be shocked by this sight.

He was confident that the bizarre method of using different techniques with each hand, like Mu Jang-yak, couldn’t be easily replicated even by supreme masters, so what on earth was happening?

‘It can’t be.’

Even seeing it, he couldn’t believe it.

How could one imitate it after seeing it just once?

He wasn't the only one surprised.

“...Ha!”

Hang Yeo-ryang of the Summoning Sound Valley let out an astonished gasp, her eyes narrowing.

She had already judged that the outcome was completely tilted in Mu Jang-yak's favor upon witnessing his Right Fist, Left Palm technique.

However, something entirely unexpected had occurred.

‘He's imitating that?’

Wielding different martial arts techniques with each hand.

It was a method that, contrary to the idea, was difficult to execute in practice.

If it were easy, countless martial artists would already be employing different martial arts with each hand.

‘...The true genius was someone else, I see.’

She had considered Mu Jang-yak a rarely seen genius after witnessing his Right Fist, Left Palm technique.

But now, that thought had changed in an instant.

If Mok Gyeong-un had truly made Mu Jang-yak's technique his own in a flash after seeing it just once, then she might be witnessing a tremendous genius that appears only once every few centuries.

-Swoosh!

Hang Yeo-ryang glanced at Shadow Master.

Shadow Master also appeared greatly astonished, his mouth slightly agape, unable to take his eyes off Mok Gyeong-un.

Who wouldn't be amazed upon seeing this?

At this, her eyes sparkled strangely.

In the bet, she had already practically lost.

However, that no longer mattered.

‘Mok Gyeong-un...’

Originally, she had no interest in the male students and had come only with the intention of taking Mo Ha-rang of the Demon Fire Hall.

But now, that thought had completely changed.

Letting go of such immense talent was out of the question.

‘Could this ultimately be a good thing?’

Since she had lost the bet, she could use that as a pretext to concede the Demon Fire Hall's woman to Shadow Master and take this monstrous fellow instead, which would be far more advantageous.

As this was happening, the tide of the battle noticeably shifted.

-Bam bam bam!

“Ugh!”

The sword techniques executed by Mok Gyeong-un's right hand struck the acupoints of Mu Jang-yak's left chest—the Six Roots[1], Sun and Moon (Il-wol), and the Small Sea acupoint (Sohae point) on his left arm—causing Mu Jang-yak's body to stagger and be pushed to the side.

‘The variations in the sword techniques are too intense.’

While the fist techniques wielded by his left hand were simple and sturdy, making them easy to block, the sword techniques executed by his right hand were diverse in their variations, causing Mu Jang-yak to miss three moves.

‘This monstrous guy!’

Mu Jang-yak was genuinely dumbfounded.

He had initially thought that Mok Gyeong-un's Right Fist, Left Palm technique might be a temporary strategy to catch him off guard.

After all, wielding different techniques with each hand required not only splitting one's thoughts but also a special qi circulation method, which Mok Gyeong-un couldn't have possibly mastered.

However,

-Bam bam bam bam bam!

The techniques Mok Gyeong-un displayed with both hands were by no means empty moves.

He was truly executing different techniques.

‘At this rate, I’ll lose.’

Mu Jang-yak, sensing the unfavorable situation, attempted to create distance.

His mind was becoming too scattered.

Normally, when employing the Right Fist, Left Palm technique, the opponent would become flustered and fail to respond to both techniques simultaneously, but with Mok Gyeong-un also wielding the Right Fist, Left Palm, the exchange of techniques had grown complicated.

‘It’s dizzying.’

Even Mu Jang-yak, the originator, felt dizzy.

Thus,

-Tap tap tap tap tap!

Mu Jang-yak utilized the lightness skill to try and create as much distance from Mok Gyeong-un as possible.

However, Mok Gyeong-un wouldn’t miss this opportunity.

“Where are you going?”

-Bam!

Mok Gyeong-un unleashed his body towards Mu Jang-yak without hesitation.

‘Tsk.’

Realizing it was futile, Mu Jang-yak gathered qi in the soles of his feet and stomped on the ground with his toes.

-Boom!

-Crack!

The ground of the plaza shattered, and rock fragments shot upwards.

The fragments, infused with qi, became dozens of small projectiles flying towards Mok Gyeong-un.

Naturally, he had no choice but to evade them.

However, in that fleeting moment,

-Swoosh!

Mok Gyeong-un bent his knees backward and leaned his waist back, sliding across the ground as if to avoid the fragments.

‘No way?’

How did he think to dodge by lowering his posture backward like that?

His waist and leg strength were no joke.

While it was impressive to evade in such an acrobatic manner, dodging like this would inevitably create a critical opening.

‘Foolish. You’ve made a mistake!’

-Bam!

Not missing this chance, Mu Jang-yak twisted his body, leaping forward, and attempted to strike Mok Gyeong-un’s abdomen with a vicious palm strike.

It was at that very instant.

-Bam bam bam bam bam!

“Urghh!”

Mu Jang-yak had thought that in this posture, Mok Gyeong-un would have a blind spot and be unable to respond immediately.

However, the moment he was about to deliver the palm strike, Mok Gyeong-un’s body, which was almost lying down backward, spun sideways, repeatedly striking Mu Jang-yak’s jaw with foot techniques.

‘H-how in this posture?’

-Thud!

Unable to contain his shock, Mu Jang-yak fell backward.

“Phew.”

Mok Gyeong-un got up and looked at the fallen Mu Jang-yak.

It seemed that having been hit in the jaw and face consecutively, his brain had been shaken, causing him to lose consciousness.

‘The 5th move of the Profound Mystic Foot Technique, the Whirlwind Kick[2]... quite useful.’

It wasn’t a technique meant to be used in this way, but when the posture was unbalanced, employing it could effectively draw out the opponent’s carelessness.

Cheong-ryeong’s martial arts were indeed worthy of being called supreme.

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong’s voice reached Mok Gyeong-un’s ears.

-You must have been quite eager to end it quickly.

‘...’

-You think I wouldn’t know? You added more power to the last move, didn’t you?

‘Ah, I’ve been caught.’

Mok Gyeong-un scratched his head.

The original plan was to determine the victor using only techniques within the Peak Realm.

However, while executing the Whirlwind Kick, he had increased the power he typically used from 20% to 30% in the final move.

‘Well, isn’t this still enough?’

He hadn’t done anything that would expose his true abilities.

Most of the leaders beside the platform were supreme masters of the Transcendent Realm, so to avoid revealing his actual strength to them, he had limited his power to 20% during the fight.

Moreover, there were several instances where Mok Gyeong-un had noticed openings in Mu Jang-yak’s defense but had let them slide.

-Don’t let your guard down. If the crowd realizes that you’ve already reached the Transcendent Realm, they will go beyond recognizing your talent and start to be wary of you.

‘Yes, yes. I’ll keep that in mind.’

Wasn’t that why he was controlling his strength?

Otherwise, Mu Jang-yak would have been lying on the ground long ago.

Controlling his power while fighting seemed to have been the right decision.

‘Thanks to that, I learned something interesting.’

As Mok Gyeong-un reached the Transcendent Realm, he could see the opponent’s qi more clearly.

Although not in great detail, he could roughly discern how Mu Jang-yak’s qi circulation was structured.

Interestingly, Mu Jang-yak's lower danjeon was divided into two.

It could be considered a unique form, which likely allowed him to execute different techniques with one body.

Mok Gyeong-un applied this by drawing out some of the death qi from his middle danjeon to wield different techniques.

‘It's quite useful.’

If utilized well, it seemed convenient when fighting opponents of similar levels.

In any case, had he achieved his objective to this extent?

The goal in the final gate was to impress upon the observing leaders that he possessed exceptional talent while only displaying the Peak Realm.

‘This should be sufficient, right?’

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un's intentions were conveyed.

He had firmly imprinted his talent in the minds of the observing leaders.

However, beyond that, a small confrontation was unfolding among the leaders on the platform.

“Brother Son. It seems I'll have to take that Mok Gyeong-un kid as my disciple.”

At the words of Won Byeong-hak, the Thunderbolt Fist King, Son Yun, the Bright Blade King, raised an eyebrow and replied.

“...What are you saying? Didn’t you just say you had chosen the child from the Esoteric Realm Gate?”

“I said I was considering it. But... no. Let me be honest. If I miss out on that child in today’s closing ceremony, I feel like I’ll regret it for a while.”

“Is it acceptable for someone who has received the title of ‘King’ to speak with a forked tongue?”

“Hah. I said I had the child from the Esoteric Realm Gate in mind. When did I ever definitively state that I would take that child no matter what? And respectable brother Son, you already have many excellent disciples, so why are you being greedy here?”

“Greedy? Did you just accuse me of being greedy?”

“If this isn’t greed, then what is it?”

Before they knew it, the atmosphere between them had become quite hostile.

‘Oh my...’

Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, felt perplexed. He needed to announce the end of the first duel, but the sudden confrontation between these two kings made it difficult.

Chapter 114 – Disciple Scramble (1)

‘This is troublesome.’

Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, had intended to ascend the platform and announce the end of the duel.

However, he had not expected a situation where the two most influential upper echelon members among the Five Kings would engage in a confrontation.

‘...I understand their intentions, but they went too far.’

Lee Ji-yeom clicked his tongue inwardly as he glanced at Mok Gyeong-un.

In fact, he too had been unable to conceal his astonishment upon witnessing Mok Gyeong-un replicating the profound principles of Mu Jang-yak’s Right Fist, Left Palm technique in a single attempt during their duel.

If it weren’t for the fact that he knew his liege was possessing the boy, he would have been desperate to accept him as a disciple due to his innate martial talent, just like the others.

In any case, to ensure smooth progression, he needed to intervene in their confrontation.

“Ahem. You two...”

However, just as he was about to speak, Shadow Master’s voice came from the left side.

“Hohoho. I apologize for interrupting your conversation, but would it be alright if I said a word?”

As Shadow Master stepped in as if to mediate, the two kings, whose emotions were about to escalate, simultaneously turned their gazes towards him.

Among them, the more belligerent one, Son Yun, the Bright Blade King, spoke in a somewhat sharp tone.

“What do you wish to say?”

“It is nothing more than a remark, wondering if there is a need for you two esteemed individuals to damage your sentiments over a single talent in this gathering.”

Under normal circumstances, they would have quickly come to their senses upon hearing these words.

However, this time was an exception.

Passing all the gates of the Corpse Blood Valley meant that most of the qualities a martial artist should possess had been verified, and it signified that they possessed fierce survival skills as well.

Not only that, but reaching the Peak Realm at the age of 17 and possessing innate martial talent to the extent of being able to replicate profound principles that even Transcendent Realm supreme masters couldn't casually attempt after witnessing them just once...

Who would want to let go of such an individual?

“I understand what you are trying to say, Shadow Master, but this is a matter between the Thunderbolt Fist King and myself, so please do not interfere.”

Son Yun, the Bright Blade King, issued a strong warning.

On the other hand, Won Byeong-hak, the Thunderbolt Fist King, remained silent.

It wasn't due to his gentlemanly nature, but because he had visited Shadow Master the previous night and requested him not to touch the child from the Esoteric Realm Gate.

“Ahem.”

He had resolved to be shameless, considering that he couldn't afford to let go of such a talent, but naturally, he had to be mindful of the situation.

Fortunately, he hadn't made such a request to the Bright Blade King, but he could only hope that Shadow Master wouldn't bring it up.

At that moment, Shadow Master smiled and spoke.

"However, what is the point of you two deciding who will take the talent here?"

At those words, one of Son Yun's eyebrows raised.

Could it be that Shadow Master was also intending to participate in this talent scramble?

With that, Son Yun spoke in a warning tone.

"Don't tell me you're also after that child..."

"Ah, no. That's not what I meant. What I'm saying is that it would be futile for you two to engage in this debate if we follow the rules of the closing ceremony."

"Futile? What do you mean by that?"

Shadow Master pointed at Mok Gyeong-un with his hand and spoke to the two puzzled kings.

"Although it's difficult to confirm without witnessing the duels of the other students, if that student were to pass the final gate as the top ranker..."

‘!!!!!’

He trailed off, but everyone understood Shadow Master's implication.

Come to think of it, with that level of martial talent, the probability of him passing the final gate as the top ranker was significantly high.

If that were to happen, the choice would lie with the student.

In the end, the debate over who would accept Mok Gyeong-un as a disciple might become entirely futile.

‘That’s right. It’s pointless for us to argue.’

Unlike those who agreed with Shadow Master’s words, Hang Yeo-ryang, the Valley Master of the Summoning Sound Valley, glanced at Mok Gyeong-un with twinkling eyes.

Mok Gyeong-un sat on the ground, his arms crossed, watching the next duel.

The next duel was between Mo Ha-rang of the Demon Fire Hall, ranked third, and Yeon Mu-ung of the Esoteric Realm Gate, ranked fourth.

They were already engaged in a fierce battle.

The confrontation between Mo Ha-rang, who specialized in the Swift Assassination Blade Technique, and Yeon Mu-ung, who wielded the Iron Fist based on the external martial art known as the Iron String Technique[1], was quite intriguing.

Should it be called a battle of lightness and heaviness?

-Bam bam bam bam bam!

As their qi consumption was still low and their stamina was sufficient, the duel between the two was evenly matched.

However, judging solely by their fighting styles, it seemed that Mo Ha-rang, who prioritized swiftness, would tire out faster than Yeon Mu-ung, as her movements were two to three times faster than his.

As he was observing the duel,

-Who do you think will win?

Cheong-ryeong asked.

Without any hesitation, Mok Gyeong-un muttered quietly in response.

“Mo Ha-rang.”

