

Mayhem 131

Chapter 131 – Ability (2)

‘Will this be alright?’

Guard Go Chan, who had possessed Ha Chae-rin, had an uneasy look in his eyes as he watched the fight beside Ho Jong-hyeok.

He was well aware of Mok Gyeong-un’s skills before coming here.

Although he possessed a strange power, he was merely at the second-rate level, so it was questionable whether he could endure against such a monstrous fellow.

However...

-Thud!

‘!?’

Jeo Mo-pal of the Five Mountains Alliance, the Fifth Mountain, was forced to kneel with his right wrist twisted.

Seeing his state, Go Chan couldn’t hide his inner shock.

No, it hadn’t even been a full month, so just what had happened?

Was Mok Gyeong-un originally this strong?

“... Indeed, my judgment was correct.”

The blind Second Mountain, Wi Maeng-cheon, opened his mouth while his sword was still locked.

He had no intention of actually beheading Mok Gyeong-un, but he had created a momentum that seemed like he would slash with maximum killing intent.

As a result, Mok Gyeong-un revealed his true skills.

This was quite surprising.

‘He has surpassed the peak realm.’

It exceeded expectations.

He had thought that he might be at the pinnacle of peak realm at most.

However, if he could block his sword strike in an instant and overwhelm Jeo Mo-pal with his internal energy, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that he had reached the beginning of the Transcendent Realm.

“With what skill did he...”

-Woo!

‘!?’

The blind Wi Maeng-cheon frowned.

Although their swords were locked, a very faint resonance transmitted to his ears, grating on them.

Then, he felt cracks forming on his sword.

At this...

-Clang!

Wi Maeng-cheon used a sword technique to deflect Mok Gyeong-un's sword.

As the sword was deflected, Mok Gyeong-un's body slightly floated back and was pushed back about five steps.

Then, Wi Maeng-cheon touched and felt the blade of his sword with his fingers.

'The Bamboo Sword is cracked.'

Although it was wrapped in bamboo, it was a renowned sword created by the hands of a skilled craftsman.

Such a Bamboo Sword had developed hairline cracks from a single clash?

Just what kind of sword was it?

-Clap clap clap!

At that moment, the sound of someone clapping could be heard.

The one clapping was none other than the Society Leader's second disciple, Jang Neung-ak.

With the corners of his mouth stretched to his ears, Jang Neung-ak was looking at Mok Gyeong-un with a satisfied gaze.

“Yes, this is exactly what this Young Master wanted to see.”

The martial prowess that had passed the Corpse Blood Valley’s gates with the highest score, despite being a hostage of the righteous faction.

There was no way it could be shoddy.

Even though he didn’t know how he concealed his energy, if he could withstand the sword of Wi Maengcheon, the Second Mountain, it was certain that he had surpassed the peak realm.

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un spoke with a troubled expression.

“You’re really making things difficult for me.”

He had tried his best to conceal his skills.

But to think it would be exposed in this way.

‘How annoying.’

If it weren’t for that blind man, he wouldn’t have been discovered like this.

Through this, Mok Gyeong-un learned one thing.

Nothing was ever perfect.

Even if the energy of death, the “death qi,” was an energy that living humans couldn’t sense through their perception, if there were people who could discern the opponent in such strange ways, he needed to be even more cautious.

-That blind mortal bastard is a troublesome variable.

Cheong-ryeong also clicked her tongue at this result.

Not revealing one's skills was the most ideal, but now that he had been exposed, they might have to change their plans depending on how that Jang Neung-ak responded.

At that moment, Jang Neung-ak approached and spoke.

"Concealing one's skills in the martial world is quite common. However, for someone not even in his prime to surpass the peak realm is very rare."

'Rare?'

At Jang Neung-ak's words, Ho Jong-hyeok, the Great Clan Leader of the Destruction Clan, clicked his tongue.

Even he, who had been praised by his father for possessing outstanding martial talent, was only able to enter the Transcendent Realm when he was almost thirty.

Of course, even that had earned him the admiration of those around him.

But for a guy who was only 17 or 18 years old to have entered the Transcendent Realm, he deserved to be called a genius.

'... I understand why he hid his martial prowess.'

A sharp awl pierces through the handle.

A moderately outstanding talent might receive hospitality from those around, but if it surpasses that, it becomes the target of wariness and jealousy instead.

Mok Gyeong-un's talent clearly belonged to the latter.

Whether it was his own judgment or the order of his master, the Shadow Clan Master, hiding his skills was probably out of concern for that.

Jang Neung-ak spread his arms wide and said to Mok Gyeong-un,

"I like you."

"..."

"I'll be straightforward. Swear loyalty to this Young Master."

"Swear loyalty?"

"Yes. This Young Master wants talented individuals like you. Those talents are equivalent to this Young Master's power."

That would be natural.

The more strong martial artists he had as subordinates, the more solidified his position as the Clan Master's successor would become.

Jang Neung-ak approached right in front of Mok Gyeong-un and continued,

"This Young Master does not demand loyalty without compensation. If you swear loyalty, I will promise you wealth and honor befitting it."

"Wealth and honor..."

“Yes. Furthermore, if this Young Master becomes the pinnacle of this association, you will get to enjoy even more together.”

At Jang Neung-ak’s words, Cheong-ryeong said to Mok Gyeong-un,

-It doesn’t seem like you have a choice.

The most ideal situation was to build strength under the Shadow Clan Master and observe the situation.

However, now that his skills had been exposed, that had become difficult.

If he refused here, the likelihood of being kept in check or getting involved in troublesome matters would increase, so the second-best option was to build strength under Jang Neung-ak.

However...

-Tap!

Mok Gyeong-un clasped his hands in greeting to Jang Neung-ak and said,

“I apologize. Although it’s a very tempting offer, it seems difficult for me to follow the Young Master right away.”

-Huh?

Cheong-ryeong was puzzled by Mok Gyeong-un’s words.

Since his hidden strength had been exposed, it would have been a safe choice to enter under Jang Neung-ak’s command to avoid troublesome matters.

But if he refused here...

“You can’t follow this Young Master?”

As expected, Jang Neung-ak’s expression changed in an instant.

One of his eyebrows twitched and rose, seeming displeased.

It was as expected.

‘Just what are you thinking, mortal?’

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue inwardly.

The Society Leader’s second disciple was one thing, but each and every one of his subordinates was not an ordinary master.

Therefore, it was best not to provoke them.

‘He never moves in a safe manner as advised.’

At that moment, Jang Neung-ak poked Mok Gyeong-un’s chest with his folding fan and said,

-Press!

“Do you know what that means right now?”

“Well? I’m not sure what it means.”

“What?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Jang Neung-ak’s eyes turned completely cold.

How dare a mere hostage from the righteous faction not only refuse the Young Master’s offer in this way but also talk back?

-Press!

Jang Neung-ak poked Mok Gyeong-un’s chest even harder with the folding fan and said,

“Have you forgotten who is standing in front of you?”

“How could that be possible? You are Young Master Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Society Leader.”

“Yet you seem to be ignoring this Young Master’s offer.”

“No way. I merely conveyed that it would be difficult for me to accept the Young Master’s offer right away.”

“Do you think you have the option to refuse?”

“If you want to have the Shadow Clan under your command, I don’t think you’ll force it unreasonably.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Jang Neung-ak’s eyes sharpened.

Seeing his appearance, the red-clothed woman with thick lips pressured Mok Gyeong-un.

“Hey, do you really have a death wish? A mere hostage from the righteous faction, to the Young Master right now...”

-Swish!

Jang Neung-ak raised his hand, stopping her pressure.

Then, he chuckled and said,

“You’re certainly different, perhaps because you’re a hostage from the righteous faction.”

“Pardon?”

“If you were from this place, you wouldn’t respond to this Young Master’s offer like you did. Rather, you would be afraid of going against this Young Master’s temper.”

“...”

“But you are extremely audacious against this Young Master.”

Jang Neung-ak found this Mok Gyeong-un interesting.

He thought that if he applied some pressure, he would crawl in on his own.

Considering his position as a hostage from the righteous faction and how big of an opportunity it was to establish such a connection within the Heaven and Earth Society, if he had the slightest awareness, he would have no choice but to follow.

But he responded like this.

“Yes, that’s right. This Young Master wants to have the Shadow Clan under his command. For that, I want you to become this Young Master’s person and serve as an important catalyst.”

Jang Neung-ak revealed his true intentions.

Then...

“I would like that too, but as you know, I just became the Shadow Clan Master’s disciple.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“I wasn’t chosen, but I became the Shadow Clan Master’s disciple as a benefit of being the top scorer at Corpse Blood Valley, so will he trust me that much?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Jang Neung-ak’s eyes narrowed.

He also had a cunning side, so he immediately understood what Mok Gyeong-un meant by saying this.

“... Keep talking.”

“Before even properly learning martial arts or building trust, if the Shadow Clan Master finds out that I, a hostage from the righteous faction, entered under the Young Master’s command, how will he view me?”

“...”

“If I were the Shadow Clan Master, I would rather suspect and distance myself from a hostage from the righteous faction who had just entered the Society and was trying to approach wealth and power too quickly.”

With these words, Mok Gyeong-un lowered his voice and whispered so that only Jang Neung-ak could hear,

“It doesn’t matter if you take me as a subordinate right away, but if that happens, you won’t be able to obtain everything you desire. Is it really beneficial to take me as a subordinate now?”

‘!?’

Jang Neung-ak’s lips slightly twitched.

‘Look at this guy.’

He received a rather refreshing shock from Mok Gyeong-un’s words.