-Ho. Your discernment has improved quite a bit.

She shared the same opinion as Mok Gyeong-un.

At a glance, one might think that Yeon Mu-ung, who was moving in a composed manner while employing the Iron Fist, would have an advantage as time passed, but the difference in their skill levels was evident.

In Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, despite exchanging over twenty moves, Yeon Mu-ung still couldn't keep up with Mo Ha-rang's movements, while she was gradually attacking his weak points.

This alone indicated that Mo Ha-rang was a step above Yeon Mu-ung.

“Damn it!”

As Mok Gyeong-un had predicted, Yeon Mu-ung was gradually becoming impatient.

Yeon Mu-ung, whose Iron String Technique had only reached the 7th stage, had three vulnerable areas.

They were his face, armpits, and ankles.

When the Iron String Technique reached its pinnacle, the entire body would become as hard as rock, resolving most of the weak points.

However, Yeon Mu-ung still had vulnerabilities.

-Bam!

“Hiss!”

At some point, one of Mo Ha-rang’s daggers had penetrated the area near his armpit, one of his weak points.

Yeon Mu-ung, who had been firmly holding his ground, finally employed footwork and retreated.

With this, she could be certain.

‘Found it.’

An incomplete external martial art inevitably had weak spots.

Now that she had found them, she could make her move.

‘You’re finished.’

-Clang! Crack!

As she released the dagger from her hand, the silver thread connected to it moved like a living snake, chasing after Yeon Mu-ung, who was trying to create distance.

It persistently targeted his armpit, tormenting Yeon Mu-ung.

“Damn it!”

Enraged, Yeon Mu-ung tried to strike down the silver thread, but it entangled and coiled around his arm like a spider’s web.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

The outcome would soon be determined.

Being at a higher level than himself and having his weak points exposed, it would be difficult for Yeon Mu-ung to endure.

At that moment, Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave, or rather, the evil spirit possessing him, approached Mok Gyeong-un and whispered in a low voice.

“My Lord. What should we do?”

The evil spirit glanced at someone.

It was Mok Yu-cheon.

Although he knew that Mok Gyeong-un didn't have any particular feelings towards him, they were ostensibly brothers, so he was asking how to handle the situation.

Without much contemplation, Mok Gyeong-un replied.

“Confront him at the level of the body's owner.”

“Understood.”

The evil spirit occupying Yeom Ga's body could display greater martial prowess, but doing so might unnecessarily draw attention, so there was no need for that.

Besides, with the evil spirit's skill, even at Yeom Ga's level, it would not be difficult to defeat Mok Yu-cheon.

The experience of his previous life could not be ignored.

At that moment,

“Gasp!”

Mu Jang-yak, who had been lying unconscious beside them, woke up.

Upon waking up, he struggled to regulate his breathing, sitting up and coughing.

“Cough, cough.”

Seeing him like this, Mok Yu-cheon approached and spoke.

“Jang-yak. Are you alright?”

“Cough, cough... I-I’m fine.”

After coughing a few more times, Mu Jang-yak finally managed to catch his breath and raised his head.

Then, with a bitter look in his eyes, he opened his mouth.

“As expected... I lost.”

“...You fought well enough.”

Mok Yu-cheon spoke in a regretful tone.

He wanted to console him in a way that could lift his spirits, but there was no way to do so.

Not only had he reached the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm, but he had even mastered the profound technique of the Right Fist, Left Palm technique, which even peerless masters couldn’t replicate. Yet, he had still lost.

His opponent had perfectly recreated his own technique after witnessing it only once.

The opponent was simply the worst.

‘Mok Gyeong-un...’

What on earth are you?

He had thought that something had changed about him since the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, but this was a completely different level of existence.

Even he, who was called a genius, felt a sense of inferiority compared to Mok Gyeong-un's martial talent.

That fellow was a monster in itself.

"Phew."

At that moment, Mu Jang-yak struggled to stand up.

Mok Yu-cheon tried to stop him.

"Don't push yourself. Sit down and circulate your qi. You must be quite dizzy after being hit in the jaw and face."

The fact that he had woken up this quickly was already remarkable.

Despite Mok Yu-cheon's suggestion, Mu Jang-yak shook his head, saying he was fine, and then got up and approached Mok Gyeong-un.

Mok Yu-cheon looked at him with puzzlement.

Was he doing this because he couldn't accept the outcome of the duel?

Thinking that a dispute might occur, Mok Yu-cheon approached to intervene.

-Plop!

However, Mu Jang-yak sat down next to Mok Gyeong-un and spoke in a low voice.

"I lost. No, I lost to you. As promised, my lord..."

“Ah, no. I think you used the wrong form of address.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Mu Jang-yak’s cheeks trembled, and then,

“...I will serve you as my master. Please forgive me for not being able to properly show my loyalty in front of the leaders and their watchful eyes.”

‘!?’

Mok Yu-cheon, who had intended to intervene in case a dispute broke out, couldn’t hide his bewilderment upon hearing their conversation.

‘Master?’

What was this about?

Why was Mu Jang-yak addressing Mok Gyeong-un as his master and submitting to him in such a humiliating manner?

Could it be related to the promise they had mentioned earlier?

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un looked at him with a smile and pointed his finger at a certain location.

It was the training ground in the center of the plaza where the duel was taking place.

‘Ah?’

Looking over there, the outcome of the duel had been determined.

“Haa... Haa... I lost.”

Yeon Mu-ung of the Esoteric Realm Gate, holding his blood-soaked right armpit, knelt on one knee in front of Mo Ha-rang’s dagger, acknowledging his defeat.

This meant that it was now Mok Yu-cheon’s turn to duel.

Although he was curious about what had transpired between those two, he had to prepare for the duel first.

‘Tsk.’

Mok Yu-cheon turned his body, intending to leave.

At that moment,

“Good luck.”

“Yes, Master.”

‘!?’

Upon hearing the voice of Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave addressing Mok Gyeong-un as “Master,” Mok Yu-cheon froze in place.

What was going on?

He knew that person had been accompanying Mok Gyeong-un for some time, but “Master”?

Wasn't that a form of address typically used by slaves or servants?

With that, Mok Yu-cheon turned around and spoke to Mok Gyeong-un in a dumbfounded tone.

“...What have you done?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Why are they calling you their master? What exactly have you done to them?”

In response to Mok Yu-cheon's question, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and replied.

“I didn't do anything special.”

“What do you mean you didn't do anything special? Then why are they addressing you as their master or whatever...”

“Mok Yu-cheon!”

At that moment, the voice of Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, resounded.

Mok Yu-cheon bit his lip and turned around, walking towards the center of the plaza.

While dealing with that fellow here in the Corpse Blood Valley, he had realized his devilish true colors.

There was no doubt that he had played some trick.

At that moment, he saw Mo Ha-rang, who had won the duel, walking back to where the students were.

Considering their friendship from being in the same team during the flag contest, Mok Yu-cheon spoke.

“Congratulations on your victory.”

“...Thanks.”

-Step, step!

As they approached each other, Mok Yu-cheon warned in a whisper.

“Stay away from that Mok Gyeong-un. I don’t know what trick he played, but it seems like he’s making the students around him serve him as their master.”

He was telling her this out of a sense of camaraderie, as they had been on the same team.

However,

“...That advice. It’s already too late.”

‘!?’

Upon hearing Mo Ha-rang’s voice as she passed by, Mok Yu-cheon’s expression stiffened.

So, she was also serving Mok Gyeong-un as her master?

Mok Yu-cheon turned his head and looked at Mok Gyeong-un with trembling eyes.

Despite being brought here as a hostage, what the hell are you up to in this place?

Thus, the duel between Mok Yu-cheon and the evil spirit possessing Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave began.

As he was observing the duel, a voice echoed in Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

-Hello.

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un slightly furrowed his brows.

What was this?

This wasn't Cheong-ryeong's voice.

The sound penetrated his ears, but it wasn't reverberating around him; it sounded as if someone was whispering directly into his ear.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes narrowed as he lightly scanned his surroundings.

Where did that voice come from?

At that moment,

-Hehehe.

A chuckle was heard.

At that moment, as Mok Gyeong-un was raising his vigilance, he detected the faint form of internal energy carried along with the reverberating vibration of the incoming sound.

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un turned his head and looked at Hang Yeo-ryang, the Valley Master of the Summoning Sound Valley, who was sitting as a spectator beside the platform.

‘Ha!’

At this, a glimmer of admiration flashed in her eyes.

Ah, yes. That fellow truly exceeded her imagination.

When infusing internal energy into sound from a distance, it was difficult to discern who had spoken and pinpoint their location.

Yet, he had instantly found her from this distance.

‘I must have him, indeed.’

He was not someone she could afford to concede.

Chapter 115 – Disciple Scramble (2)

At this distance, when infusing internal energy into sound, it was difficult to discern who had spoken and pinpoint their location.

However, surprisingly, Mok Gyeong-un had found her after just two attempts.

A mere brat who had merely reached the Peak Realm possessed such keen perception?

Hang Yeo-ryang, the Valley Master of the Summoning Sound Valley, clicked her tongue and smacked her lips.

A strong sense of desire arose within her.

‘How can I concede something like this?’

Even if most of the leaders were after him, she had no intention of yielding whatsoever.

No, their opinions didn’t matter anyway.

There was only one thing to consider.

It was a matter of successfully enticing Mok Gyeong-un.

Hang Yeo-ryang looked at Mok Gyeong-un and spoke again, infusing internal energy into her voice.

-Hehehe. You’re quite something. To find me instantly like that.

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

He had simply looked at the center of the rippling energy waves, and his guess had been correct.

However, how did she do it?

‘Without moving her lips?’

The sound was echoing in his ears.

As he was puzzled, Hang Yeo-ryang said to Mok Gyeong-un,

-Why are you surprised?

Rather than being surprised, he found it intriguing.

The method of transmitting sound over such a distance using qi seemed quite useful.

Should it be said that it appeared suitable for secretly speaking to someone?

-Are you curious about how it's done?

There was no way he wouldn't be curious.

Mok Gyeong-un lightly nodded his head.

Then,

-Shall I teach you?

She suddenly offered to teach him this?

Mok Gyeong-un looked at her with puzzlement.

Mok Gyeong-un believed that everything had a corresponding price, so he thought there was no way that woman would teach him such a thing with pure intentions.

‘It’s quite fascinating, but not knowing it won’t cause any inconvenience.’

With that, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and turned his head away.

Hang Yeo-ryang slightly furrowed her brows.

She had tried to pique his interest, but she hadn’t expected him to refuse so readily.

‘...What an interesting kid.’

She hadn’t demanded any compensation and had simply offered to teach him, yet this was the first time she had seen someone instantly end their displayed interest like that.

Because of that, she became even more intrigued.

Thus, she continued,

-The essence of sound techniques is to create vibrations in the air through sound. This can be considered a similar principle.

‘!?’

What was this?

He hadn’t agreed to learn it, but as she explained the principle, one of Mok Gyeong-un’s eyebrows slightly raised.

Regardless, Hang Yeo-ryang continued her explanation.

-Imagine touching cotton with your qi between your vocal cords and the root of your tongue at the Yanquan acupoint[1], generating internal energy and quickly creating vibrations. And then...

Even if he didn't want to listen, the continuous sound made it impossible for him not to understand the method.

Moreover, surprisingly, the method wasn't very difficult.

-A clever kid like you should be able to do it sufficiently with this level of explanation, right?

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un slightly tilted his head to the side.

Then, looking at Hang Yeo-ryang, he followed her instructions, sending internal energy to the Yanquan acupoint and tried it once.

-Is this how it's done?

‘Correct.’

Upon hearing his voice, Hang Yeo-ryang slightly raised the corners of her mouth.

He was indeed intelligent.

Even if the execution seemed easy, comprehending and performing it in one attempt was not a simple feat.

He possessed the sharpness to grasp the principles that easily.

‘He's a delightful child to teach.’

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un asked her,

-It's impressive. What is this technique called?

-The monks of Shaolin refer to it as the 'Intention-Sealing Voice Transmission' (意闔傳聲), but the Valley Master and those who study sound techniques call it the 'Secret Voice Transmission' (傳音入密). In short, it's also referred to as 'Voice Transmission'.

-Voice Transmission... Is this a technique that others cannot hear?

-That's right. It's a technique truly suitable for having secret conversations, like between you and me. Isn't it nice?

-Yes, it is.

It certainly seemed like a useful technique.

Using very faint qi to create vibrations and transmit sound.

He had no particular desire to learn it, but since she had taught him on her own accord, it would likely come in handy.

As they were conversing, she transmitted a message to him.

-I watched your duel, and it was truly magnificent.

-Thank you.

-Originally, the Valley Master had come to take a female disciple, but it was a duel that made me change my mind.

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled inwardly.

She was openly revealing her intentions.

As expected, there was a purpose behind teaching him this technique.

-Ah, hearing you say that, I'm at a loss for words.

-Hehehe. Child, let me be direct. Become this Valley Master's disciple. Such opportunities are rare.

Hang Yeo-ryang, the Valley Master of the Summoning Sound Valley, blatantly proposed for him to become her disciple.

In fact, her proposal was indeed a rare occurrence.

The final gate hadn't even ended yet, and the closing ceremony hadn't taken place, so approaching a student and persuading them to become a disciple was something that wouldn't happen unless they were exceptionally fond of them.

However, the problem was that Mok Gyeong-un himself had no intention whatsoever of becoming the Valley Master of the Summoning Sound Valley's disciple.

Mok Gyeong-un transmitted a message with a regretful expression.

-Oh my, what should I do? I am truly grateful for the Valley Master's offer, but I need more time to consider it.

He expressed it politely since she had taught him something.

It was essentially no different from a refusal.

At this, Hang Yeo-ryang let out a small snort.

‘Do you think you can escape from this Valley Master?’

She had already made up her mind to accept Mok Gyeong-un as her disciple.

Therefore, she was determined to make him beg her to accept him as a disciple, using whatever means necessary.

-If you're considering the two kings, I'd like to tell you that it's a foolish choice.

-A foolish choice?

-Bright Blade King Son Yun already has four disciples and a designated successor. If you were to join them, do you think you'd be able to fully showcase your talent?

-Ah... Is that so?

-Hehehe. From the looks of it, you must have thought of choosing Thunderbolt Fist King in mind. But do you know this?

-What are you referring to?

-The Thunderbolt Fist King's only disciple became crippled in his right arm while learning his secret techniques.

‘Hmm.’

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un stroked his chin.

In fact, he hadn't chosen anyone yet.

Originally, he had his sights set on Baek Sa-ha, the Poison Annihilation King, but since he didn't attend as a spectator, his original plan had been disrupted.

However, if what Hang Yeo-ryang said was true, becoming a disciple of the two kings might turn out to be quite troublesome.

‘Internal competition or the risk of martial arts?’

Whichever it was, it became unpleasant to choose.

However, this information was ultimately Hang Yeo-ryang's attempt to exclude these two individuals.

Therefore, Mok Gyeong-un considered it as information to be referenced, nothing more, nothing less.

-Yes, I will keep the Valley Master's advice in mind.

-...

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, which seemed to draw a line, she tapped her fingers on the chair.

This kid seemed to be more stubborn than he appeared.

If it weren't for the final gate or the closing ceremony, she would have wanted to forcibly take him away and reshape his mental state to her liking.

However, the most troublesome person was right across the platform.

Bright Blade King Son Yun.

He was someone who interfered and obstructed her affairs at every turn.

But now, that time was not far off.

Once she reached the seventh stage, the pinnacle of the Sound Wave Transmission Technique (派攻音響功), no one would be able to stand against her, except for the two among the Five Kings who had attained the realm of Awakening.

Even the Bright Blade King was no exception.

Thus, she decided to change her approach and try to coax and persuade Mok Gyeong-un this time.

-Do you know why this Valley Master only wanted to accept female disciples?

-...

-This Valley has always accepted mostly female disciples, except in truly special cases. And it's not limited to disciples. The majority of those in my Valley are women.

-...

-If you become this Valley Master's disciple, you'll be able to enjoy the feeling of being the First Emperor of the Epang Palace[2]. Doesn't it tempt you?

-...I apologize.

Mok Gyeong-un flatly refused her temptation.

‘Look at this brat.’

He should be at an age where his blood was boiling, yet he even rejected such a proposal?

At this sight, Hang Yeo-ryang’s annoyance started to rise, going beyond his stubbornness.

Originally, she had a whimsical temperament and didn’t engage in persuading others or such acts.

If she liked something, she would forcibly take it, that’s all.

‘If he keeps responding like this...’

Her patience was reaching its limit, but she decided to endure it one last time.

-From what I can see, you seem to be learning sword techniques. In that case, wouldn’t it be even better to become this Valley Master’s disciple?

-...What do you mean by that?

-The Bright Blade King and the Shadow Master are masters of blade techniques, and the Thunderbolt Fist King, as his title suggests, is a master of the Thunderstrike Fist. However, judging from the duel, it seems that what you primarily trained in is sword techniques.

She considered Mok Gyeong-un’s sword techniques to be more refined than his fist techniques during the duel.

In that regard, she deduced that Mok Gyeong-un had mainly practiced sword techniques.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un spoke,

-As far as I know, the Valley Master is primarily skilled in sound techniques.

-Hehehe. While that is certainly true, the Valley Master is also a master of the sword, comparable to my own sound techniques. I can confidently say that if you learn the Striking Sword Technique[3], one of my Valley's legacies, you will reach an even higher realm of swordsmanship.

‘Striking Sword Technique?’

Did she also have proficiency in sword techniques?

However, there was one fact that Hang Yeo-ryang was unaware of.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

-I am grateful for your words, but I don't necessarily have to focus on sword techniques.

Although she didn't know, Mok Gyeong-un hadn't devoted himself solely to the sword.

He was prepared to learn whatever he deemed necessary.

However, Mok Gyeong-un's response ultimately angered Hang Yeo-ryang.

-Tsk!

‘This Valley Master is offering such a proposal, yet he keeps arrogantly refusing.’

If carrots didn't work, then the answer was the whip.

In fact, that was more convenient for her.

-This Valley Master is holding you in such high regard and trying to accept you as a disciple, yet you are being utterly arrogant. Very well. In that case, I'll have to accept that Mok Yu-cheon brat who is currently engaged in a duel as a subordinate of my Valley.

‘Mok Yu-cheon?’

Mok Yu-cheon and the evil spirit possessing Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave were in the midst of a fierce duel at the training ground in the center of the plaza.

They were almost evenly matched.

Most of the leaders were also watching their duel with interest.

-I heard that the child is your younger brother, right?

Before the duel, when Won Byeong-hak, the Thunderbolt Fist King, learned that the two shared the same surname, Mok, he had asked if they were siblings.

In response, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, deemed it acceptable to reveal that information and confirmed it.

That was how she knew about it.

-Yes, that's correct.

-I see. That child also seems quite useful. Don't you think?

-...

-If he's such a useful talent, I should accept him as a subordinate, play with him for a while, and then kill him when I lose interest.

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un couldn't help but chuckle.

As he continued to express his refusal, she was now blatantly threatening him.

Although she spoke indirectly, she was threatening to take his younger brother as a subordinate and kill him if Mok Gyeong-un didn't become her disciple.

‘Try refusing again this time.’

She twitched her lips and looked at Mok Gyeong-un with malicious eyes.

Considering that both siblings had made it to this stage, they must have relied on each other while passing through the gates.

In that case, their brotherly bond should be deep.

‘If you don't want to let your younger brother die, obediently become the Valley Master's disciple...’

-Do as you please.

‘!?’

Suddenly, upon hearing Mok Gyeong-un's transmitted voice echoing in her ears, her expression, which had been twitching her lips venomously, stiffened.

What did he mean by doing as she pleased?

For a moment, she doubted her own ears.

Hang Yeo-ryang spoke in a voice mixed with anger,

-You must think that this Valley Master wouldn't actually do it.

She was someone who followed through on her words.

How dare a mere student not listen to her words and respond in such a manner?

Fine. Then she would truly show him.

-It's all your own doing. Let's see if you can remain so composed after losing your younger brother.

-Yes, yes. Do as you please.

-Ha! You...

-You can kill him, I don't mind, and you can even dismember him and turn him into a cripple after playing with him. After all, that's the Valley Master's decision for the subordinate you're taking in.

-What?

-If my younger brother can make the Valley Master happy even in such a way, that would be quite fortunate.

-Tsk!

He says that with a smile on his face.

-...

Suddenly, rather than her anger rising, she was left dumbfounded.

What was wrong with that brat?

Although there was a distance between them, as someone who had reached the Transcendent Realm, she could see Mok Gyeong-un's face to a certain extent.

How could he smile and say it was fine to kill his younger brother or turn him into a cripple?

It wasn't an expression of pretending to be composed while scheming something.

His face truly seemed to convey that he didn't mind.

‘...Is that kid really in his right mind?’

Chapter 116 – Disciple Scramble (3)

How could he smile and say it was fine to kill his younger brother or turn him into a cripple?

It wasn't an expression of pretending to be composed while scheming something.

‘...Is that kid truly insane?’

Hang Yeo-ryang herself was notorious for her eccentric and whimsical temperament, but this was the first time she had encountered someone like him.

It wasn't a deliberate display of bravado.

Did that imply that the brotherly bond between the two wasn't particularly deep?

Occasionally, there were those who even targeted each other's lives while competing for the position of family heir, so it was possible.

'This type of threat is meaningless.'

The desire to forcibly drag him away at once grew stronger.

At that moment, she heard someone's voice in her ear.

"Valley Master Hang. Contacting a student before the closing ceremony is a violation of the rules, it seems."

-Flinch!

Startled, she turned her head to the side.

The owner of the voice was Shadow Clan Master.

Shadow Clan Master's gaze remained fixed on the ongoing duel.

She furrowed her brows at this.

'Impossible. The Secret Voice Transmission is a technique that transmits sound only to a specific recipient, so he shouldn't have been able to hear it.'

No matter how high one's realm was, this technique couldn't be overheard.

However, how did he realize that she was attempting to contact Mok Gyeong-un?

As she was contemplating this, Shadow Clan Master spoke as if reading her thoughts.

“If you stare too blatantly, it becomes noticeable.”

“...What are you talking about?”

She feigned ignorance.

Shadow Clan Master then spoke with his characteristic laughter.

“Ohoho. The Summoning Sound Valley's sect, the Sound Wave Transmission Sect, has many unique techniques related to sound, I hear. Among them, there's a technique called the Secret Voice Transmission that allows one to convey their intentions to a specific person, isn't that right?”

“...”

At Shadow Clan Master's words, Hang Yeo-ryang's expression turned cold.

She knew that Shadow Clan Master primarily dealt with confidential matters, but she had no idea he was aware of the Secret Voice Transmission, one of her sect's techniques.

If that was the case,

‘You've been continuously monitoring me.’

She thought she had escaped the watchful eye of the Clan Leader, but it seemed that wasn't the case.

As she was feeling perplexed, Shadow Clan Master continued speaking without even glancing at her.

“It’s a technique I truly wish to learn. However, even within the sect, there are laws and rules to be observed, so I hope the Valley Master will keep that in mind.”

“...”

She didn’t respond.

Although she felt displeased about him knowing her sect’s technique, it wouldn’t be beneficial to clash with Shadow Clan Master, the eyes and ears of the Clan Leader.

“Ooh!”

At that moment, exclamations erupted from various directions.

The reason for this was the duel unfolding in the training ground of the plaza.

“Ho.”

Even Shadow Clan Master’s eyes narrowed as if surprised.

It was understandable, as the duel had been almost evenly matched from the beginning.

However, most had predicted Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave to be the victor of this duel.

This was because, judging from the techniques Yeom Ga displayed during the duel, he seemed to be a highly experienced master, targeting only the most opportune moments.

On the other hand, Mok Yu-cheon appeared to lack dueling experience but compensated for it with his exceptional instincts.

‘But in the end, experience is the key.’

Thus, it was believed that as time passed, Yeom Ga would gain the advantage.

Shadow Clan Master shared the same opinion.

However,

“Cough... Cough...”

Black blood was flowing from the mouth of Yeom Ga, who was kneeling on one knee in the training ground.

What on earth had happened?

Mok Gyeong-un, with narrowed eyes, looked at Mok Yu-cheon standing in front of Yeom Ga.

“Haa... Haa...”

Mok Yu-cheon was exhaling rough breaths.

A faint red haze was rising from his body, and his skin had completely turned a brown hue.

Even the whites of his eyes had turned brown, making his appearance extremely bizarre.

‘What is that?’

Even the masters of the Heaven and Earth Society, who had relatively open minds regarding martial arts, were astounded, as they had never seen such a sight before.

Bright Blade King Son Yun crossed his arms and muttered.

“His power has nearly doubled.”

As someone with the keenest perception among them, it was evident to him.

Just a moment ago, Mok Yu-cheon, who was merely at the beginning of the Peak Realm, had his power surge rapidly after transforming into that state.

He was almost surpassing the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm.

Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak also frowned and spoke in a tone of incomprehension.

“Could it be that the child has mastered an evil technique?”

Evil techniques.

In martial arts, it refers to mastering techniques in a manner that deviates from the established paths.

Among the masters of the demonic sects, there were occasionally those who mastered evil techniques and rapidly advanced their martial arts.

However, such methods had significant side effects since they deviated from the normal path.

For instance, due to the exceptionally rapid growth, it would be difficult to progress beyond a certain level, or the meridians would become twisted or one would fall into a state of delusion due to incorrect qi circulation methods.

Bright Blade King Son Yun, looking at Mok Yu-cheon's brown eyes, said,

“...If he has mastered an evil technique, we may need to subdue that child.”

One of the biggest problems with evil techniques was that as the energy rapidly increased, it would affect the brain, causing one to lose rationality and run amok.

Looking at Mok Yu-cheon's current state, he was definitely not normal.

-Ha! Your creation is finally showing its true colors, mortal.

Cheong-ryeong's voice echoed in his ear.

Mok Gyeong-un also slightly nodded his head.

The Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method, the exclusive cultivation method of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor's head, was an ascending martial art but definitely not an evil technique.

Rather, it properly followed the principles of righteous cultivation.

However, the issue was that Mok Gyeong-un had arbitrarily changed the mnemonics of the technique Mok Yu-cheon had mastered.

‘As expected, it's that.’

It seemed that the side effects had finally manifested.

In fact, since he had tampered with the ascending martial art, the Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method, it wouldn't have been strange if such an incident had occurred at any time.

The fact that it had only happened now could be considered fortunate.

-Judging from his appearance, he's close to a state of rampage. If he's unlucky, his meridians may completely rupture, and he could die on the spot.

At Cheong-ryeong's words, Mok Gyeong-un twitched the corners of his mouth.

‘Is this a good thing?’

Mok Gyeong-un had intended to dispose of Mok Yu-cheon at an appropriate time.

However, if he were to lose his life due to the side effects of the cultivation method in front of everyone like this, it would be convenient as there would be no need for him to take action.

However, the evil spirit's condition seemed worse than expected.

“Cough... Cough...”

Just now, as Mok Yu-cheon's power had surged rapidly, the evil spirit had been struck in the chest, and he was continuously coughing up blood.