His interest in Mok Gyeong-un being a hostage from the righteous faction was only a small part, and his goal was to take Mok Gyeong-un as a subordinate and use this opportunity to bring the Shadow Clan under his command as well.

He had rushed because his forces were still inferior to the Senior Disciple.

But this guy was beyond imagination.

‘Cunning.’

He was reading even the parts that Jang Neung-ak had not considered.

As this guy said, if he accepted him as his subordinate right away, the Shadow Clan Master’s mind would be filled with suspicion.

If that happened, it would become difficult to fully bring the Shadow Clan under his command.

'Hmm.'

Jang Neung-ak looked straight at Mok Gyeong-un.

He had thought he was an impudent fellow for rejecting his offer, but after this conversation, his thoughts had completely solidified.

He wanted to make this guy completely his.

-Tap!

Jang Neung-ak removed the folding fan that had been poking Mok Gyeong-un's chest.

And he also spoke in a whispering voice,

"You have a point. Fine. It's regrettable, but for now, I'll just back off. I hope you build a close trust with the Shadow Clan Master."

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un gave a light smile.

Jang Neung-ak also chuckled as if their thoughts had aligned, then clasped his hands behind his back and turned around.

"Young Master?"

"Let's go back and have a generous drink."

At these words, most of his subordinates couldn't hide their puzzlement.

He's just leaving without any results?

It was quite different from usual.

However, they had to follow their lord's order, so they withdrew without a word.

Of course, the Fifth Mountain Jeo Mo-pal, who had suffered an injury to his wrist, was the same.

“...”

On the other hand, the blind Wi Maeng-cheon, who had overheard the conversation they whispered with his extraordinary hearing, stopped for a moment and found the situation unsatisfactory.

'Excessively cunning.'

Without causing a commotion with his three-inch tongue, he made his lord withdraw in a pleasant manner.

He even made it so that no conclusion was reached.

His cunning aspect made Wi Maeng-cheon more wary than his outstanding martial arts.

However, since his lord seemed to be very pleased with him at the moment, he would withdraw for now but keep a close eye on him.

As they all left, Mok Gyeong-un sent a voice transmission to Cheong-ryeong with a smile.

-I'll have to kill that blind man first.

Chapter 132 – Ability (3)

As they all withdrew, Mok Gyeong-un sent a smiling voice transmission to Cheong-ryeong.

-I'll have to kill that blind man first.

-... I knew you'd say that.

Cheong-ryeong had expected this cunning fellow to naturally say that.

Clicking her tongue, Cheong-ryeong said,

-You handled it relatively well, but what about that guy?

That guy.

She meant Go Chan, who had possessed Ha Chae-rin.

Wasn't the original purpose to come out and retrieve him?

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un sent a voice transmission.

-I already instructed Guard Go Chan through voice transmission to monitor them.

-Monitor? Hoh.

It seemed like a good decision.

Although they were withdrawing for now due to his three-inch tongue, it was certain that they would get involved again in some way.

If Go Chan naturally played the role of a monitor at a time like this, it would be easy to handle whatever happened later.

-Since he doesn't seem to dislike being possessed by a wench's body, he should do well.

'Was that so?'

Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head.

He remembered Go Chan constantly frowning and not even being able to make eye contact with him.

Anyway, since he had told him that he would change his body to a man's soon, he thought Go Chan would diligently carry out the task.

Then, Cheong-ryeong said,

-Still, unlike our concerns, you handled it well with your mind.

She had been worried that Mok Gyeong-un might act rashly without considering the consequences, as he often took unexpected actions while they were together.

But unlike these worries, he seemed to have gained some composure now.

However...

-Since there are eyes watching.

-Yes, there's also that eunuch-like fellow assigned by that mortal, so it's best to be cautious.

-It's not just that.

-Not just that?

-Yes.

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un glanced at somewhere.

Then, he chuckled and headed back to the Shadow Clan's estate.

As Mok Gyeong-un disappeared like that, two individuals revealed themselves behind a wall about ten jang away.

One was a short man with a goatee, and the other was a woman wearing a bamboo hat and a veil.

The short man said to the woman,

"Young Lady, that Mok Gyeong-un kid seems to have clashed with the Second Young Master, so why are you letting him go?"

The woman in the bamboo hat, whom the short man addressed as "Young Lady," was none other than Wi So-yeon, the third disciple of the Society Leader.

"Well..."

"Pardon?"

At the man's question, she gave a vague answer.

Just an hour ago, she had learned from an informant that Mok Gyeong-un, whom she had met at the Corpse Blood Valley report, was a hostage from the righteous faction and had scored the highest at the Corpse Blood Valley gates, and she was caught in a strange feeling.

‘Righteous faction?’

Why was the talent she had coveted from the righteous faction?

Thinking carefully, in the Central Plains martial world, there was no martial family with the surname “Mok” (木) except for the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

‘Mok Gyeong-un...’

He was a talent she had coveted enough to entrust him with her identity tag, but his true identity was really unexpected.

Because of this, she had felt quite regretful after hearing this information.

‘Did I do something unnecessary?’

At that time, she had given him the tag because she liked him, but now that she heard he was a hostage from the righteous faction, she thought it might hold her back.

But what could she do about something she had already given?

So, she wanted to meet Mok Gyeong-un again and judge whether he would be helpful to her or not.

Even if he was a hostage from the righteous faction, since he had passed the Corpse Blood Valley gates with the highest score and became the Shadow Clan Master’s disciple, he was in a position she couldn’t easily let go of.

But coincidentally, while going to find Mok Gyeong-un, she saw him talking with her second senior brother.

‘... He’s really like a thorny issue.’

Seeing that her second senior brother also coveted him, she thought so.

A thorny issue.

It referred to a part of a chicken’s rib that had little meat, making it regrettable to eat or not to eat.

Right now, Mok Gyeong-un’s existence was like that to Wi So-yeon.

If she recruited him right away, it would be burdensome for her, who needed to gather more support forces, since he was a hostage from the righteous faction.

But seeing that he had become the disciple of the Shadow Clan Master, who was in charge of information and spies, and even her second senior brother Jang Neung-ak was eyeing him, it was regrettable to simply let him be taken away.

To her, the short man said while looking at something,

“Putting that aside, is what he said earlier true?”

“What?”

“Didn’t Young Master Jang Neung-ak say something about that hostage from the righteous faction surpassing the peak realm?”

At his words, Wi So-yeon’s eyes narrowed behind the veil.

They had hidden at a distance and suppressed their presence to the maximum, so they couldn't properly see or hear.

However, she had also heard Jang Neung-ak's words.

[For someone not even in his prime to surpass the peak realm is very rare.]

'Strange.'

This point was indeed questionable.

She had met Mok Gyeong-un at the Corpse Blood Valley report just two days ago.

At that time, she had directly assessed Mok Gyeong-un's martial prowess and even confirmed his level by directly touching his hand.

However, Mok Gyeong-un's martial prowess at that time was at most at the pinnacle of peak realm, even being generous.

'He definitely wasn't hiding his skills.'

But how did he receive an evaluation of surpassing the peak realm in just two days?

This made her suspicious.

There was no way Jang Neung-ak, the Society Leader's second disciple, would make up a story about someone he was meeting for the first time.

"Young Lady?"

At the short man's call, Wi So-yeon quietly opened her mouth.

“... I'll have to confirm it myself.”

There was nothing faster than experiencing it with one's own eyes.

If he had really surpassed the peak realm in such a short period, he was someone she had to recruit regardless of his background.

Seok Jung, the Shadow Clan's escort warrior, guided Mok Gyeong-un to his lodging within the estate.

Since he had become a formal disciple, the treatment from the Shadow Clan was assured.

They allowed him to use an entire separate residence with a garden by himself, and there were four escort warriors and two attendants guarding the place.

However, seeing them, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue inwardly.

‘They're all monitors.’

The attendants were also learning martial arts, despite being called attendants.

Thanks to that, Mok Gyeong-un clearly recognized that they were all playing the role of monitoring his every move.

-He must have been quite dissatisfied.

At Cheong-ryeong's words, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

It was annoying, but he understood.

Even if he was the Shadow Clan Master, it didn't seem like he would easily let go of his suspicions just because he had accepted him as a disciple.

Monitoring was a natural course of action.

It would probably continue for a while until the suspicions were completely dispelled.

-What level are they?

-The two attendants are third-rate, and the four escorts are all first-rate warriors.

In the eyes of Mok Gyeong-un, who had opened the Ghost Eye, their levels were clearly visible.

It wasn't difficult to estimate their martial prowess just by the size of their energy.

-Even if their martial prowess is low, it will be difficult to move freely with so many monitors.

-We shouldn't do that.

-Shouldn't do that, huh.

He must have something else in mind.

While inspecting the separate residence like that, Seok Jung clasped his hands in greeting to Mok Gyeong-un and said,

“My task is finished, so I will take my leave now.”

“Ah, you said your name was Escort Seok Jung?”

“Yes.”

“I have something to quietly ask you, so could we talk for a moment?”

“Pardon?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Escort Seok Jung couldn’t hide his puzzlement.

However, since there were many monitors watching around, even if they had some conversation inside, it didn’t seem like it would cause any particular problems.

Escort Seok Jung sent a light hand signal to the escorts guarding the separate residence and followed Mok Gyeong-un into the room.

-Creak! Thud!

After closing the door, Escort Seok Jung naturally asked Mok Gyeong-un, who was sitting at the round table,

“What did you want to say?”

“You’ll report about me, right?”