The evil spirit, with his head lowered, glanced at Mok Gyeong-un.

From his appearance, it seemed as if he was asking what to do.

‘Hmm.’

As an evil spirit, he should be able to regulate the possessed body to alleviate the injuries to a certain extent, but judging from his behavior, it must not be an ordinary injury.

However, if Mok Yu-cheon were to use that flawed cultivation method a bit more, it could further aggravate the side effects.

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and transmitted a message.

-Just endure it for a while and confront Mok Yu-cheon...

It was at that very moment.

-Thud!

Suddenly, the evil spirit's eyes rolled back, and he collapsed.

‘What...’

What on earth had happened?

Although an evil spirit possessing a body would be affected by it to a certain extent, the body was essentially no different from clothing, so he should have been able to control the pain.

However, why did he faint?

-Swish!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un slightly furrowed his brows.

It was because the evil spirit possessing Yeom Ga's body had left it.

Why did he suddenly leave the body?

As he was puzzled, the evil spirit spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

-...

‘What? He's dead?’

Surprisingly, the reason the evil spirit had left the body was that Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave had breathed his last.

Naturally, Mok Gyeong-un had thought he would easily win.

However, that expectation had been shattered.

-...

At the evil spirit's words, Mok Gyeong-un looked at Mok Yu-cheon with narrowed eyes.

According to the evil spirit, at the moment when he thought the match was over and was about to finish it, he had been caught off guard by a surprise attack, and after that, the meridians in his chest had suddenly begun to rupture.

He had tried to arbitrarily repair the injured areas, but the meridians were rupturing at too fast a pace, leaving him with no options.

-What a coincidence.

‘Pardon?’

-Is this what they call a blind fish getting caught?

It was difficult to understand what Cheong-ryeong meant.

At that moment, Mok Yu-cheon, still in his bizarre state with his entire body discolored, approached the fallen body of Yeom Ga and tried to reach out his hand.

Right then,

-Bam!

Someone blocked his way.

It was Gwak Mun-gi, the senior warrior who assisted Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master.

“The match is over. Stop.”

Gwak Mun-gi, with a somewhat tense expression, extended his hand and showed wariness towards Mok Yu-cheon.

It was understandable, as Mok Yu-cheon’s appearance was extremely dangerous to anyone’s eyes.

He was in a state where he could go on a rampage at any moment.

As Gwak Mun-gi was on guard, Mok Yu-cheon retreated about two steps back.

‘His rationality still remains.’

At this, senior warrior Gwak Mun-gi felt relieved inwardly.

If he had lost his rationality and gone berserk, it would have been a dangerous situation where they would have had to subdue him in some way.

-Swish!

With that, Gwak Mun-gi placed his finger on the neck of the fallen Yeom Ga.

Then, he frowned and looked at the platform.

Upon seeing his expression, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, stiffened.

‘Oh no...’

He had sent him to confirm whether Yeom Ga was alive or dead because his collapsed state looked ominous.

However, judging from that expression, it seemed his concerns had become reality.

It was truly a perplexing situation.

Deaths occurring in the Corpse Blood Valley’s gates weren’t a significant issue, but if a talent like Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave were to die here, it would be an extremely regrettable occurrence.

Of all places, it had to happen in the final gate.

At that moment, upon seeing senior warrior Gwak Mun-gi's reaction, Mok Yu-cheon couldn't hide his bewilderment.

‘What... What is this...’

Mok Yu-cheon had no intention of killing Yeom Ga in this duel.

However, the moment he circulated the Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method, he had been unknowingly gripped by an immense murderous intent.

He couldn't fathom the reason.

Even now, a strong urge was boiling inside him, and he was in the mood to run wild at any moment.

Nevertheless, Mok Yu-cheon suppressed it with extreme perseverance.

‘Stop... Stop it.’

-Sizzle sizzle sizzle!

Then, gradually, the color of Mok Yu-cheon's skin began to lighten.

Upon seeing this, a glimmer of admiration appeared in the eyes of a few leaders.

‘He's suppressing the urge?’

To them, Mok Yu-cheon's behavior was quite refreshing.

Judging from the rapid increase in power and the bizarre skin discoloration, it was close to a state of pre-rampage due to the side effects of an evil technique.

However, he had managed to suppress and control it on his own.

‘Look at this kid.’

To some, this was quite a novel sight.

Even with a considerably strong willpower, it would have been difficult to overcome the urge, yet at that age, he displayed such perseverance.

On the other hand, Mok Gyeong-un smacked his lips as if disappointed.

‘What a pity.’

He had hoped for Mok Yu-cheon to go berserk and die on the spot, but instead, he had endured it.

It could be said that he was lucky.

Cheong-ryeong, who seemed to share the same sentiment, agreed with him.

-What a fortunate mortal.

‘Indeed.’

-But it’s quite interesting.

What was interesting about it?

As he was puzzled, she spoke.

-The fact that the mnemonics you arbitrarily changed without much thought are having such an effect.

‘...’

He had nothing to say about that.

Who would have predicted that the power would surge so rapidly and cause such a bizarre phenomenon of damaging the meridians just by haphazardly altering the mnemonics?

However, the fact that the altered cultivation method was dangerous remained unchanged.

About half an hour passed like that.

The situation had taken an ironic turn.

The reason for this was that Mo Ha-rang from the Demon Fire Hall, Mok Gyeong-un’s opponent for the next duel, had forfeited, stating that she had no confidence in winning the duel.

However, with this development, the contenders for the top spot in the final gate had become Mok Gyeong-un and Mok Yu-cheon.

This made the leaders who had come as spectators unable to hide their astonishment.

Who would have imagined that siblings from the same martial family would compete for the top spot?

It was also a first in the history of the Corpse Blood Valley’s gates.

Moreover,

‘Two siblings who were brought here as hostages are competing.’

“Ohoho.”

Among the spectators, Shadow Clan Master, one of those who knew the identities of the Mok siblings, found this situation quite intriguing.

On the other hand, Bright Blade King Son Yun, who had directly brought them here, clicked his tongue inwardly.

‘How did this happen...’

Initially, he had thought that these two would lose their lives in the Corpse Blood Valley, but he had never anticipated such an outcome.

If this fact were to spread within the Heaven and Earth Society, it would cause a huge controversy.

The mere fact that two youngsters from a righteous sect, who weren’t even members of the Heaven and Earth Society and had been brought here as hostages, were competing for the top spot in the Corpse Blood Valley’s gates was quite a blow to their pride.

No, it was even an unpleasant occurrence.

‘...The Sect Leader has made a bad move.’

If he hadn’t sent them here in the first place, such a situation wouldn’t have occurred.

However, these two had survived until the end.

And according to the laws of the Corpse Blood Valley, they had even gained the opportunity to become disciples of the Heaven and Earth Society's leaders.

Even the Sect Leader couldn't have foreseen this.

'There's no other choice now.'

In this situation, it was better to thoroughly transform those two into people of the Heaven and Earth Society.

That way, they could be turned into symbols.

As excellent symbols of betrayal, abandoning the righteous sect, which could be considered the roots of the later generation of the righteous pathway, and growing as talents of the Heaven and Earth Society.

"Now. You two, face each other."

At that moment, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master on the platform, called them to the training ground and had them face each other.

Thus, the two siblings found themselves standing face to face.

"Then, begin the duel!"

Lee Ji-yeom shouted as he lowered his raised hand.

As the starting signal was given, Mok Yu-cheon assumed a ready stance and spoke with a face full of anger.

“You jerk?”

“What?”

Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly asked back.

Then, Mok Yu-cheon narrowed the distance step by step and confronted him.

“You didn’t properly teach me the cultivation method!”

At first, he hadn’t been suspicious.

It was because he had gone through multiple confirmation processes.

However, after coming here and experiencing Mok Gyeong-un’s true nature, he became convinced.

That bastard definitely hadn’t properly taught him the mnemonics of the Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method, which was exclusively for the head of the family.

‘Because of you, I...’

Consumed by murderous intent, he had killed someone during the duel.

And even now, he couldn’t control it and was forcibly suppressing it.

No matter how estranged they were as siblings, as long as they were from the same family, he hoped that Mok Gyeong-un would at least feel remorse, if not take responsibility, for his side effects.

However,

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“You’re realizing it only now? You’re truly a magnificent fool.”

“You!!!!”

Mok Yu-cheon, with anger surging to his head, launched himself towards Mok Gyeong-un.

He was about to unleash the best techniques he was capable of, but

-Bam!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un, with lightning speed, flicked his wrist and grabbed his neck, slamming him to the ground.

-Boom!

“Ugh!”

Then, he whispered in his ear,

“How do you expect to do anything to me like this? Why don’t you try using that cultivation method instead?”

Chapter 117 – Disciple Scramble (4)

“How do you expect to do anything to me like this? Why don’t you try using that cultivation method instead?”

Mok Gyeong-un’s mocking tone.

At those words, a blazing fury, like a furnace, surged from a spot in Mok Yu-cheon’s chest.

Until just a month ago, to him, Mok Gyeong-un was nothing more than a cowardly trash who couldn’t be found to have any talent.

But how could this situation unfold?

How could the circumstances be turned upside down in just a month, making him the inferior one?

-Grit!

His teeth ground together.

Hadn’t he made bloody efforts beyond his talent to overturn the notion of his lowly birth?

Yet he was being pushed back by this devilish fellow?

It was becoming increasingly difficult to contain his anger.

-Thump! Thump!

His heart pounded strongly, and the impulse of murderous intent that he had been suppressing was trying to rise again.

Seeing him like that, Mok Gyeong-un spoke as if he had wished for it, raising the corners of his mouth.

“Good. That’s how it should be.”

‘!?’

Upon hearing those words, Mok Yu-cheon felt a momentary pang of regret.

In a moment of humiliation, he had almost released the impulse he had been suppressing with difficulty, unable to control his anger.

Mok Yu-cheon bit his lip and suppressed his rage.

He absolutely couldn’t do as this fellow wished.

‘No. I have to endure.’

If he were to indulge in that impulse, he wouldn’t be able to control what he might do.

Seeing his reaction, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

He found this aspect to be quite troublesome.

Should it be called unnecessarily stubborn?

However, although brief, he had experienced Mok Yu-cheon in the Yeon Mok Sword Manor and had information about him.

Mok Yu-cheon’s reverse scale was easy to trigger.

“For a lowly courtesan’s son, your patience is quite...”

Before he could even finish his sentence,

-Whoosh!

At that moment, a strong rebound force arose from Mok Yu-cheon’s neck, and along with the hand grasping his neck, Mok Gyeong-un’s body was flung backward.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been lifted nearly three feet in the air, somersaulted and landed on the ground.

-Swish!

Even so, he was pushed back nearly five steps.

Having been pushed back and regained his balance, Mok Gyeong-un raised his head.

‘So this was it.’

His power had surged in an instant.

It seemed to have nearly doubled, already surpassing the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm.

Seeing that, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue inwardly.

‘It turned out like this.’

Although it was a side effect caused by the incorrect mnemonics, what were the chances of such an absurd situation occurring where the power nearly doubled?

It was no different from searching for a needle in a sandy beach.

-Sizzle!

The red mist flowing from Mok Yu-cheon's entire body was ominous beyond compare.

The atmosphere seemed even more dangerous due to his brown skin and whitened eyes.

Seeing him like that, a glimmer of admiration appeared in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

‘Ah. So that's how it is.’

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes differed from those of ordinary people.

After embracing the energy of death, the death qi, and opening the Ghost Eyes, he could see the flow of energy.

Because of that, he could witness right in front of him how Mok Yu-cheon's energy was surging.

The principle was quite unique.

‘How fascinating.’

He had only changed a few parts of the original cultivation method's mnemonics, yet such a phenomenon occurred.

No, it was more than a few parts, but it was still fascinating.

The depth of martial arts seemed truly limitless.

“I’ll kill you!”

It was at that very moment.

-Bam!

Mok Yu-cheon shouted at Mok Gyeong-un and launched his body towards him.

Perhaps due to his power nearly doubling, his speed was much faster than before.

Reaching Mok Gyeong-un in an instant, Mok Yu-cheon threw a fist as if to shatter Mok Gyeong-un’s head.

-Tap tap tap tap tap!

Mok Gyeong-un employed the lightness skill and created distance just as the fist was about to touch his head.

He had barely dodged it.

Since he was limiting himself to the peak of the peak realm, he didn’t draw out more than 20% of his internal energy, so it was more efficient to dodge than to block.

-Bam!

However, just as he thought he had created distance, Mok Yu-cheon had already caught up to him.

Then, he unleashed the 9th move of the Yeon Mok Nine Techniques, the basic technique of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, the Yeon Eternal Trading Blows Technique[1].

Mok Gyeong-un was well aware of this technique, so he tried to dodge by predicting its trajectory, but,

-Bam!

“Ugh.”

At that moment, the trajectory of the Yeon Eternal Trading Blows Technique’s fist technique changed, striking his left shoulder and collarbone in succession.

Upon being hit, Mok Gyeong-un’s body was pushed back again.

-Swish!

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un being pushed back, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, stiffened his expression.

It was understandable, as Lee Ji-yeom had confirmed the cause of death after seeing the corpse of the deceased Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave.

The cause of death was the rupture of all the meridians centered around the area of impact.

This was completely different from a typical internal injury.

So, before the duel, he had wanted to inform his liege, Mok Gyeong-un, about this fact, but he couldn’t due to the many watchful eyes.

‘This is serious. Why did the Liege provoke that child?’

Mok Yu-cheon himself seemed to be restraining that impulse.

However, when Mok Gyeong-un said something, he couldn't contain his anger and manifested the evil technique again.

Perhaps the meridians in the areas that were hit just now had ruptured.

‘Ah...’

Was his guess correct?

Mok Gyeong-un was staggering, clutching his shoulder.

Had the meridians indeed ruptured from the previous strike?

At that moment, Mok Yu-cheon also hesitated for a moment upon seeing Mok Gyeong-un grasping his shoulder.

‘Could it be?’

Mok Yu-cheon looked at his palm.

The sensation when he had struck Mok Gyeong-un's shoulder and collarbone just now was very similar to when he had killed Yeom Ga from the Vermillion Slaughter Cave.

It was a sensation as if his qi was mixed with the impulse of murderous intent.

‘What on earth is this?’

If he became more accustomed to this strange sensation, it seemed like he could unleash it at will.

However, now wasn't the time for that.

Although he had been consumed by murderous intent due to Mok Gyeong-un's provocation, he had no real desire to kill him.

He just wanted to teach that devilish fellow a lesson.

At that moment,

"Phew."

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been clutching his shoulder, let go of his hand and straightened his back.

Seeing that, Mok Yu-cheon furrowed his brows.

Yeom Ga, whom he had faced earlier, had coughed up blood and suffered in agony before meeting his demise from this strike.

However, there was no abnormality in Mok Gyeong-un's complexion.

Was he unaffected?

"You..."

"Is this all you've got?"

Mok Gyeong-un's mocking tone.

Upon hearing this, Mok Yu-cheon's eyes turned fierce.

He had been foolish to sympathize with him for a moment, thinking he might die.

“It's disappointing. Is this the limit of your lowly birth?”

-Grit!

The red mist surged even more strongly from Mok Yu-cheon's entire body.

Then, his veins bulged prominently.

The more his emotions intensified, the more it seemed to affect his qi circulation.

‘Bastard.’

Mok Yu-cheon clenched his fists tightly.

It was rather fortunate.

Unlike Yeom Ga, if he were hit in areas like the shoulder, it seemed he could avoid a fatal injury, so he needed to make it so that Mok Gyeong-un couldn't use his limbs for a while.

That way, he would come to his senses.

-Bam!

Mok Yu-cheon, consumed by the impulse of murderous intent, launched his body towards Mok Gyeong-un again.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un also moved accordingly.

This time, instead of retreating, he launched his body head-on towards the charging Mok Yu-cheon.

They both charged towards each other.

-Bam!

Mok Yu-cheon's movement was even faster.

In an instant, a fist flew towards Mok Gyeong-un's face as if to pierce through it.

Mok Gyeong-un moved his head to dodge it and then kicked towards Mok Yu-cheon's abdomen.

-Bam!

Mok Yu-cheon, who was hit in the abdomen, snorted.

As if it didn't hurt at all, he tried to strike down Mok Gyeong-un's leg to break it in that state.

However,

-Bam!

Mok Gyeong-un twisted his body and kicked Mok Yu-cheon's face with his other leg.

Mok Yu-cheon dodged it with a half-step and succeeded in landing a strike on Mok Gyeong-un's thigh.

-Bam!

Mok Gyeong-un's body, having been hit, was slightly pushed back.

-Swish!

Unlike before, he was pushed back about three steps.

As he was pushed back, qi surged from the soles of Mok Gyeong-un's feet, and then,

-Crack!

The floor of the training ground cracked.

Witnessing this, one of the leaders, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, exclaimed in astonishment and muttered.

“He drained it.”

It was a phenomenon where the energy contained in the opponent's fist was drained through the Yongcheon acupoint.

It could be considered a technique of grafting.

If he could use that technique more smoothly, he could utilize the opponent's strength to add greater power and reflect it back.

However, even that alone demonstrated his excellent qi manipulation.

‘Ah, as expected, it’s that child.’

Seeing this, his desire for Mok Gyeong-un intensified even more.

That fellow was undoubtedly a talent who could not only complete the secret technique of the True Origin Lightning Fist but also further develop it.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un once again mocked Mok Yu-cheon.

“How mediocre.”

“You!”

Enraged, Mok Yu-cheon launched his body towards Mok Gyeong-un once more.

-Bam!

‘Why? Why is it?’

Mok Yu-cheon, consumed by the impulse of murderous intent, became more impatient as his anger grew.

His power had surged, making him superior to Mok Gyeong-un in every aspect, yet why couldn’t he defeat him?

Did he need even stronger power?

Mok Yu-cheon tried to draw out more energy by operating the flawed Ignited Wood Heart Transformation Method.

It was at that very moment.

-Snap!

As if the string of rationality had snapped, Mok Yu-cheon's eyes completely turned brown.

Then, he let out a roar like a beast.

“Roar!”

At the power-infused scream reminiscent of a lion's roar, the warriors nearby simultaneously covered their ears.

-Crack! Screech!

Mok Yu-cheon's skin had turned not just brown but black, and his veins bulged prominently, his muscles swelling to the point where his upper garment tore.

-Roar!

Sensing the surging energy emanating from Mok Yu-cheon, the leaders simultaneously rose from their seats.

His power had not just doubled but nearly tripled.

He had almost reached the realm of the early stages of the Transcendent Realm.

‘What kind of evil technique is that?’

‘How did his energy surge to that extent?’

Even Bright Blade King Son Yun and Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak couldn’t hide their astonishment at Mok Yu-cheon’s appearance.

This was a bizarre phenomenon that couldn’t even be adequately described as an evil technique.

The Heaven and Earth Society was not a righteous sect, so evil techniques were not forbidden, but this went beyond that concept and was ominous and dangerous in itself.

‘This has surpassed the level that child can handle.’

Power wielded beyond one’s limits ultimately leads to destruction in the end.

It was a temporary surge caused by a rampage.

However, it was not at a level that Mok Gyeong-un could handle.

“Valley Master. The duel!”

Although Son Yun didn’t finish his sentence, Lee Ji-yeom shared the same thought.

They had to stop the duel immediately.

“Understood...”

It was at that very moment.

-Boom!

The fragments of the training ground floor shot upward, and the rampaging Mok Yu-cheon charged towards Mok Gyeong-un.

His speed was on a different level compared to before.

In the blink of an eye, he reached Mok Gyeong-un, and then,

-Bam!

He swung a vicious fist at Mok Gyeong-un.

Along with it, Mok Gyeong-un's body was flung away, bouncing off the training ground floor three times like a ragdoll before rolling on the ground.

-Thud! Boom! Boom! Crash!

Just by looking at the shattered stone floor of the training ground, one could imagine the extent of the power.

With this level of impact, he might have suffered injuries that crushed the bones throughout his body.

However, the rampaging Mok Yu-cheon didn't stop there.

“Roar!”

Letting out another monstrous scream, he tried to charge towards the fallen Mok Gyeong-un.

Right at that moment,

-Bam! Boom!

Mok Yu-cheon, who had been charging forward, stumbled and fell.

Someone of a large stature was grasping the back of his neck, none other than Bright Blade King Son Yun.

However, Son Yun wasn't the only one restraining him.

At some point, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak was standing right in front of Mok Yu-cheon, his fist drawn back, ready to unleash an explosive force at any moment.

-Bam bam!

“Roar!”

Mok Yu-cheon, suppressed by Bright Blade King Son Yun's hand, tried to resist.

Thanks to his surging power, his entire body shook.

However, no matter how strong he had become, there was no way he could surpass the power of Bright Blade King Son Yun, who had reached the pinnacle-stage of Transcendent Realm.

“Stay still.”

-Boom!

Son Yun pressed down on Mok Yu-cheon's neck even more forcefully.

“Thunderbolt Fist King.”

While holding Mok Yu-cheon down, Son Yun called out to Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak.

It meant to quickly subdue his acupoints.

Won Byeong-hak nodded his head and relaxed his stance, approaching Mok Yu-cheon to attempt to seal his acupoints.

-Tap tap tap tap tap!

However,

“What’s with this brat?”

“What’s the matter?”

“The locations of his acupoints have all changed.”

“His acupoints?”

“That’s right. The locations of his acupoints are all jumbled up, so like this...”

It seemed difficult to make him faint by sealing his acupoints.

As they were dealing with that,

“Let me handle it.”

Upon hearing the voice, Won Byeong-hak turned his head.

There stood Hang Yeo-ryang, the Valley Master of the Summoning Sound Valley. She approached closely and placed her two hands near the ears of Mok Yu-cheon, who was trying to struggle while being suppressed.

And then,

-Bam! Whoosh!

She clenched and opened her hands.

At that moment, a strong vibration occurred, and the eyes of Mok Yu-cheon, who had been trying to resist, rolled back.

Then, his movements soon subsided.

Won Byeong-hak asked with a furrowed brow.

“What did you do?”

Hang Yeo-ryang, the Valley Master of the Summoning Sound Valley, chuckled and tapped her head with her finger, saying,

“Should I say I made this vibrate a little?”

She had used sound techniques to create vibrations, shaking Mok Yu-cheon’s brain through his eardrums.

Is this when the expression “the skull is ringing” is used?

No matter how strong he was, unable to endure the vibrations coming from both sides, Mok Yu-cheon had lost consciousness.

-Thump thump thump!

At that moment, Mok Yu-cheon's swollen muscles subsided.

Not only that, but his blackened skin also regained its original color.

Finding this strange, Son Yun checked his acupoints.

‘The surging energy is subsiding. However...’

It was as expected.

Some of the meridians throughout his body had swollen due to the surging power, and some had even ruptured, and his danjeon had also become quite unstable.

‘Strange. How strange.’

In this state, it wouldn't have been surprising if all his meridians had ruptured.

However, it stopping at only some parts was fortunate.

If not, Mok Yu-cheon would have not only lost his martial arts but also become disabled or crippled throughout his entire body.

It could be said that it was fortunate that they had rushed in.

‘What about that child?’

Son Yun removed his hand from Mok Yu-cheon's acupoints and looked at the place where Mok Gyeong-un had been flung away.

Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, was there.

Seeing this, he clicked his tongue.

‘To think it would turn out like this while determining the final top ranker.’

It was truly an ironic situation.

Although Mok Yu-cheon's condition wasn't very good, if he had been hit with a strike like before, Mok Gyeong-un's body would have been nearly shattered as well.

As he was thinking that,

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un was seen staggering and getting up from his spot.

‘!?’

Seeing that, the eyes of the leaders, including Son Yun, glimmered with admiration.

Did he endure such a tremendous strike?

At that moment, Lee Ji-yeom, who was beside him, whispered to Mok Gyeong-un with surprised eyes.

“My liege, are you alright?”

He had thought that Mok Gyeong-un would have suffered severe injuries from the surging strike that nearly reached the early-stage of Transcendent Realm.

However, Mok Gyeong-un smiled as if nothing had happened and said,

“I’m fine.”

“But with that level of strike just now...”

“Ah, ah. At this level, it’s correct that I couldn’t dodge it.”

“Pardon?”

What did he mean by that?

At this level, he couldn’t dodge it?

What on earth was he talking about? As he was wondering,

Mok Gyeong-un lightly moved his neck and stretched it.

-Crack! Crack!

“Deliberately taking the hit and pretending to be in pain is quite a task.”

“Ha...”

At those words, Lee Ji-yeom was momentarily dumbfounded.

Did he mean that he had deliberately taken that tremendous strike?

However, what was surprising was not that, but rather, he was even more astonished by Mok Gyeong-un's appearance, who truly seemed unharmed.

But the surprises didn't end there.

“But thanks to seeing it up close, I learned something good.”

“Pardon?”

What did he mean by that?

As he was puzzled,

-Bulge! Bulge!

At that moment, the veins on Mok Gyeong-un's left hand bulged prominently, and soon, the muscles up to his wrist swelled, and his skin turned black.

‘!!!!!’

Chapter 118 – Choice (1)

-Bulge! Bulge!

At that moment, the veins on Mok Gyeong-un's left hand bulged prominently, and soon, the muscles up to his wrist swelled, and his skin turned black.

‘!!!!!’

Seeing this, the eyes of Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, widened.

The phenomenon occurring in Mok Gyeong-un's left wrist was almost identical to what had happened to Mok Yu-cheon's body during his rampage.

The only difference was that it was limited to his wrist.

‘No. What on earth?’

To the astonished Lee Ji-yeom, Mok Gyeong-un spoke nonchalantly.

“It seems to put a lot of strain on the meridians, perhaps because I changed the location of the acupoints and detonated the internal energy. But if I apply it only to a part of the body without going berserk, it seems quite useful. What do you think?”

“...”

At this question, Lee Ji-yeom was at a loss for words.

Was this even possible?

If he had said that he had thoroughly examined Mok Yu-cheon's body, explored the circulation paths, and found a way to utilize it like this after numerous studies, it would have been understandable.

But how did he do this?

“Why are you like that? Does it seem lacking in utility?”

“That's...”

Oh my.

What should he say?

It wasn't a realm that could be understood with the thinking of an ordinary person.

No, rather than that, it might be possible because Mok Gyeong-un, or rather his liege possessing his body, was a deceased spirit.

This seemed difficult for even martial artists with innate talent to replicate, let alone their martial prowess.

Who could reproduce and utilize it like this just by observing it?

Moreover, it was no different from the rampage of an evil technique.

‘Perhaps his words about surpassing the wall within three years weren't empty.’

However, there was something Lee Ji-yeom didn't know.

It was the fact that Mok Gyeong-un accurately remembered the incorrect mnemonics he had taught Mok Yu-cheon from the beginning.

‘If utilized well, it should be fine.’

Based on this, Mok Gyeong-un had visually confirmed how Mok Yu-cheon's circulation paths and energy worked, which was why he could replicate it like this.