“... Pardon?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's sudden question, Escort Seok Jung was momentarily stunned and then belatedly asked back.

He wondered what question Mok Gyeong-un would ask, but he didn't expect him to be so blatantly direct.

In response, Seok Jung pretended and answered,

“What do you mean by that?”

“Since it's just the two of us, you can speak honestly. You're going to report, aren't you?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, Escort Seok Jung's expression stiffened.

Did this guy call him into the room separately to ask him not to report?

If that was the case, it was a huge miscalculation.

Seok Jung spoke in a serious tone,

“I don't know what you're talking about, but I only follow the orders of the Clan Master.”

“Yes, you would. But don't do that.”

“... Just what are you saying?”

“It's exactly as you heard. Even if you continue to monitor me in the future, only report to Master what I allow you to report.”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Seok Jung's eyes sharpened.

The Clan Master had told him to thoroughly monitor Mok Gyeong-un because he was a hostage from the righteous faction, and he now understood why.

Just what kind of guy was he?

If he knew that Seok Jung was monitoring him under the Clan Master's order, he should have restrained himself or not treated him recklessly.

-Tap!

Escort Seok Jung clasped his hands in greeting to Mok Gyeong-un and said,

“I will pretend I didn't hear what you just said. However, if you continue to force such things on me, I will have no choice but to...”

“You'll regret it.”

What? Regret it?

This guy was truly arrogant beyond measure.

Although he was a formal disciple, if the Shadow Clan Master changed his mind at any time, he could be expelled.

Yet was he trying to threaten him, the monitor, right now?

At this, Escort Seok Jung, unable to endure it any longer, turned his feet and said,

“I can’t listen any further. I will take my...”

-Swish!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un stretched out his hand.

In that instant...

-Whoosh!

“Huh?”

The body of Escort Seok Jung, who had tried to go outside, was forcibly pulled by an invisible force.

He tried to resist by drawing up his internal energy, but it was useless.

-Thud!

In an instant, Seok Jung, who had flown forward, fell to the floor.

-Thud!

“Ugh!”

Mok Gyeong-un stepped on Seok Jung’s back with his foot.

-Press!

“Ack!”

He had seen Mok Gyeong-un fighting against the subordinates of the Clan Master's second disciple earlier, so he was aware that he was no match for him.

But what was this?

Could it be that Mok Gyeong-un had just pulled him using the Void Grasping technique?

‘Impossible.’

To be able to pull a person using the Void Grasping technique, one had to be a master who had nearly reached the pinnacle-stage of Transcendent Realm.

The pinnacle-stage of the Transcendent Realm meant being a supreme master at the level of the Five Kings.

Of course, this wasn't a proper Void Grasping technique.

It was one of the eight techniques of the Destruction Fist, the “Seizing” technique.

“J-Just what...”

“Shh. Be quiet. If you make too much noise, those outside who want to eavesdrop will get curious.”

“...”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Seok Jung shut his mouth.

He had previously signaled the escort warriors guarding outside to stay close in case of emergencies.

So now, all the escorts and attendants were right next to the separate residence.

Seok Jung calmly said,

“... Knowing that, why are you doing this to me?”

“Why, you ask? Are you asking because you don’t know?”

“Even if you are a master who I can’t handle, I only serve the Shadow Clan...”

-Shing!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un drew his sword from the leather scabbard.

Seok Jung swallowed his dry saliva, perhaps feeling tense from the brilliant and sharp aura flowing from the blade.

Was this person really someone who had nothing to lose?

There were monitors outside, yet he even drew his sword, so was he really going to...

-Swish!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed the blade and placed the hilt of the sword, the handle, against Seok Jung’s sword.

Just what was he doing? At that instant...

-Whoosh!

‘!?’

Seok Jung blinked his eyes.

What just happened?

Feeling a dazed sensation, he couldn't remember what had happened for a moment.

It was like the feeling of waking up from sleep.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un's voice was heard,

“You have a humble desire. You want to marry your lover, who is also from the escort group, build an estate in the outer city, and live happily...”

‘!?’

Seok Jung's eyes widened.

What?

How did this bastard know that?

To the perplexed Seok Jung, Mok Gyeong-un pressed his back with his foot and said,

“But if that lover dies, that humble wish will also be shattered.”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Seok Jung, momentarily enraged, tried to push off the floor and stand up.

However...

“Ugh...”

It was impossible since he was inferior in internal energy from the beginning.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“I hope you don’t waste your energy on needless acts.”

“You... you! If you do such things...”

“Isn’t it entirely up to Escort Seok Jung’s efforts to make sure I don’t want to do such things?”

“...”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s threat, Escort Seok Jung tightly shut his mouth.

He had to endure unconditionally right now.

This guy was someone the Clan Master should never have accepted as a disciple.

He made up his mind to pretend to submit and then immediately go to the Clan Master to report.

However...

-Swish!

There was a sound coming from the window side.

It was a sound like the paper on the window being pierced, and...

-Tap!

Escort Seok Jung's eyes shook crazily at the butterfly-shaped accessory that fell in front of him.

It was the accessory he had given to his lover as a gift.

“Th-This is...”

To the perplexed Seok Jung, Mok Gyeong-un bent his waist and whispered in his ear,

“Next time, instead of an accessory, you'll see your lover's severed head. Do you understand?”

‘!!!!!!!’

The moment he saw Mok Gyeong-un's face, Seok Jung felt like his heart was stopping.

Although he was smiling, the moment he met Mok Gyeong-un's eyes filled with malice, his spine turned cold, and he wanted to vomit out everything inside him right away.

“You look like you're about to cry. Did someone bully you? There, there. Get up.”

-Pat pat!

Mok Gyeong-un lightly patted his back and then helped him stand up.

And to the pale-faced Seok Jung, he said,

“Just inform Master that the Society Leader’s second disciple came to visit, but I politely declined, so they left. Leave out any stories about who I fought or whatnot. Understand?”

“... Y-Yes, I understand.”

“Good. Then go ahead.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Seok Jung tried to hurry outside.

But his legs were trembling, making it difficult to walk properly.

Only by circulating his internal energy throughout his body was he barely able to walk out the door.

As he went out like that, he saw the escort warriors and attendants waiting right in front of the separate residence in case of emergencies.

Seok Jung asked them,

“Did the Young Master happen to come out while I was with him?”

“What do you mean by that? Weren’t you continuously conversing inside?”

“That’s right. No one came out, so did something happen inside?”

‘!?’

At the escorts’ words, Seok Jung’s expression stiffened.

Judging from their reactions, it seemed Mok Gyeong-un had never come out at all.

But how did he bring this butterfly-shaped accessory?

He had no idea what was going on.

-Shudder!

Seok Jung felt goosebumps all over his body.

What kind of ghost-wailing situation was this?

He knew the wish he had been longing for without even saying it?

He brought the accessory he had given to her without even going outside?

It was hard to believe if all of this was real.

“Escort Seok. What kind of conversation did you have inside to make you like this?”

“... N-Nothing much was discussed.”

“But why?”

“I’m just feeling a bit unwell.”

Seok Jung couldn’t say anything.

If he was someone who could do such strange and frightening things while sitting still, it seemed he could do anything as he had warned.

‘I can’t say anything. Anything at all.’

Seok Jung had no thoughts other than wanting to leave this place right away and catch his breath.

“... I’m done with my task, so I’ll be going now.”

With those words, Seok Jung hurriedly left the separate residence.

Seeing his appearance, those who were puzzled about what had happened approached Mok Gyeong-un, who had come out of the separate residence.

And with a smile, he said,

“You all must be working hard. Since you’ll be with me from now on, shall we have a cup of warm tea together?”

Chapter 133 – Erosion (1)

“The Society Leader’s second disciple just left?”

“Yes.”

“Hmm.”

At Seok Jung’s report, the Shadow Clan Master tapped the desk in his office with his finger.

It seemed the result at the Corpse Blood Valley gates had spread faster than expected.

Already, the second disciple Jang Neung-ak had made a move.

‘It seems Young Master Jang Neung-ak was trying to use that child Mok Gyeong-un as a foothold.’

He had already approached several times, requesting support, but each time, the Shadow Clan Master had refused, saying the Clan Master was still in good health and he had no intention of supporting anyone.

However, now that he had a formal disciple, Jang Neung-ak was blatantly targeting him.

But unexpectedly...

‘He refused Young Master Jang Neung-ak’s offer...’

What was surprising was that Mok Gyeong-un had refused Young Master Jang Neung-ak’s offer without any hesitation.

And yet nothing particular had happened, which was astonishing.

The second disciple was someone who had to get what he wanted to be satisfied.

It was strange that such a person would return without any complaints after Mok Gyeong-un’s single refusal.

“Was there nothing else out of the ordinary?”

At the Shadow Clan Master’s question, Seok Jung hesitated for a moment.

In his heart, he wanted to tell everything, but the fear that had pierced his chest made it impossible for him to reveal what had happened earlier.

‘He is concealing his martial prowess. He possesses a strange ability. He had some inaudible conversation with the second disciple.’

There was so much he wanted to say.

However, his lips wouldn’t part.

Even though the Shadow Clan Master’s room was soundproofed, he had the illusion that Mok Gyeong-un was watching, making it impossible for him to say this.

“... Nothing else happened.”

At his answer, the Shadow Clan Master’s eyes slightly narrowed.

However, without revealing it, he said,

“That’s fortunate. Then you may go.”

“Yes.”

-Tap!

Escort Seok Jung clasped his hands in greeting and left the office.

As he left, a voice came from somewhere.