Even Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue in admiration of Mok Gyeong-un's talent.

‘This brat...’

How did he come up with the idea to make it his own like this?

In her eyes, Mok Gyeong-un’s development speed and open-mindedness were not just surprising but also terrifying.

Even with the Ghost Eyes of the deceased, this brat was truly a monster.

‘It might not be an impossible feat.’

Perhaps fulfilling her grudge wasn’t an entirely impossible task.

Because of that, her emotions were further heightened.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un muttered while releasing his blackened hand to its original state.

“What should I call it?”

This was an evil technique that changed the locations of the acupoints.

Considering that,

‘Since it’s an evil technique that arbitrarily changes the acupoints, I should call it the Reversed Acupoint Evil Technique.’

Reversed Acupoint Evil Technique[1].

Thus, another potential emerged for Mok Gyeong-un.

For ordinary martial artists, it was a shortcut to delusion or becoming a cripple, but for Mok Gyeong-un, who had a fast recovery speed, whether externally or internally, and originally possessed a reverse acupoint circulation method, it was no different from an exclusive potential that wouldn't put much strain on him if controlled well.

Seeing this, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, clicked his tongue and said,

“...My liege, you truly astound your subordinate a lot.”

“Is that so?”

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and then asked.

“What happened to Mok Yu-cheon?”

“Fortunately, the leaders intervened before a mishap occurred.”

‘Ah...’

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un couldn't hide his disappointment.

Since the surging energy had exceeded the level Mok Yu-cheon could handle, he had naturally thought that this time, he wouldn't be able to endure it and would become a cripple or die.

But did he survive this time as well?

At this point, Mok Yu-cheon also seemed to be lucky and have a long lifeline.

‘It’s a pity, but there’s no other way.’

Thanks to that, he had to be satisfied with acquiring a new technique called the Reversed Acupoint Evil Technique.

Thus, the final duel of the last gate came to an end.

However, a controversy arose here.

It was about who the victor of this duel was.

The first person to bring this up was none other than Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak.

Originally, after much deliberation, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, had intended to declare Mok Yu-cheon’s defeat, as he had suffered severe internal injuries by recklessly employing an evil technique.

However,

“I object.”

“What do you mean by object?”

“Although we intervened midway, if we look at it in terms of the duel, shouldn’t Mok Yu-cheon’s victory be acknowledged?”

At Won Byeong-hak’s objection, some of the other leaders showed signs of agreement.

It was understandable because a duel ultimately meant a confrontation.

However, if they hadn't intervened, Mok Gyeong-un might have lost his life at the hands of the rampaging Mok Yu-cheon.

Considering this, Mok Yu-cheon could be seen as the victor.

"Hmm. Thunderbolt Fist King's words also have a point."

Lee Ji-yeom, who had intended to make the announcement, responded in that manner, perhaps conscious of the opinions surrounding him.

At this, Won Byeong-hak twitched the corners of his mouth.

Although he had put forward a plausible justification, Won Byeong-hak's true intentions were different.

'This way, I can slightly increase the chances of taking that child.'

If Mok Gyeong-un became the victor of the duel, he would be the top ranker in the final gate, so the choice would lie with him, not the spectators.

In that case, the probability would be one-sixth, including Bright Blade King Son Yun, Shadow Master, Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang of the Summoning Sound Valley, Bo Hyuk-so, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, Dae So-man, the Grand Elder of the Scarlet Blood Clan, and himself.

On the other hand, if Mok Gyeong-un didn't become the top ranker, he would also be in a position to be chosen.

'Then it becomes a fight between the Bright Blade King and myself.'

Although it felt somewhat forced, if he pushed forward with his position here, how could the other leaders dare to drool over what he was aiming for?

This was Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak's calculation.

However, someone else raised an objection again.

“That remains to be seen.”

‘Huh?’

It was none other than Bright Blade King Son Yun.

At this, Won Byeong-hak furrowed his brows.

Since they held the same position, he had thought that Son Yun would agree with him, as they were in similar situations.

But what was this?

“What do you mean by that remains to be seen?”

“If we look at it now, we can see that the injuries of the student named Mok Gyeong-un are lighter than expected. As you esteemed masters know, in a life-and-death duel, superiority in power doesn't always determine the outcome.”

“Hah. This wasn't a life-and-death duel.”

“That applies even if it's a duel.”

The two once again showed a sharp confrontation.

Seeing this, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, couldn't hide his perplexity.

For now, he understood why they were behaving like this after Bright Blade King Son Yun presented a dissenting opinion.

‘Thunderbolt Fist King is trying to increase the chances of taking the Lord, even if only slightly, while Bright Blade King is trying to win favor by giving the Lord the top ranker position.’

His prediction was somewhat accurate.

Bright Blade King Son Yun believed that if Mok Gyeong-un was a martial artist, he would choose not from all six leaders but from the strongest and most powerful ones among the Five Kings.

At least that cunning fellow from the Yeon Mok Sword Manor wouldn't do anything detrimental to himself.

So there was no need to take away the top ranker position from him.

“Ahem. In any case, I maintain that the victor of this duel is the student named Mok Yu-cheon.”

Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak made his opinion clear.

In response, Bright Blade King Son Yun spoke as if he shared the same sentiment.

“Considering everything that student Mok Gyeong-un demonstrated today, I believe he is sufficiently the victor.”

‘...So this is how it's going to be?’

Won Byeong-hak gnashed his teeth slightly.

If it turned out like this, wouldn't he become the villain in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes?

He thought about changing his opinion right now.

At that moment, someone stepped forward.

"I also agree with Thunderbolt Fist King's opinion."

'Valley Master of the Summoning Sound Valley?'

The one who stepped forward and agreed with his opinion was none other than Hang Yeo-ryang, the Valley Master of the Summoning Sound Valley.

Looking at them, she said,

"Of course, it's clear that the student named Mok Gyeong-un possesses exceptional martial talent, but if we consider the purpose of this duel, we should reach a conclusion in line with that purpose."

"Purpose?"

Bright Blade King Son Yun raised one of his eyebrows.

As expected from their adversarial relationship, the corners of Hang Yeo-ryang's mouth rose even more at this reaction.

“Yes, the purpose. Our sect recognizes evil techniques as martial arts. Even if he went berserk, the fact that the student named Mok Yu-cheon overwhelmed Mok Gyeong-un for a moment doesn’t change. Isn’t that right?”

At her words, the two supreme leaders glanced at each other and nodded their heads.

In fact, her words also had a point.

‘Hehehe. Do you think this Valley Master will easily concede?’

Hang Yeo-ryang also coveted Mok Gyeong-un.

Therefore, from her perspective, she needed to guide the spectators to make the choice.

Since she had already confirmed through voice transmission that Mok Gyeong-un had no intention of choosing her, it was all the more necessary to solidify Mok Yu-cheon’s victory.

She had no intention of backing down from the qi battle with the two kings.

“Ahem.”

At this point, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, seemingly pleased with her agreement, tried to drive the point home.

“You see. Most of the spectators share a similar opinion to mine. Although I personally evaluate that Mok Gyeong-un child more highly in terms of talent, considering the purpose of the duel, naturally...”

“Ohohoho. I apologize, but may I also express my opinion?”

At the grating laughter, the gazes of everyone, including Won Byeong-hak, turned towards Shadow Master.

Shadow Master stood up modestly, covering his mouth with his palm.

Then, he made a gesture of respect with both hands and spoke.

“First, I apologize for the interruption.”

“Ahem.”

At his apology, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak coughed as if displeased.

It was undoubtedly because Shadow Master had interrupted his words and stepped forward, which meant he would surely express a dissenting opinion.

At this, Shadow Master waved his hand lightly and said,

“Did I offend you? I apologize. However, I stepped forward and interrupted because I thought it would be right to reach an accurate conclusion.”

“An accurate conclusion? What do you mean by that?”

Won Byeong-hak asked bluntly.

If the Shadow Master said anything unreasonable, he was ready to confront him immediately.

At this, Shadow Master politely opened his mouth.

“To be honest, in my case, I share the same opinion as Bright Blade King.”

“No, how is that an accurate conclu...”

“Of course, it’s not an accurate conclusion but merely my opinion. However, the fact that opinions are divided into two means that it’s difficult to determine the victor of this duel with certainty.”

“What do you mean it’s difficult to determine the victor? Anyone can see that if we hadn’t intervened in the duel...”

“Yes, that’s the problem.”

“What?”

Won Byeong-hak furrowed his brows.

What on earth was Shadow Master talking about?

As he was puzzled, Shadow Master continued speaking while bending his waist with his hands together.

“The duel had already returned to square one the moment we intervened. That’s why this debate is taking place.”

“Square one?”

“Yes. If we hadn’t intervened, a conclusion would have been reached in some way. That’s something everyone agrees on, right?”

“...”

At his words, Won Byeong-hak let out a soft sigh.

Wasn't that obvious?

However, if they hadn't intervened, Mok Gyeong-un would have lost his life, and Mok Yu-cheon's meridians might have all ruptured, turning him into a cripple or leading to his death.

They were able to save both of them because they had intervened in some way.

"Shadow Master... Your words certainly have a point, but if we hadn't intervened, a mishap would have occurred for both students. Do you not acknowledge that?"

"I acknowledge it. That's why I believe we should choose one of two options rather than determining the outcome as a victory or defeat."

"Two options?"

"Yes."

At this, Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang asked curiously.

"What are they?"

"It's simple. Since the match was interrupted due to the spectators' intervention, either hold a rematch..."

"Do you think a rematch is possible now?"

Hang Yeo-ryang frowned and gestured with her head towards the unconscious Mok Yu-cheon.

Mok Yu-cheon's internal injuries were severe, so he wouldn't be able to fight for a while.

How could they hold a rematch?

At this, Shadow Master smiled and said,

“Then, we have no choice but to declare it a draw due to the spectators’ intervention.”

‘!?’

At those words, everyone fell silent.

It was a conclusion completely different from what each of them had been thinking.

However, it wasn’t an entirely unreasonable argument.

‘A draw...’

‘Nominally, that’s correct.’

‘A rematch is difficult right away. We can’t hold another spectating session at that time.’

‘Since opinions are divided, it might be better than that.’

Most of them showed signs of agreeing with Shadow Master’s words.

There was no point in continuing to argue over who the victor was, as they would surely not back down from each other.

However, there was another problem here.

“Shadow Master’s words also have a point. Since the match was interrupted, declaring it a draw is also an option. But then, how do we handle the top ranker position?”

This was everyone’s concern.

The reason opinions were divided over this outcome was because of whether the choice would be given to Mok Gyeong-un or to the spectators.

At that moment, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, stepped forward.

“Then, how about doing it this way?”

Everyone’s attention focused on him.

“There has never been a case where spectators intervened in a duel like this before. However, what everyone acknowledges is that it wouldn’t be strange for either of these two to be the victor, right?”

“Valley Master... Do you mean?”

“Since it’s difficult to hold a rematch in this situation, if the conclusion is a draw, we can’t declare both students who remained until the end as losers, can we?”

‘Oh no!’

At these words, Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak’s expression stiffened.

In the end, he was suggesting that both students who had fought in the final duel of the last gate should be treated as top rankers.

If this happened, the choice would be given to the two students, not the spectators.

He wanted to object to this, but there were no more grounds for him to step forward.

‘Phew.’

Stepping forward would only result in them holding onto each other.

Thus, for the first time in the history of the Corpse Blood Valley’s gates, two top rankers were born.

However, although he had contributed to the two of them becoming top rankers, Bright Blade King Son Yun was concerned about the repercussions if the fact that the two hostages brought from the righteous sect had jointly become top rankers became known to the entire sect.

But he couldn’t overturn the already determined result.

It was a done deal, and the aftermath was a problem that the Society Leader, who had sent the hostages to the Corpse Blood Valley, had to bear.

His concern was now only one thing.

‘Mok Gyeong-un.’

He wanted to accept that person as his disciple.

He agreed that probably everyone here shared the same opinion.

Although they were joint top rankers, there wouldn’t be many who wanted to accept Mok Yu-cheon, who had mastered an evil technique and had a high risk, as a disciple or subordinate.

At that moment, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master on the platform, spoke to Mok Gyeong-un, who was standing.

“Mok Gyeong-un, no, Mok Gyeong-un-danju and Mok Yu-cheon-danju, who have passed all the gates of the Corpse Blood Valley and become top rankers, I congratulate you. As mentioned earlier, as a benefit of becoming top rankers, the two Clan Leaders have been given the opportunity to choose from the leaders who have spectated here.”

The moment of choice had finally arrived.

Who would he choose?

Since the choice lay with Mok Gyeong-un, no matter how high-ranking the leaders were, most of them couldn't help but have eyes filled with tension and anticipation.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un politely made a gesture of respect towards the leaders sitting in front of the platform, raised his head, and spoke courteously.

“I apologize. All the leaders are such excellent individuals that it's difficult for me to conclude who to choose.”

‘Hmm?’

What did he mean by that?

As they were puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“So, I will speak frankly. No matter what, I want to go to the one who earnestly desires me. If there is such a person, it would be great if you could raise your right hand slightly.”

-Swish!

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the leaders simultaneously raised their hands slightly, as if it didn't matter who was first.

Coincidentally, it was all six leaders.

They all glanced at each other, revealing an uncomfortable air.

It was the expected result.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un twitched his lips and said,

“This is quite a predicament. Everyone wants me...”

“...”

“Then, there's no other way. For the sake of fairness, I will say this. Please don't be too angry. If I were to choose you, what benefits would there be? I would like each leader to tell me one by one.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the six leaders simultaneously furrowed their brows.

This was no different from telling those who wanted to take him to present a suitable price for him, wasn't it?