“Clan Master.”

“Yes.”

“It feels like something is missing from the report.”

“I agree with that statement.”

Unlike usual, Seok Jung’s complexion was pale, and for some reason, he seemed to have not fully conveyed the circumstances of what had happened outside the estate.

Considering the second disciple Jang Neung-ak’s temperament.

Nominally, he was the leader of the Shadow Clan, commanding the information, secrets, and spies of the Heaven and Earth Society.

There was no way he wouldn’t find this strange.

“Assign someone to Seok Jung.”

“Yes.”

“And inform those stationed at the separate residence to write down and report his every move.”

“Yes.”

-Tap!

With a small sound from the ceiling, the presence disappeared.

After he left, the Shadow Clan Master unrolled an old scroll placed on the desk in his office.

The scroll was written in characters completely different from Hanzi.

[1][منی اهر]

It was difficult to even consider it a secret code.

And so, seven days passed.

Over those seven days, the Shadow Clan Master fell into various concerns.

They were concerns that arose from observing Mok Gyeong-un, who had become a formal disciple over those seven days.

The first was Mok Gyeong-un's talent.

It was something he experienced starting the very next day.

He had given him a secret manual to memorize and called him to the Clan Master's private training room to teach him the Ghost Shadow Footwork.

So, before teaching him, he told him to demonstrate the stances to the extent he understood if he had memorized the secret manual.

However...

‘... Just what is this?’

The Shadow Clan Master couldn't hide his surprise.

That's because Mok Gyeong-un had digested the Ghost Shadow Footwork too perfectly.

Not a single stance was out of place, and it was accurate as if he had trained and mastered it for a long time.

He wondered if Mok Gyeong-un had perhaps practiced the Ghost Shadow Footwork overnight.

But that wasn't the case either.

[Young Master Mok just stayed locked in his room quietly.]

According to the reports from the escort warriors and attendants monitoring the separate residence, he had done nothing.

It seemed he had really just rested last night after having a meal.

The Shadow Clan Master couldn't hide his amazement at the fact that he had perfectly grasped the footwork in a single day without doing anything.

'Is he truly a genius?'

He was aware that Mok Gyeong-un possessed innate martial talent.

Hadn't he shown the amazing ability to instantly imitate the Right Fist, Left Palm technique's marvelous principle right in front of him?

So, the Shadow Clan Master tested Mok Gyeong-un.

This time, he gave him the Flying Phantom Saber Art and told him he would give him an hour to memorize or learn as much as he could.

An hour later, the Shadow Clan Master asked Mok Gyeong-un,

[How much have you learned?]

The Flying Phantom Saber Art was the Shadow Clan Master's unique martial art and belonged to the Demonic Ascension martial arts.

He took pride in it being one of the top ten saber arts in the entire martial world.

So, it was somewhat more difficult to learn than the Ghost Shadow Footwork, and he thought it would be impossible to master in a short time.

However...

‘... Just what am I seeing?’

What was happening?

Mok Gyeong-un demonstrated the Flying Phantom Saber Art too skillfully.

He even displayed the later stances that couldn't be performed without grasping the saber intent, not inferior to the Shadow Clan Master himself.

Seeing this, the Shadow Clan Master was genuinely shocked.

How was this possible in just an hour?

‘It’s absurd.’

Beyond shock, he even felt fear at Mok Gyeong-un’s martial talent to the point of being terrified.

From the beginning, Mok Gyeong-un didn’t need something called teaching.

When learning stances for the first time, the master had to correct the accurate posture and the meaning behind the stances, but he comprehended it all on his own just by looking at the secret manual.

Just in case, he could confirm it by teaching him two more martial arts.

‘One hears and knows ten, no, one martial art and knows ten.’

There was nothing much to teach.

In just a single day, he had comprehended all the main martial arts of the clan.

Since he had awakened to all the stances on his own, the key was nothing but reaching a higher realm through cultivation methods or enlightenment.

[I’ll have to change the teaching method.]

So, the Shadow Clan Master changed the method to a question-and-answer format rather than teaching martial arts.

Even if it wasn’t related to stances, there were various studies in martial arts, so he told Mok Gyeong-un to ask if there was anything he didn’t know.

But over the seven days, there was hardly anything he asked.

No, there was one thing.

[I heard that thing on Master's face is a human skin mask, so how do you make that?]

Mok Gyeong-un showed interest in that rather than martial arts training.

However, since he still didn't trust Mok Gyeong-un, he hadn't taught him about the final three stances of the Flying Phantom Saber Art and the human skin mask yet.

The first concern was his martial talent that could truly be called genius without exaggeration.

And the second concern was an extension of this.

[Is this true?]

[Yes. It's information received from the branch in the northern part of Anhui Province.]

[... It's hard to believe.]

Just three days ago, he had requested information about the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

The Shadow Clan Master had ordered an investigation into the environment Mok Gyeong-un had grown up in to clearly understand what kind of person he was.

With this level of talent, he thought the Yeon Mok Sword Manor would have also put in a lot of effort to nurture him.

However, contrary to such expectations...

[Hmm.]

The Mok Gyeong-un described in the report was too different from the one he knew now.

His martial arts talent was insignificant, and his standing within the Yeon Mok Sword Manor was the worst.

Rather, the one known to possess innate martial talent was a fellow named Mok Yu-cheon, who had also been dragged as a hostage from the righteous faction.

‘It’s hard to understand.’

His reputation within the family was too poor.

To this extent, he was practically ignored in the succession structure.

But how was this possible?

‘Before being taken as a hostage, he was merely at the third-rate level?’

According to the report, he should have been called trash, let alone having talent, but compared to his current appearance, it was utterly unimaginable.

It was like looking at the records of a different person.

This made him even question if the Yeon Mok Sword Manor had distorted the information to hide their talent.

‘The only thing that matches...’

Looking at his standing within the Yeon Mok Sword Manor, it made sense for him to have grievances.

After all, he was in a position where he wasn't recognized by everyone in the family.

However, this alone was insufficient.

[Look into it further.]

[Understood.]

In the end, more definite information was needed.

If he had been the same as the image the Shadow Clan Master knew, this information alone would have been enough, but the person was completely different from the information brought.

Even up to this point, the third concern was an immediate problem he was facing.

-Tap tap tap!

The Shadow Clan Master tapped the floor with his finger out of habit and muttered,

“What to do?”

The desk in the office was filled with reports, all of which were observations of Mok Gyeong-un's every move written by the monitors.

Since they had observed him for seven days, he thought there would be at least one thing that would come up.

But there was nothing.

As if it was predetermined, Mok Gyeong-un's daily routine was simply martial arts training, meals, breathing exercises, and reading books before bed. That was it.

For seven days, there was no deviation from this cycle of actions.

‘... It's too consistent.’

Because of this, his suspicion reached its peak.

When the records sent by the monitors remained unchanged for two days, he replaced them all, just in case.

But they also had the same records as the previous monitors.

So, two days later, he changed them again to different monitors, but it was the same.

To this extent, he could really believe it to be true, but the Shadow Clan Master rather felt a sense of dissonance from these records.

‘Is it for show?’

The feeling of trying not to stand out was too strong.

As a result, all his actions felt like they were for show.

Since he knew he was being monitored, it seemed like he was restraining himself to reassure them or gain their trust.

‘Hmm. What to do?’

In case he could coax or threaten the monitors like in the case of Escort Seok Jung, he had changed them three times.

A total of 18 monitors had observed Mok Gyeong-un.

For now, it was virtually impossible for Mok Gyeong-un, who had only been in the training room and separate residence for just seven days, to persuade or threaten all of them and use them as he wished.

‘It might have only heightened his vigilance.’

Mok Gyeong-un wasn’t simply outstanding in talent.

He was a very cunning fellow, so he must have already noticed that he was being monitored.

So, there was no point in continuing to change the monitors like this.

‘No other choice.’

A monitored target doesn’t show what you want to see.

In that case, it was better to change the method.

“Byeok.”

At the Shadow Clan Master’s call, a voice came from the ceiling.

“Yes.”

The one called Byeok was the Shadow Clan Master's guard and confidant.

His martial prowess had reached the pinnacle of the peak realm, and he was a former member of one of the Four Great Assassination Sects, the Silent Sorrow Assassination Sect[무음수살문], reaching the highest level in concealment.

“Byeok, replace the attendants with ordinary ones and withdraw the escort warriors, leaving only two.”

“Yes, I understand.”

The Shadow Clan Master's next move was this.

It was to reduce the number of monitors and lower Mok Gyeong-un's vigilance.

And...

“Byeok will have to work hard for a while.”

“Understood.”

Instead of openly monitoring, he was planning to secretly monitor through Byeok.

Although his martial prowess was similar to Mok Gyeong-un's, Byeok, a top-class assassin from the Silent Sorrow Assassination Sect, was a master at concealing his presence to the point where even masters who had reached the transcendent realm would have difficulty finding him if he seriously hid himself.

Of course, there were varying degrees of the transcendent realm, and it was difficult to deceive those who had surpassed the consummate level.

However, he could easily deceive Mok Gyeong-un's level of perception.

Mok Gyeong-un's separate residence.

Byeok, who had been moving while suppressing his presence with the Silent Step, carefully entered the gap between the roof tiles.

After entering like that, he headed towards the room where light was leaking out.

From there, the sound of someone reciting something long could be heard.

Byeok quietly moved there and looked down at the room with the candle lit from the ceiling.

'!?'

Byeok frowned.

He saw Mok Gyeong-un grasping a man's head and chanting something strange.

“Turbid fire road, Noon hour labor, Promise to fairy realm, One grain transforms into ten thousand.....”

'What?'

Just what was going on?

Byeok, who had been looking at this seriously, quietly took out something from his bosom and, after watching for an opportunity, jumped down from the ceiling.

Byeok, who had jumped down behind the defenseless Mok Gyeong-un, then...

-Swish!

He held out an old scroll to Mok Gyeong-un.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un, who had finished the incantation, turned his head and spoke as if it were nothing.

“You came quickly.”

“Yes. Master.”

What on earth was happening?

Surprisingly, Byeok called Mok Gyeong-un “Master.”

Then, Mok Gyeong-un received the scroll Byeok had held out and said with a smile,

“How is the new body? Demonic Monk.”

Chapter 134 – Erosion (2)

Mok Gyeong-un received the scroll Byeok held out with a smile and asked,

“How is the new body? Demonic Monk.”

In response, Byeok answered with a satisfied expression.

“It seems useful.”

That’s right.

Surprisingly, Demonic Monk had already possessed the body of the man called Byeok.

This had happened just three days ago.

After the escort warriors and attendants were replaced for the third time, Byeok had secretly come to inspect Mok Gyeong-un’s separate residence.

However, this wasn’t just once but his third visit.

Mok Gyeong-un had already sent Demonic Monk to explore the entire Shadow Clan for four days, grasping how it operated and the extent of its power.

[It’s fortunate.]

Mok Gyeong-un was aware that this person named Byeok was practically the right-hand man and confidant of the Shadow Clan Master.

Therefore, he had been waiting for an opportunity and subdued him when he infiltrated the separate residence.

No matter how much his martial prowess had reached the pinnacle of the peak realm and he was skilled at concealing his presence as a former member of the Silent Sorrow Assassination Sect, there was no way he could handle the eyes of a spirit and Mok Gyeong-un’s martial prowess.

Mok Gyeong-un judged that the captured Byeok had high utilization value.

So, he had Demonic Monk possess his body.

In this way, Demonic Monk, who had taken over Byeok's body, had been monitoring by the Shadow Clan Master's side for three days under Mok Gyeong-un's orders.

“Hmm. Is this what the Shadow Clan Master looks at every day?”

Mok Gyeong-un asked, holding up the old scroll.

In response, Demonic Monk, who had possessed Byeok's body, nodded and answered.

“Yes. He looked at it without fail for about half an hour at the hour of the dog (7-9 PM) every day.”

After receiving his report for the first time, Mok Gyeong-un became curious about this scroll and ordered him to bring it for a while.

No matter what was written on it, he could memorize everything with just one look.

At that moment, Demonic Monk glanced at the man whose head was grasped by Mok Gyeong-un's hand and asked,

“Master, but who is this person?”

-Ah, you mean that mortal? It seems he was sent by that blind bastard last time. Phew.

The one who answered this question was none other than Cheong-ryeong.

She was freely smoking a pipe while staying out of the wooden puppet inside the separate residence.

“By blind, you mean him?”

-Yes, that troublesome mortal.

It was the blind man Wi Maeng-cheon, a member of the Five Mountains Alliance and a confidant of Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Society Leader.

Unlike Jang Neung-ak, who withdrew, he showed a strange wariness, so she thought he would do something annoying in the near future, and that prediction had come true.

He had boldly sent someone to Mok Gyeong-un’s separate residence within the Shadow Clan’s estate at night.

Of course, they had captured him as soon as he entered the separate residence.

“He was quite tight-lipped.”

At those words, Demonic Monk looked at the unconscious man’s hands.

Both hands were a mess.

All his fingers were bent backward, and even needles were stuck in his fingernails.

He had been properly tortured.

“I had hoped he would endure a bit longer, but he opened his mouth on the sixth fingernail.”

Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue as if regretful.

He had planned to pierce him with needles and then pluck out his fingernails and toenails.

No matter how strong one's endurance was, it was difficult to withstand continuous torture after having one's internal energy sealed.

Mok Gyeong-un removed his hand from the man's head and said,

“Do you know what this guy said when he first approached?”

“...”

“He said he was from the Righteous Alliance's Silent Strides.”

‘!?’

The Righteous Alliance's Silent Strides?

Does he think that makes sense?

If he had mentioned someone else within the Heaven and Earth Society, he could have avoided deeper suspicion, so why did he answer in that way?

As Demonic Monk was puzzled, Cheong-ryeong exhaled a long puff of smoke and said,

-Hoo. Can't you see if you look? He's using his brain.

“Using his brain?”

-He probably targeted the fact that the mortal is a hostage from the righteous faction. Unlike his master, that blind bastard was suspicious and wary of the mortal.

“Ah...”

-Tsk tsk. Use your head. Your head.

At her admonishment, the Demonic Monk scratched his head.

Demonic Monk had a straightforward side but was far from using his brain.

Cheong-ryeong said to Mok Gyeong-un,

-But I don't know what nerve that blind bastard had to blatantly send someone like this here. He could have been caught if he had made a single mistake.

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

“Hmm.”

Come to think of it, that was also true.

This place was none other than the estate of the Shadow Clan.

Since it was a place that managed secrets, information, and spies, its security was thorough even within the inner city.

But how did he come to the separate residence without being discovered...

“Ah...”

Suddenly, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes sharpened.

-Why are you doing that?

“They deliberately left the storehouse open.”

-They deliberately left the storehouse open?

What does that mean?

As she was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head and said,

“If you leave the storehouse open, you can know what the thief who entered wants. You can even find their hideout if you follow the thief.”

-Could it be?

“Yes. It seems they deliberately let him in.”

There was no way the security of a place that handled secrets could be easily breached.

Unless they deliberately let him in.

If that was the case, it meant that they had already noticed this person's infiltration but had a high possibility of letting him in to find out his purpose.

“They're not the Shadow Clan for nothing. To handle someone's infiltration in reverse like this...”

-Rumble rumble!

Numerous presences could be felt from outside.

Soon, the paper on the windows and doors brightened up from the south in order, illuminated by torches.

The suddenly rushing presences seemed to have surrounded the separate residence so that there was no way to escape.

Cheong-ryeong looked at Mok Gyeong-un with sparkling eyes.

The prediction was spot on.

In a dark alley between the walls, about 30 jang away from the Shadow Clan's estate.

On the opposite side of this wall, there was a middle-aged man with long hair, his eyes covered with a black cloth, leaning on a bamboo cane.

He was none other than Wi Maeng-cheon, the Second Mountain and a member of the Five Mountains Alliance.

Why was he here, not far from the Shadow Clan?

Soon, someone wearing a mask and of unknown identity jumped over the wall and approached him, whispering,

“It seems they have rushed to that fellow's separate residence as you said.”

“It went according to plan.”

“Yes.”

“Huhuhu.”

Wi Maeng-cheon laughed softly.

Everything was going as he wanted.

He could imagine Mok Gyeong-un being perplexed right now.

Since he was an excessively cunning fellow, he must have realized his true intentions by now.

Just a few hours ago...

[What? Is it really alright to do that?]

[Yes. But not right away. Endure as much as possible. It will be painful and difficult, but you have to.]

[When you say as much as possible?]

[Until that fellow's suspicion is dispelled.]

[... I understand. But wouldn't it be better to disguise it as Young Master's side or the supreme leader's concubine's side rather than the Clan Master, just in case?]

[No. That cunning brat will quickly notice if we mention someone who hasn't even contacted him directly.]

[...]

[Rather, if I say I sent him, he won't kill him right away.]

[Will he really?]

[Trust me.]

[I understand. But if that brat knows that the Society Leader sent him, how will he react?]

[If he has truly defected to our organization and has definitely become a person of the Shadow Clan, he will report it to his master, the Shadow Clan Master. If not, he will agonize over how to deal with it. But that doesn't matter.]

[The Shadow Clan will make the first move anyway.]

[Yes.]

The Shadow Clan handled secrets, so its external and internal security was thorough.

Of course, not the entire estate was like that, but if someone tried to infiltrate from the outside to the inside, they would immediately notice.

Once inside, it was only a matter of time before getting caught.

[If the Shadow Clan's security guards take large-scale action...]

[Yes. At that time, he will die as the Righteous Alliance's spy, Silent Strides, again.]

This was Wi Maeng-cheon's true intention.

To create the image that Mok Gyeong-un was in contact with the Righteous Alliance's spy, Silent Strides.

If that happened, the Shadow Clan Master would have no choice but to suspect Mok Gyeong-un, a hostage from the righteous faction.

[I entrust this to you, Ji-hang.]

[I will certainly complete the mission.]

[... I will never forget this loyalty.]

[Yes. Please take good care of my family in Danyang.]

[I understand.]

From the beginning, it was a ploy devised with the resolution to lose one's life.

Informing Mok Gyeong-un of the truth midway was simply to buy time until the Shadow Clan's warriors made a move.

If he lost his life before that, he wouldn't be able to carry out the plan.

'I apologize to my lord, but that brat Mok Gyeong-un is not someone who can be trusted. If you take him in, he will become poison, not gain.'

So, it was better for him to become a spy of the righteous faction and be expelled.

It would be even better if he unfortunately died.

Even if he had truly defected to the Heaven and Earth Society, Wi Maeng-cheon could never trust Mok Gyeong-un.

“Then let’s go back.”

After confirming that the Shadow Clan’s warriors had rushed to Mok Gyeong-un’s separate residence, the Second Mountain Wi Maeng-cheon left this place with the masked person.

Wi Maeng-cheon lay on the bed with a somewhat relieved heart.