Chapter 119 – Choice (2)

“Then, there’s no other way. For the sake of fairness, I will say this. Please don’t be too angry. If I were to choose you, what benefits would there be? I would like each leader to tell me one by one.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the six leaders simultaneously furrowed their brows.

This was no different from telling those who wanted to take him to present a suitable price for him, wasn’t it?

At this, Bo Hyuk-so, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, couldn’t hold back and opened his mouth.

“How impudent. If you think the benefit of becoming the top ranker is some great privilege, you are gravely mistaken.”

At those words, the other leaders also slightly nodded their heads, indicating their agreement to some extent.

Although everyone coveted him as a disciple due to his innate martial talent, those present here were leaders who guided the Heaven and Earth Society.

What kind of audacity was this, treating them like an auction, not even an auction house?

As they were doing so, Mok Gyeong-un politely made a gesture of respect to Grand Elder Bo Hyuk-so.

-Swish!

‘He’s not slow-witted.’

At this, Bo Hyuk-so chuckled and was about to nod his head when,

“Yes, I will keep your words in mind. Then, do the other leaders have nothing to say?”

“What?”

In an instant, the expression of Bo Hyuk-so, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, distorted.

He had almost blatantly told him not to be impudent towards the leaders and to show respect, but was this fellow now mocking him?

Unable to contain his anger, Bo Hyuk-so tried to rise from his seat.

“How dare you...”

“Ah. Calm down. Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan.”

“Grand Elder of the Scarlet Blood Clan?”

Dae So-man, the Grand Elder of the Scarlet Blood Clan sitting next to him, stopped him.

“Now, calm down...”

“He’s still a junior who hasn’t even reached adulthood, and he passed the gates of the Corpse Blood Valley as the top ranker. Should we, as his seniors, reprimand him for showing that level of boldness? Let’s show leniency on this auspicious day.”

‘Is this guy serious?’

At his words, the right eyebrow of Bo Hyuk-so, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, rose.

He was stopping him with nice words, but wasn't he blatantly trying to give a good impression to that impudent fellow?

So he was about to say something to him when,

“You wanted to hear what advantages there are? Alright. I'll speak first. If you follow me, I'll grant you the position of Vice Clan Leader in the Scarlet Blood Clan and pass down my exclusive martial art, the Scarlet Blood Mysterious Ancestral Technique. With your excellent martial talent, you'll be able to inherit my position in no time.”

At the words of Dae So-man, the Grand Elder of the Scarlet Blood Clan, Bo Hyuk-so, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, clicked his tongue.

If it turned out like this, wouldn't it go according to that impudent fellow's wishes?

It was truly perplexing.

Bo Hyuk-so looked at the other leaders with an expression asking if this was alright.

Although he couldn't say much to Grand Elder Dae So-man since they held the same position, if the higher-ups drew a strong line at a time like this...

“You can sufficiently imagine what benefits there would be if you become this Valley Master's disciple, so I'll only say this. This Valley Master is the only one here who can teach you the sword.”

‘Oh no!’

When Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang stepped forward, Bo Hyuk-so, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, bit his lip hard.

He had hoped for them to draw a line, but instead, even a leader of the Valley Master's rank had stepped forward.

With this, he lost the grounds to say anything to the fellow.

If he were to say something, it would be criticizing her, who held a higher position.

‘Damn it.’

Maybe he should have pretended to be unable to resist and spoken up as well.

But if he stepped forward now, it would only make him feel embarrassed because of what he had said earlier.

Moreover, for those like him who could be considered the lowest-ranking leaders here, the Grand Elders, it was an unfavorable bidding.

‘But will Shadow Master and the two Kings go this far to take that kid?’

They had their pride, after all.

As he was thinking that, someone spoke up.

“The sword. Is that the path you wish to pursue?”

‘Ah...’

The one who asked this question was none other than Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak.

Seeing even him step forward, Bo Hyuk-so, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, slid his buttocks into the inner side of the chair he was half-sitting on.

With even Thunderbolt Fist King stepping forward, taking this child was already a lost cause.

“If you have chosen the sword as your path, I will naturally give up, but with your innate martial talent, you can pursue the path of a grandmaster in any martial art, not just the sword.”

‘Grandmaster?’

Grandmaster (宗師).

It refers to becoming a master in any field.

In the martial world, grandmasters are those who have surpassed the wall and reached the realm of Unrestrained Realm [1], and they are called grandmasters. Seeing Thunderbolt Fist King evaluate Mok Gyeong-un so highly, everyone clicked their tongues inwardly.

His determination to take him seemed incredibly strong.

“Is the sword the path you have chosen?”

At Won Byeong-hak’s question, everyone looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

Eventually, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth.

“It doesn’t have to be the sword. My goal is to become strong, regardless of the path.”

‘!?’

At those words, Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang's eyes turned fierce.

She had said that she would teach him the sword, so him saying that was no different from drawing a clear line.

She wanted him, but he truly knew how to provoke her.

At that moment, Won Byeong-hak burst into hearty laughter at Mok Gyeong-un's words.

“Hahaha! As expected, your aspirations align well with your talent, which is great.”

He was very satisfied with Mok Gyeong-un's response to his question.

If Mok Gyeong-un had no intention of choosing him and was going to choose Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang, he would have drawn a clear line in response to this question.

However, Mok Gyeong-un didn't do that.

If so, it probably meant that he was inclined towards him, who held the position of a King.

Won Byeong-hak spoke to Bright Blade King Son Yun beside him with a triumphant expression.

“Brother Son, you also wanted him, but it seems I will be the one taking him.”

At those words, Son Yun snorted.

Regardless, Won Byeong-hak seemed confident that Mok Gyeong-un would come to him, so he stood up from his seat and spoke, wanting to drive the point home.

“If you become my disciple, not only will you be my successor, but I will also pass down my lifelong martial arts to you. If you complete the True Origin Lightning Fist of our sect, no one will be able to stand against you with the Thunderstrike Fist.”

It could be heard as an arrogant promise, depending on how one listened to it.

However, since he had drawn a line earlier regarding the Thunderstrike Fist, no one said anything.

They took it as him earnestly desiring Mok Gyeong-un.

‘Come to me. As my disciple.’

Won Byeong-hak extended his hand towards Mok Gyeong-un.

It was at that very moment.

“Truly remarkable, child of the Mok family.”

‘As expected...’

Bright Blade King Son Yun, who was beside Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak, finally stepped forward.

At this, Won Byeong-hak shook his head as if displeased.

As if not caring about this at all, Bright Blade King Son Yun spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

“Our connection runs deep, you and I.”

‘Connection?’

At those words, everyone, including Won Byeong-hak, looked at Bright Blade King Son Yun with puzzled expressions.

What did he mean by saying their connection was deep?

Could it be that they already knew each other?

As they were thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth while making a gesture of respect with both hands.

“Thanks to Bright Blade King, I was able to come here, but I didn’t expect to see you again in this place.”

‘Oh no...’

At those words, Won Byeong-hak furrowed his brows.

Did they really know each other?

But why didn’t they show any signs of it until just now?

‘Was it intentional?’

To make him harbor false hopes and then feel deprived?

If that was the case, he couldn’t help but feel quite displeased.

As he was doing so, Bright Blade King Son Yun continued speaking.

“Remarkable. Even then, I thought your talent was outstanding, but I never imagined you would survive here.”

“Should I say it was a good experience, thanks to you?”

At those words, a glimmer of admiration appeared in Son Yun’s eyes.

He had thought that Mok Gyeong-un might resent him for making him suffer in the Corpse Blood Valley, but surprisingly, he spoke about it so calmly, which was unexpected.

In fact, there was no trace of resentment in his eyes.

‘Not bad.’

He had thought Mok Gyeong-un was just cunning, but seeing him show such composure, he took a liking to him.

With that, he wanted to confirm one thing.

“There’s something I want to ask you.”

“Something you want to ask?”

“That’s right.”

“Please, ask away.”

“If given the opportunity, do you have the desire to return?”

At that question, everyone couldn't hide their puzzlement.

What did he mean by that?

It was difficult to understand the meaning behind this question.

However, not everyone was like that.

‘Is that so? Ohoho.’

Shadow Master, who knew the fact that Mok Gyeong-un's origin was as a hostage from the Yeon Mok Sword Manor of the righteous sect, understood the gist of the question and nodded his head.

Indeed, this was an important question.

He was also interested in Mok Gyeong-un, but since his roots lay in the righteous sect, he wanted to confirm this.

If Mok Gyeong-un had intentions towards the righteous sect, accepting him as a disciple would be a futile act.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth.

“I don't particularly place significance on returning. Besides, I came here of my own accord.”

As soon as those words were spoken, the corners of Bright Blade King Son Yun's mouth rose.

He had heard the answer he most wanted to hear.

With that, Son Yun stood up from his seat and spoke.

“Not only do you possess martial talent, but you have also become a suitable talent for our sect. Alright. Become my disciple. If you do so, even if your background becomes an issue in the future, I will protect you until the end. You know what this means.”

‘!?’

At those words, the other leaders murmured softly.

What did he mean by background?

Come to think of it, they were curious about which sect these siblings, who had jointly become top rankers in this Corpse Blood Valley’s gates, belonged to.

At this, Valley Master Hang Yeo-ryang opened her mouth.

“What do you mean by background? What did you just say?”

“It’s exactly as you heard.”

“Exactly? So, Bright Blade King, you’re saying you know that child’s background, and it’s something that could be problematic?”

At this question, Lee Ji-yeom, the Corpse Blood Valley Master on the platform, showed a perplexed expression.

Although his liege was possessing him, that shell could be considered the son of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor of the righteous sect.

If his identity were to be revealed, the repercussions would be quite significant.

‘Was it intentional?’

Lee Ji-yeom looked at Bright Blade King Son Yun.

He had cleverly revealed Mok Gyeong-un’s identity without explicitly stating it, creating a sense of crisis.

He wasn’t talking about the benefits but rather emphasizing the potential losses, persuading that only he could protect Mok Gyeong-un.

‘With this, he has no choice but to be taken away.’

It seemed that his lord’s position had become difficult.

Bright Blade King Son Yun was a relentless person, and he had many disciples under him, so he didn’t particularly want to recommend him.

However, if he came out like this, his lord currently had few allies and couldn’t afford to make enemies, so he might have no choice but to take Bright Blade King’s hand.

‘You’re quite the strategist, Bright Blade King.’

Shadow Master covered his mouth with his hand and smiled.

At first glance, it might sound like Bright Blade King Son Yun was saying he would protect Mok Gyeong-un if he became his disciple, but this was literally a warning.

Don’t forget your situation.

That offer was a strategy to make the other party submit mentally.

The moment Mok Gyeong-un's identity as a son of the righteous sect was revealed, he would find himself in a difficult situation.

‘There's no other choice.’

If he were Mok Gyeong-un, he would have no choice but to choose Bright Blade King Son Yun.

That was the only way to obtain a relatively safe haven.

Bright Blade King Son Yun was a person with a clear stance and stubbornness, so he would definitely keep his word.

To overcome the weakness of his background, the best option was him.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth.

“Ah, that could indeed be a problem.”

“That's right.”

If he knew that, there was only one choice.

Even if his identity wasn't revealed now because he was attached to the sect, if it became known due to the Society Leader's whim, would others become a protective haven for him like Son Yun?

They wouldn't be willing to take on such a risk.

‘Come. Take my hand.’

However,

“Hmm. Then, I should make it clear here.”

“Make it clear? What do you...”

“Since this might hold me back, I thought it would be better to tell you in advance.”

At those words, Bright Blade King Son Yun’s eyes wavered.

What was this child trying to do now?

With that,

“Wait... Stop...”

Bright Blade King Son Yun tried to stop Mok Gyeong-un.

However,

-Bam!

Mok Gyeong-un made a gesture of respect with both hands together and spoke in a loud voice.

“Let me introduce myself again. I am Mok Gyeong-un, the third son of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor of the righteous sect.”

‘!!!!!!!’

As soon as those words were spoken, not only the leaders but also the warriors of the Corpse Blood Valley who were unaware of the truth, and even the students, all became agitated.

This was something no one had anticipated.

The final top ranker of the Corpse Blood Valley's gates, which had produced the best disciples of the later generations in the Heaven and Earth Society for a long time, was from the renowned martial family of the righteous sect, the Yeon Mok Sword Manor?

But how did he end up participating in the Corpse Blood Valley's gates here?

As they were doing so, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“But let me add one more thing. I was brought here as a hostage by Bright Blade King, who is present here.”

‘!?’

In an instant, Bright Blade King Son Yun was dumbfounded.

He revealed this fatal weakness and potential gossip with his own mouth?

Chapter 120 – Choice (3)

“But let me add one more thing. I was brought here as a hostage by Bright Blade King, who is present here.”

‘!?’

In that instant, Bright Blade King Son Yun's expression stiffened.

Publicly revealing this critical weakness that could become a source of gossip?

Just what was he thinking?

Even if it was outside the fortress, this place was still within the territory of the Heaven and Earth Society, and everyone here belonged to the Heaven and Earth Society.

To reveal this inside the Heaven and Earth Society, whose internal factions had long vied for dominance in the martial world with the righteous faction, to the point where calling them mortal enemies would be no exaggeration, was truly a foolish choice.

-Murmur murmur!

‘He’s from the righteous faction?’

‘The righteous faction?’

The atmosphere quickly heated up as murmurs arose from all around.

It was the same for the other trainees.

Mok Gyeong-un’s forcibly sworn followers, Mu Jang-yak and Demon Fire Hall’s Mo Ha-rang, couldn’t hide their shock either, glaring at him with dumbfounded expressions.