He trusted his intuition.

Nothing was as accurate as the sound of the heart.

Someone whose heartbeat remained steady and emotions unchanged in any situation was far from an ordinary human being.

Such an existence must have something twisted about them.

He had conveyed this opinion to his lord, the second disciple Jang Neung-ak, several times, but it was all ignored as his desire for Mok Gyeong-un had already grown.

So, what could he do?

He had no choice but to resolve it on his own.

Fortunately, what he had gained from becoming blind was not only the maximization of other senses, including hearing, but also the deepening of his ability to observe and his insight.

It was a move he had devised through dozens of simulations over seven days.

No matter how cunning, he would not be able to escape and would eventually be dealt with by his master, the Shadow Clan Master.

‘It’s quite refreshing now that I’m at ease.’

With that, Wi Maeng-cheon fell asleep in a good mood.

How much time had passed since he fell asleep?

‘!?’

Soon, Wi Maeng-cheon quietly lifted his head from the bed.

Since he was originally blind, all his senses that did not rely on sight were twice that of ordinary people, and his hearing was even sharper.

Although he was asleep, these developed senses always made him detect danger.

‘What is it?’

At some point, it was quiet outside.

It was too quiet to the point of feeling discomfort.

Four warriors were taking turns standing guard around his residence.

He couldn't feel their presence.

-Swish!

Wi Maeng-cheon, who had silently gotten up from his spot while suppressing his presence, grasped the handle of the bamboo cane containing the Bamboo Sword.

And he carefully opened the door and went out.

Wi Maeng-cheon slowly walked towards where the warriors were standing guard, suppressing his presence.

-Huff! Huff!

He could hear breathing.

The steady breathing he heard was not that of someone awake.

'Are they sleeping?'

Wi Maeng-cheon frowned.

These warriors took turns standing guard, so they never worked half-heartedly.

But no matter how much he listened, they were all asleep.

At this, Wi Maeng-cheon felt inexplicably disturbed.

Did it make sense for all the escort warriors around the residence to be asleep?

As he was puzzled, footsteps could be heard from somewhere.

Although they were approaching while suppressing their presence as much as possible, it was clearly audible to his hearing.

-Thump, thump!

Wi Maeng-cheon grasped the handle of the cane and assumed a kicking stance.

These footsteps...

He had heard them somewhere before.

It was only once, but he had accurately remembered them.

‘It can’t be?’

That fellow should be in a situation where he was imprisoned in the Shadow Clan’s Golden Jade and being interrogated right now.

But how...

-Whoosh!

At that moment, the presence reached in front of him at a tremendous speed.

-Clang!

Wi Maeng-cheon, who had instantly kicked, blocked the sharp aura flying towards him.

The sound of metal clashing against metal strongly resonated in his ears.

-Tremble!

The two people who had been locking swords clashed a few times like lightning and distanced themselves.

-Clang clang clang! Bam bam bam!

As they gained some distance, Wi Maeng-cheon opened his mouth.

“... How did you come here?”

“You seem quite surprised.”

The owner of that voice was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

Wi Maeng-cheon couldn't understand at all.

He knew that the Shadow Clan's guards had stepped forward and surrounded Mok Gyeong-un's separate residence.

But how did he come here?

The puzzled Wi Maeng-cheon soon drew up his internal energy.

‘First, I need to subdue that bastard.’

He didn’t know how he had come out of the Shadow Clan and arrived at his residence, but subduing him was the priority for now.

But then...

“Ah! Before that, you should take this.”

“What?”

-Whoosh!

Something heavy that cut through the air.

Since it felt too heavy to be a hidden weapon, Wi Maeng-cheon lightly stepped back about two steps and dodged what Mok Gyeong-un had thrown.

It rolled on the ground and stopped in front of Wi Maeng-cheon’s feet.

“What are you doing?”

“I returned what you gave me, so is there a problem?”

“What do you mean by what I gave... !?”

Suddenly, Wi Maeng-cheon stopped speaking midway.

After losing his sight, his senses had become twice as good as ordinary people.

Naturally, this sense included the sense of smell.

With the scent of blood rising from under his feet, Wi Maeng-cheon stretched his foot forward with a suspecting heart and flicked up what Mok Gyeong-un had thrown.

And he caught it with his left hand.

-Tap!

‘!!!!!!!’

At that moment, Wi Maeng-cheon’s expression stiffened.

Coincidentally, the sensation felt on his palm was a face.

The owner of that face was none other than...

‘Ji-hang?’

It was Ji-hang, whom he had sent to frame Mok Gyeong-un as a spy of the righteous faction.

To be precise, it was Ji-hang’s severed head.

Chapter 135 – Erosion (3)

The blind man Wi Maeng-cheon’s face stiffened.

What was placed on his hand was none other than...

‘Ji-hang?’

It was Ji-hang, whom he had sent to frame Mok Gyeong-un as a spy of the righteous faction.

To be precise, it was Ji-hang’s severed head.

For a moment, Wi Maeng-cheon’s mind became complicated.

Just what was going on?

‘Why does this brat have Ji-hang’s head?’

He couldn’t understand.

Of course, Ji-hang’s death was planned as the final part of this move.

That was the only way to endanger Mok Gyeong-un without revealing the tail.

But he should be in a situation where he was being interrogated right now, so why had he already died, and why was Mok Gyeong-un handing his neck to him?

To the perplexed Wi Maeng-cheon, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smirk,

“You must be greatly disappointed that the result is different from what you intended.”

“You bastard...”

“You seem to have used your head a lot, but it’s a pity. It would have worked smoothly with others.”

“What?”

Just an hour ago.

In the office of the Shadow Clan’s Internal Affairs Director.

A Shadow Clan warrior urgently entered and reported to Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun, who was standing with his hands behind his back.

“An intruder has infiltrated Young Master Mok Gyeong-un’s separate residence.”

“Young Master Mok’s separate residence?”

Cho Yeom-hun’s eyes narrowed.

He had already received a report the moment the intruder had entered.

However, the Shadow Clan had a practice of not immediately capturing intruders when they entered.

They would monitor the intruder’s route to find out their target and even reverse-track them.

This time, too, the Internal Administration was watching the intruder’s route for reverse-tracking.

However...

“Hmm... What is the intruder’s intention?”

This was their concern.

The Shadow Clan was already monitoring Mok Gyeong-un's every movement and action because he was a hostage from the righteous faction.

But the intruder had gone to Mok Gyeong-un's separate residence.

To the worried Cho Yeom-hun, the Shadow Clan warrior carefully opened his mouth.

“It seems their goal is to make contact with Young Master Mok Gyeong-un rather than targeting him.”

“... I see.”

The worrisome situation had occurred.

In fact, those in the inner city knew that the Shadow Clan handled secrets, so they wouldn't carelessly set foot in it, and they were also well aware of its extremely strict level of security.

Therefore, it was somewhat absurd for someone from the Heaven and Earth Society to infiltrate this place.

In that case...

‘Is it a spy after all?’

The probability couldn't be completely ignored.

If the intruder was a spy from the righteous faction, the situation they had been worrying about had practically occurred.

Although the Clan Master had not yet allowed Mok Gyeong-un access to any particular information other than martial arts due to not trusting him, it was unacceptable for anything to be leaked outside even a little.

“What should we do?”

“Capture him.”

“What about reverse-tracking?”

“If Young Master Mok is related to the intruder, we can’t just let it slide rather than reverse-tracking.”

“Understood.”

-Tap tap tap!

As the Shadow Clan warrior who received the order left, Cho Yeom-hun also picked up his unique weapon, the Zhenping Saber, and summoned the Internal Administration’s escort unit.

Once the entire escort unit had gathered, Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun led them with a solemn expression.

The path to the separate residence wasn’t very far.

On the way there, Cho Yeom-hun recalled seven days ago.

[Even if he scored the highest at the Corpse Blood Valley gates, you shouldn’t have accepted him.]

[You should know what it means to have scored the highest.]

[... I know. I know, but Clan Master. That fellow could become poison to the Shadow Clan. No matter how outstanding his talent is, he will face heavy opposition due to his background.]

[Of course, that would be the case. However, if we can gain certainty about that child, our Clan will have an immense talent we have never encountered before.]

Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun could not understand the Shadow Clan Master's decision at all.

If he still hadn't dispelled his doubts, why couldn't he let go of his attachment to the righteous faction's hostage?

Because of that, the Shadow Clan's position could be narrowed in the future.

'If...'

If the intruder was truly a spy from the righteous faction and Mok Gyeong-un had a close relationship with him or had made contact with him in some way to do something, this opportunity could not be missed.

If there was the slightest suspicion, for the sake of the Shadow Clan, he had to be expelled.

-Whoosh!

With that, Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun arrived at Mok Gyeong-un's separate residence.

The place, illuminated by torches, was surrounded by dozens of Shadow Clan security warriors.

Upon arriving, Cho Yeom-hun asked a Great Clan Leader-level warrior,

“What’s the situation?”

“Since we sent them in, they should be coming out soon.”

“Is that so?”

Soon, as the Great Clan Leader-level warrior said, the warriors sent inside came out supporting an unfamiliar person, and Mok Gyeong-un followed behind them.

However, seeing the intruder being supported out, Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun’s eyes sparkled.

That’s because the fellow’s hands were a mess.

Anyone could see the traces of torture.

‘Hmm.’

Normally, seeing this, one might think, ‘Does this mean the intruder has no relation to Mok Gyeong-un?’ But Cho Yeom-hun, the Internal Affairs Director of the Shadow Clan, wasn’t like that.