At the very least, they had thought Mok Gyeong-un was from a small or medium-sized faction under the Heaven and Earth Society, even if he was a nameless one.

But the righteous faction?

‘Then, I’ve sworn loyalty to someone from the righteous faction?’

‘How could this be....’

The two individual’s faces were instantly colored with humiliation.

‘Ohoho. What a vexing child.’

Knowing his true identity, a man who was one of the few, the Shadow Master, clicked his tongue inwardly while looking at Mok Gyeong-un.

Right now, Mok Gyeong-un had practically revealed his identity in the middle of enemy territory.

Even if he was here as a hostage.

‘To the Heaven and Earth Society martial artists, those from the righteous faction must be rejected as enemies.’

This was true for everyone, regardless of age or gender.

Especially for the younger generation of promising talents, as they had been educated by their parents and teachers from a young age, the animosity was passed down even more strongly.

It wouldn’t be surprising if a commotion broke out at any moment.

-Thud!

“The Yeon Mok Sword Manor? Did you just say the righteous faction’s Yeon Mok Sword Manor?”

As expected, someone jumped up from their seat.

It was the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, Bo Hyuk-so.

Having lost his father in the battle against the Hwasan Faction, his hatred for the righteous faction ran deep.

But when Mok Gyeong-un's identity was revealed to be none other than a member of the righteous faction, he reacted intensely.

“How could a mere righteous faction underling enter the Corpse Blood Valley, which can be called the gateway to the Great Heaven and Earth Society! Kneel!”

-Whoosh!

Bo Hyuk-so shattered the armrest of his chair with a single strike.

Then, imbuing the shattered, pointed piece of the armrest with his internal energy, he hurled it towards Mok Gyeong-un's thigh.

It was at a tremendous speed.

However, Mok Gyeong-un calmly unleashed his footwork, stepping back and evading it.

-Crack!

The armrest piece pierced the stone floor of the plaza right in front of Mok Gyeong-un, embedding halfway.

It seemed he had intended to impale Mok Gyeong-un's leg with this.

“Dodged it? Good. Then, I, the Flame Demon Grand Elder, will personally make you kneel!”

The Flame Demon Clan’s Grand Elder, Bo Hyuk-so, was about to stomp his foot and step forward.

At that moment, someone blocked his way.

“Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan. Stop.”

It was none other than the Corpse Blood Valley Master, Lee Ji-yeom.

As Lee Ji-yeom blocked his path, Bo Hyuk-so raised his voice with a flushed face.

“Valley Master. What in the world is the meaning of this? How can a mere righteous faction underling be here? Surely you couldn’t have been unaware, right?”

At this question, Lee Ji-yeom couldn’t hide his tremendous discomfort.

Because the one possessing the body was from a renowned righteous faction family, he thought he wouldn’t carelessly reveal the identity of his vessel.

But he didn’t expect him to suddenly make it public like this.

‘...This is troublesome.’

The problem wasn’t just that he revealed it, but also that the Society Leader had ordered to keep the identities of the two Mok brothers, who were brought here as hostages, a secret.

It was a direct order from the Society Leader, so it had to be followed.

If he were to disregard it in the middle of all this attention, the Society Leader would certainly use it as an excuse to pressure him.

‘Should I remain silent....’

However, for the sake of his liege, this had to be revealed.

That was the duty of a subordinate.

With this, Lee Ji-yeom was about to reveal that it was an order from the Society Leader and that there had been instructions to keep it a secret.

“This is...”

Before he could finish his words,

“Inserting the Yeon Mok Sword Manor’s hostages into the Corpse Blood Valley entrance was an order from above. So, don’t raise any more objections. Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan.”

“Isn’t that right, Bright Blade King?”

The one who stepped forward before Lee Ji-yeom could speak was none other than the Bright Blade King, Son Yun.

Seeing Son Yun take action, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes glinted with interest.

He had expected Son Yun to show anger after he willingly exposed his own weakness, which Son Yun had intended to use against him. Instead, he was unexpectedly trying to resolve the situation.

“An order from above, what do you mean by...?”

“I advise against discussing this matter further.”

“...”

At Son Yun’s warning, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, Bo Hyuk-so, closed his mouth.

If it was an order from the upper echelons above the Five Kings, then it was beyond the line where he could step in and argue.

“I understand.”

As Son Yun responded and sat back down, the Corpse Blood Valley Master, Lee Ji-yeom, let out a sigh of relief and sent a grateful look towards the Bright Blade King, Son Yun.

Thanks to Son Yun stepping in first, saying it was an order from above, the difficult situation was resolved.

However, despite his lord’s unexpected actions, seeing him step in to resolve the matter like this showed that he truly wanted to accept him as his disciple.

Even if there might be dissatisfaction arising from accepting a hostage from the righteous faction as a disciple, he was willing to take on that risk, which was indeed remarkable.

‘Well.’

If he hadn’t known that his liege was residing in that body, he himself would have been tempted to take him as a disciple.

But right then,

“I find it hard to accept.”

The owner of the displeased voice was none other than Hang Yeo-ryang, the Summoning Sound Valley Master.

Just a moment ago, she had been desperate to have Mok Gyeong-un, but now she was glaring at him with eyes full of hostility.

Son Yun spoke to her.

“What is it that you find hard to accept?”

“Even if it was an unavoidable order from above, if we hadn’t known about this fact, one of us would have almost accepted a hostage from the righteous faction as a disciple, wouldn’t we?”

At her words, the two Grand Elders nodded in agreement.

Even if it was an order from above, he was still a hostage from the righteous faction.

If they had unknowingly accepted someone detestable from the righteous faction as a disciple, wouldn’t they have had to bear the consequences later on?

“...The Summoning Sound Valley Master has a point. Brother Yun and the Corpse Blood Valley Master, why didn’t you give us even a hint despite knowing this?”

Thunderbolt Fist King, Won Byeong-hak, also expressed his dissatisfaction.

Judging by the change in his way of speaking, it seemed he had also developed reservations about Mok Gyeong-un after learning about his background.

This was, in a way, a natural reaction.

At that moment, the Summoning Sound Valley Master, Hang Yeo-ryang, smiled bitterly and said,

“Ah. Now I understand.”

“Now you understand?”

“Yes. If it was an order from above to send the righteous faction’s hostage to Corpse Blood Valley, then perhaps the original purpose was something else, wasn’t it? We all know well what kind of place Corpse Blood Valley is.”

“...”

At her words, the others showed gazes of agreement.

Corpse Blood Valley was a place from which it was difficult to come out alive once you entered.

Sending the righteous faction’s hostage to such a place was closer to implying that they didn’t want him to survive, rather than giving him a chance.

“Perhaps those above also intended for that, but things didn’t go as expected?”

“Don’t cross the line. Summoning Sound Valley Master.”

The Bright Blade King, Son Yun, warned her in a sharp voice as she continued to express her dissatisfaction despite it being an order from above.

Then, Hang Yeo-ryang laughed and bowed slightly with her hands clasped in front of her waist.

“Yes, yes. How could I, a lowly one, dare to disobey those above? However, I have no desire to accept a righteous faction member who killed my sister and can be called our sect’s eternal enemy as a disciple or subordinate. So...”

-Screech!

The Summoning Sound Valley Master, Hang Yeo-ryang, turned her chair around and sat down.

Her actions seemed to be a protest of her own dissatisfaction.

But that wasn’t the end of it.

-Screech!

As if agreeing with her, the Grand Elder of the Flame Demon Clan, Bo Hyuk-so, and the Grand Elder of the Crimson Blood Clan, Dae So-man, also turned their chairs around.

However, they weren’t the only ones.

-Screech!

‘...Thunderbolt Fist King.’

Even Thunderbolt Fist King, Won Byeong-hak, turned his chair around.

Their actions appeared to show their firm resolve to reject anyone from the righteous faction, even if it was an order from above.

Considering their future standing within the sect, their behavior was understandable.

“Ahem, ahem.”

Mok Yu-cheon, who was coughing as quietly as possible.

Fortunately, he had woken up just a moment ago, and the heavy atmosphere made his thoughts complex.

‘They’re the same too.’

It wasn’t just the righteous faction.

The martial artists of the evil factions and the Heaven and Earth Society also hated the righteous faction.

Well, it might be natural.

Haven’t they rejected each other and fought and killed each other for a long time?

‘...Similar.’

Perhaps that was why his heart felt heavy, and on the other hand, there was understanding...

‘No. I understand them?’

Why did he have such thoughts?

Mok Yu-cheon inwardly denied his own thoughts.

Then, he looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

That guy was unexpected.

He didn't think he would reveal his identity so boldly.

‘Still, his roots are in the righteous faction after all.’

He was truly hard to understand, even when you thought you knew him.

How much disappointment had he received because of that guy?

He had thought he was a demon who belonged here, not in the righteous faction.

But if that guy was going to uphold his honor as a member of the righteous faction and as a martial artist of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor until the end, the story would be different.

‘If he does so, I will also risk my life to help...’

Right then,

Mok Gyeong-un shouted in a loud voice that everyone could hear.

“I, Mok Gyeong-un, was born as a member of the righteous faction, but as I grew up, I despised their hypocrisy and rotten ways, as if anything other than the righteous path was evil, following a black-and-white logic.”

‘!?’

In an instant, Mok Yu-cheon was dumbfounded.

What did this guy just say?

Until just a moment ago, after waking up and hearing what Mok Gyeong-un said, he thought he had misunderstood this guy.

But now he was insulting the righteous faction.

-Murmur murmur!

Everyone's attention was once again focused on Mok Gyeong-un.

As if not caring about their gazes, Mok Gyeong-un continued his shout.

“Because of that, from a young age, I have admired the heroes of the Heaven and Earth Society. The reason I have revealed my identity to the esteemed heroes of the Heaven and Earth Society is to bid farewell to my past self.”

‘This guy, could it be?’

At his words, the Bright Blade King, Son Yun, frowned.

He knew what this cunning fellow was trying to do.

And just as he suspected, Mok Gyeong-un bowed his head to everyone with a fist and palm salute and shouted,

“I vow to the gods of heaven and earth. I, Mok Gyeong-un, will sever my ties with my family, the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, and furthermore, the righteous faction. And I will become a member of the Heaven and Earth Society and fight against those detestable people!”

His voice resounded through the plaza.

At this, the plaza was once again in an uproar.

When he had revealed his identity, they couldn't hide their outrage at the fact that someone from the righteous faction was in Corpse Blood Valley, but who would have thought he would suddenly make a declaration of defection?

The Shadow Master covered his mouth and laughed softly.

‘I wondered what he was trying to do by willingly revealing his weakness, but he's defecting, huh.’

Even he didn't expect this.

He was the son of a renowned martial family of the righteous faction, the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, and his talent was outstanding.

Usually, such individuals have strong beliefs and never yield, but this guy was a completely different type of person.

‘What an interesting child.’

The Shadow Master's eyes narrowed as he looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

It didn't feel like he was defecting just to get through this moment and save his life.

Then, what kind of thoughts did he have?

‘This child, he must have something.’

He became curious about what it was.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un spoke in a voice that only the executives could hear.

“Now there shouldn’t be any issues with my background, right?”

At these words, the Bright Blade King, Son Yun, who had been staring at him with an astonished expression, suddenly burst into laughter.

“Hahahahahahaha!”

In all his life, this was truly the first time he had seen such a fellow.

He had intended to accept him as a disciple and tame him well to make him abandon the righteous faction and become a talent of the Heaven and Earth Society.

But he came on his own, no, he declared his entry with his own mouth.

He had thought he was reckless even in the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, but he was really an unpredictable fellow.

Son Yun looked at the executives behind him and said,

“It would be difficult to argue about his background now.”

“...”

At his words, the executives who had turned their chairs couldn’t give any response.

They had already shown their will to reject him based on his background, so if they changed their attitude now because of his declaration of defection, how unsightly would that be?

Seeing their reactions, Son Yun thought it was rather fortunate.

‘In the end, he’ll come to my side.’

He had shown his unwavering support for Mok Gyeong-un until the end.

If that guy had even a bit of gratitude and felt their hostility, he would have realized that there was only one choice in the end.

Son Yun was about to extend his hand towards Mok Gyeong-un and open his mouth.

At that moment, “Ohoho. Is it my turn to make a bid now?”

‘!?’

At the unique, grating voice, the Bright Blade King, Son Yun, frowned and turned his head.

The one who, along with him, was the only person who hadn’t turned his chair.

It was none other than the Shadow Master.

‘Ah...’

That’s right, he was still there.

But there was no particular worry.

The only one who could pose a challenge was the Thunderbolt Fist King, Won Byeong-hak, but he had kicked away the fortune that came to him on its own.

While that was happening, the Shadow Master said to Mok Gyeong-un, "Well, I don't think you'd be drawn to me teaching you Taoist techniques since I've cultivated the Tao... And talking about the advantages of my position would be nothing compared to His Excellency, the Bright Blade King, so I suppose this would be the only thing that might entice you."

'This?'

What was he trying to lure Mok Gyeong-un with?

As he wondered, the Shadow Master smiled and said, "I see you've trained in the sword, but it doesn't seem like you have a suitable famous sword. Am I right?"

"...That's true, but--"

He didn't particularly have a desire for famous swords.

He didn't even know much about famous swords.

"That's great. A swordsman should have a famous sword befitting him."

Son Yun's eyes narrowed.

What kind of famous sword did he have that he was saying such things?

But the next words that came out of the Shadow Master's mouth suddenly stirred up the surroundings.

"If you agree to join me, I will give you one of the legendary demon swords, the Evil Commandment Sword."

‘!!!!!!!!!’

-Murmur murmur!