Numerous variables and situations were being considered in his mind.

The closest one was...

‘It could be to avoid suspicion.’

Most of those who entered as spies were highly trained individuals.

They had countermeasures prepared for various situations.

Assuming he was a spy who had entered from the Righteous Alliance, he would always prepare a tactic to allow at least one person to escape in case he was discovered by the enemy along with his comrades.

Well, this was just an assumption.

The fortunate thing was that the intruder was alive.

‘Since we captured him alive, we can make him confess somehow.’

This place was the Shadow Clan.

It was also a place specialized in such matters.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un saw him and greeted him with a salute.

“The Internal Affairs Director has come as well.”

“Young Master.”

Cho Yeom-hun also greeted him with a salute out of courtesy.

However, his face was already filled with the desire to interrogate him right away.

But without losing politeness, Cho Yeom-hun said,

“Young Master. An intruder entered from the outside, so were you not very inconvenienced by the enemy’s threat?”

In response to his words, Mok Gyeong-un replied with a smile,

“How could that be?”

“It’s fortunate to see that the Young Master is safe.”

“Thank you for your concern. I thought you were unaware since there was no intervention even though an intruder had entered, but that wasn’t the case.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the skin under Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun’s eyes slightly twitched.

Although he phrased it indirectly, it was a jab at why they had only discovered the intruder now when he had boldly entered like this.

At this, Cho Yeom-hun shook his head and said,

“How could we have only discovered the intruder now? We just left him alone for a moment to find out what he was after.”

“Ah, I see. I almost had a misunderstanding.”

“Hahaha. Is that so? By the way, Young Master.”

“Yes.”

“I also have something I’d like to ask.”

“What is it?”

“I thought the intruder might be after confidential documents, but unexpectedly, he headed straight for the Young Master’s separate residence.”

“Yes. As you can see, that’s right.”

“So, I’m curious as to why this intruder went directly to the Young Master’s separate residence.”

“Can’t we find out by waking him up and interrogating him? I was also interrogating him, but he wouldn’t open his mouth easily.”

‘Ha!’

Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun inwardly agreed with Mok Gyeong-un’s attitude, as if it were nothing.

If a normal intruder had entered and was captured, if there was no relation, he should have called for them to interrogate, not do it himself.

But Mok Gyeong-un says with his own mouth that he interrogated him.

Does he not know that it can raise more suspicion?

“You interrogated him yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Oh my.”

“Is there a problem?”

“This is quite troublesome. It would have been better if you had told us immediately after capturing the intruder.”

“I was going to tell you once the interrogation was over.”

“But you didn’t do that and conducted the interrogation independently.”

“Is that wrong?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, Cho Yeom-hun snorted and said,

“Yes, it’s wrong. The fact that an intruder entered the separate residence and you didn’t report it but conducted an independent interrogation means, regardless of the method, that you had solo contact with the enemy.”

“Solo contact?”

“Yes.”

“If you look at his hands, you’ll see traces of interrogation. Is there anything particularly suspicious?”

“Unfortunately, traces of interrogation can rather serve as a means to dispel suspicion about contact. Ah, of course, I’m not asserting that the Young Master had such intentions. I’m just saying it could be possible.”

You don’t think that’s the case.

The implication was that he suspected him and was reprimanding him for doing something that would make him suspicious.

At Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun's words, which kindly told him that he had done something suspicious, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

'He's laughing?'

He had clearly told him with his own mouth.

He was saying that he had done something that would make him suspicious.

But what was this reaction?

Although he felt quite unpleasant, Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun did not reveal it.

In any case, since he had justification, he was determined to take him and reveal everything through interrogation with the intruder.

Cho Yeom-hun politely saluted Mok Gyeong-un and said,

"First, I apologize to the Young Master in advance. To prepare for any situation, you'll have to come with me to the Internal Administration for a moment."

"To the Internal Administration?"

"Yes. As I mentioned earlier, the reason is your contact with the intruder. Until the intruder's interrogation is over and the Young Master is out of suspicion, it can't be helped."

Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun was now blatantly telling him that he was under suspicion.

However, even at his words, Mok Gyeong-un still maintained a relaxed expression.

Cho Yeom-hun clicked his tongue.

‘Let’s see how long that composure lasts.’

“What are you doing? Escort the Young Master to the Internal Administration right...”

Before he could even finish his words.

Right then, the intruder who had been supported suddenly opened his eyes.

Then he tried to shake off the arms of the warriors holding him.

-Bam!

“Hold him tight!”

“This bastard, where are you...!”

But the intruder’s strength was not ordinary.

In an instant, he threw the warrior holding his right arm to the ground.

-Thud!

“Ugh!”

Then he tried to grab the neck of the warrior holding his left arm, but...

-Bam!

At that moment, someone appeared and pressed the intruder's shoulder while striking his back acupoints like lightning.

Pressed by a strong internal energy, the intruder was soon forced to kneel.

-Thud!

“Ugh!”

“Clan Master!”

The one who suddenly appeared and subdued the intruder was none other than the Shadow Clan Master.

He had just arrived after receiving the report.

The Shadow Clan Master clicked his tongue and said,

“It's been a while since a night visitor has come to our clan.”

“Clan Master, you're here.”

Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun approached him, saluted, and greeted him.

And then, to take over the intruder subdued by the Shadow Clan Master, he stretched out his hand and said,

“I will handle it.”

But then, the intruder suddenly blurted out,

“I-I apologize, Internal Affairs Director. I confessed everything to that righteous faction hostage bastard.”

‘!?’

Instantly, Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun’s expression stiffened.

What the hell is this guy saying now?

Why is he suddenly saying he confessed something to him?

While he was dumbfounded, suddenly, murmurs could be heard from around him.

Some of the surrounding warriors were looking alternately at the subdued intruder and Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun, creating a stir.

‘Ha!’

Are these guys suspecting him now?

Do they really believe what this intruder suddenly said?

It was utterly absurd.

While he was doing that, the intruder now started pleading.

“Internal Affairs Director! Please spare the lives of my family members. I am fine with dying, so please, I beg you.”

At this, the flustered Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun pressed him.

“You bastard! When did you ever see me to make such a false report? Do you really have a death wish?”

Then, Cho Yeom-hun hurriedly bowed to the Shadow Clan Master with clasped hands and said,

“Clan Master! This is a false accusation. How could I possibly know someone like this? Interrogate the bastard right...”

“Internal Affairs Director, to abandon me like this...”

“This bastard!”

The enraged Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun tried to kick the intruder’s face.

At that moment, someone appeared and blocked his way.

It was none other than...

‘Escort Byeok?’

It was Byeok, the Shadow Clan Master’s escort.

As Byeok blocked him, Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun couldn’t contain his frustration and shouted,

“What is the meaning of this? Right now...”

“Why are you trying to shut the intruder’s mouth? If you truly didn’t collude, calm down.”

“Collude? Ha! Did you just accuse me of collusion?”

Internal Affairs Director Cho Yeom-hun couldn’t contain his anger at the absurdity.

That intruder was falsely accusing him, and forget about helping, the one called the Clan Master’s escort was doing this?

While that was happening, murmurs from here and there pierced his eardrums.

“Was it ordered by the Internal Affairs Director?”

“It really seems like it.”

“Did he try to hold the family members hostage and falsely accuse Young Master Mok?”

Hearing the warriors’ voices, even though he didn’t want to, the Internal Affairs Director felt like he was going crazy.

Anyone could see that the situation was too out of the blue, but they believed it?

This was a clear false accusation.

He was so angry that his hands were trembling, but then the intruder shouted again, inciting those around him.

“Clan Master, I only did as the Internal Affairs Director ordered...”

“This bastard!”

The Internal Affairs Director finally drew his saber.

He felt like he had to kill that bastard who was falsely accusing him to feel at ease.

But then, Byeok blocked his way again and said,

“Clan Master, should I subdue the Internal Affairs Director?”

“Escort Byeok! Are you really...”

Right at that moment.

-Swish!

Along with the sound of something being cut, something fell to the ground with a thud.

It was none other than...

‘!?’

The intruder’s head.

In an instant, the surroundings were filled with silence.

Everyone had a surprised expression, but the one who had cut off the intruder’s head was none other than the Shadow Clan Master.

The Shadow Clan Master spoke with an expressionless face, unlike his usual self,

“The intruder who tried to create internal strife within our clan is dead. From now on, I forbid anyone in our clan from mentioning this. Understood?”

“Yes!!!”

As soon as his words ended, everyone shouted simultaneously.

Overwhelmed by the pressure and momentum emanating from the Clan Master, they had no choice but to follow his order.

‘.....’

The Shadow Clan Master’s gaze, which had instantly straightened out the chaotic atmosphere, turned serious.

Although he had forcibly suppressed the situation with his authority for now, he felt a strong sense of discomfort from what was happening.

The intruder’s sudden and seemingly intentional false accusation.

Some warriors inciting those around them.

Even Byeok, his escort who wouldn’t move without his order, suddenly stepped forward to protect the intruder and pressured the Internal Affairs Director.

All of this was permeated with a sense of discomfort.

-Swish!

The Shadow Clan Master slowly turned his head with narrowed eyes.

In his line of sight, with the flickering shadows of the torches, Mok Gyeong-un could be seen with the corners of his mouth reaching his ears.

‘!?’

The moment their eyes met, the Shadow Clan Master unconsciously swallowed his dry saliva.

The source of this inexplicable sense of discomfort.

It was originating from Mok Gyeong-un.

Chapter 136 – Erosion (4)

Back to the present.

To the Second Mountain of the Five Mountains Alliance, the blind man Wi Maeng-cheon, who was perplexed by the dead Ji-hang, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smirk,

“You must be greatly disappointed that the result is different from what you intended.”

“You bastard...”

“You seem to have used your head a lot, but it’s a pity. It would have worked smoothly with others.”

-Grind!

The blind man Wi Maeng-cheon gnashed his teeth.

Although he didn't know what had happened, one thing was certain: his scheme had not worked.

It was a tactic he had calculated through dozens of simulations.

He had prepared to deal with most variables, so how did he escape it?

However, the important thing was that it wasn't a situation to question the cause of the failed scheme.

-Grip!

Strength entered Wi Maeng-cheon's hand holding the sword hilt.

Now that the original plan had gone awry, the only answer was to kill the fellow himself.

Otherwise, the matter would go beyond his control.

Wi Maeng-cheon quietly opened his mouth.

"I don't know how you escaped suspicion, but coming here was a huge mistake."

"A huge mistake?"

-Swish!

As soon as Mok Gyeong-un's questioning ended, Wi Maeng-cheon's sword cut through the air.

In that fleeting moment, Mok Gyeong-un had gained about half a step of distance.

Thanks to that, the sword narrowly missed slicing Mok Gyeong-un's neck and brushed past.

“You're fast.”

“...”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Wi Maeng-cheon said nothing.

Unlike last time when he had tried to test his martial prowess, this time he had slashed with the intent to kill, but he didn't expect him to dodge it.

‘... He definitely surpassed the Peak Realm.’

He probably estimated him to be at the early-stage of Transcendent Realm.

Considering the few exchanges they had and the strength infused in the sword, it seemed certain.

This alone was surprising.

Just seventeen.

For a guy not even in his prime to reach this level, his talent had to be acknowledged.

However...

‘You will die here.’

-Whoosh!

Wi Maeng-cheon's sword rushed towards Mok Gyeong-un, drawing a complex trajectory.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes shook at a rapid speed as the sword became even faster.

This was the first time he had properly faced a master since gaining enlightenment at the Corpse Blood Valley report.

Indeed, Wi Maeng-cheon's swordsmanship was beyond imagination.

-Swish swish swish swish swish!

It was not at a level he could dodge.

Thus, Mok Gyeong-un also utilized defensive sword techniques to counter Wi Maeng-cheon's fierce attack.

-Clang clang clang clang clang!

The swords of the two clashed more than a dozen times in an instant, and blue sparks flew in the darkness.

Each time the swords collided, Mok Gyeong-un's body was pushed back little by little.

This clearly meant he was inferior in internal energy.

'Even though he reached the transcendent realm with innate martial talent, he can't avoid two weaknesses after all.'

The first was internal energy.

When talking about the level of internal energy, the reason for mentioning the number of years was that the accumulated amount increased as time passed.

No matter how much Mok Gyeong-un had reached a high level with outstanding talent, he couldn't match someone who had accumulated internal energy for decades like himself.

And the second...

-Clang clang clang!

Just as they were clashing almost evenly, Wi Maeng-cheon's sword suddenly deviated from its trajectory and twisted in a completely unexpected direction, piercing Mok Gyeong-un's thigh.

As a result, Mok Gyeong-un also had to change his sword trajectory to block it.

-Clang!

At that moment...

-Thud!

Wi Maeng-cheon's heavy kick struck Mok Gyeong-un's abdomen.

Along with that, Mok Gyeong-un's body was pushed back about four steps again.

Detecting this with his hearing, Wi Maeng-cheon's mouth corners twitched.

‘Experience... He lacks experience.’

While Mok Gyeong-un's stances were flawless to the point of being impeccable, he was unable to respond to the variations, perhaps due to a lack of actual combat experience or battles with masters.

His stances were very straightforward.

Although he was responding with appropriate stances, that alone was insufficient.

In the world of life-and-death battles, experience could not be ignored.

-Whoosh!

Wi Maeng-cheon caught up to Mok Gyeong-un, who had been pushed back, and pressured him while drawing up even more internal energy.

Since he had found the opponent's weakness, he was determined to decisively push forward and settle the outcome.

'Fourth Stance of the Flashing Star Sword, Overwhelming Flash.'

-Swish swish swish swish swish swish!

Wi Maeng-cheon's sword created numerous sword shadows and pressured Mok Gyeong-un with a dazzling trajectory.

It was an incredible swordsmanship that was hard to believe came from a blind man.

Even Mok Gyeong-un inwardly exclaimed in admiration.

Mok Gyeong-un had gained a keen eye for swordsmanship after viewing numerous secret manuals at the Corpse Blood Valley report.

Wi Maeng-cheon's swordsmanship was so perfected that it was difficult to find any flaws.

So he felt the urge to properly clash with him.

-Clang clang clang clang clang!

Mok Gyeong-un's Evil Commandment Sword and Wi Maeng-cheon's Bamboo Sword collided, and the surroundings reverberated with the sound of metal.

Their swords were moving so fast that they were invisible to the eyes of ordinary people.

-Swish!

A sword grazed Mok Gyeong-un's cheek, leaving a wound.

Wi Maeng-cheon's swordsmanship once again created an unexpected variation.

'Interesting.'

It was more exciting than sparring with the Corpse Blood Valley disciples.

Their attacks were more straightforward and simple, but Wi Maeng-cheon's sword brought changes from unexpected places, pressuring him.

-Swish!

Once again, the sword brushed past Mok Gyeong-un's ribs.

They were all narrowly grazing the vital points.

If he wasn't careful, the outcome of the duel could be decided in a single moment as Wi Maeng-cheon's sword was increasingly tightening its grip on his throat.

'Luck is not on my side.'

Wi Maeng-cheon's face, who was pressuring Mok Gyeong-un, became more and more spirited.

The winner of this duel was predetermined.

If this were 5 or 10 years later, it might be different, but the current Mok Gyeong-un was absolutely no match for him.

He had a much greater advantage in both experience and internal energy.

'You are foolish, Mok Gyeong-un.'

You shouldn't have come to find me alone.

He acknowledged his martial prowess that didn't match his age, but he had chosen the wrong target for revenge.

If he had a cunning mind to escape from his scheme, he should have used the dead Ji-hang as a pretext to pressure him through his master, the Shadow Clan Master.

Blame that foolishness.

-Swish!

-Clang!

Wi Maeng-cheon's sword deflected Mok Gyeong-un's sword upward.

At the same time, a decisive opening finally appeared in Mok Gyeong-un's defense.

The corners of Wi Maeng-cheon's mouth rose bitterly.

'Overconfidence in oneself. That is the cause of your defeat.'

Convinced that he had firmly grasped the upper hand, Wi Maeng-cheon thrust his sword towards Mok Gyeong-un's neck, the decisive opening.

With Mok Gyeong-un's current stance, it was impossible to dodge or block.

'It's over.'

Wi Maeng-cheon's sword was about to pierce Mok Gyeong-un's neck.

However...

-Swish!

At the moment the tip of Wi Maeng-cheon's sword touched Mok Gyeong-un's neck, it slid and slightly brushed the surface before passing by.

'What is this?'

Just what was going on?

It was a perfect finishing strike.

But why didn't it penetrate Mok Gyeong-un's neck and suddenly slide as if blocked by something?

He couldn't understand what this phenomenon was at all.

-Bam!

As the distance narrowed, Mok Gyeong-un's knee tried to kick up Wi Maeng-cheon's chin.

In response, Wi Maeng-cheon utilized footwork with his left hand to push Mok Gyeong-un's knee and gain distance using the rebound.

-Bang! Tap tap tap tap!

As they distanced about six steps, Wi Maeng-cheon frowned as if he couldn't understand.

No matter how much he thought about it, he couldn't comprehend.

What Mok Gyeong-un had just shown was an extremely advanced principle that couldn't be performed at his level.

-Ha!

An exclamation flowed from the mouth of Cheong-ryeong, who was sitting on the roof smoking a pipe and watching.

The reason she was so surprised was simple.

-He comprehended the "Ritual of Repulsion" technique.

The move Mok Gyeong-un had just shown was none other than the "Ritual of Repulsion" technique, one of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques.

If the "Ritual of Binding" technique could pull anything, the "Ritual of Repulsion" technique could push away anything that touched the body.

Even Cheong-ryeong, who had been with him all along, didn't know this.

It was because Mok Gyeong-un hadn't mentioned it even after gaining enlightenment.

Of course, there was a reason for this.

'It's difficult.'

The way the "Ritual of Repulsion" technique manifested was different from the "Ritual of Binding" technique.

It could only push away something that precisely touched the body, and matching that fleeting moment when the sword was about to clash was quite difficult.

And it was greatly influenced by the practitioner's capability and true energy, so the stronger the force, the harder it was to repel.

That's why Wi Maeng-cheon's sword had slid rather than being deflected.

'Still a long way to go.'

He hadn't mentioned it to Cheong-ryeong because he considered it an incomplete technique.

Of course, it was still useful as it was.

It had allowed him to deflect a fatal strike.

At that moment, Wi Maeng-cheon opened his mouth.

“... You seem to have some tricks up your sleeve. But will the same technique work again?”

-Whoosh!

As soon as those words ended, Wi Maeng-cheon launched his body towards Mok Gyeong-un.

As expected of a master who had reached the transcendent realm, he had realized how to deal with the previous principle in a short time.

-Woong!

Wi Maeng-cheon's sword was completely covered in a blue glow.

It was sword energy.

He had judged that even the sliding principle wouldn't be able to handle it if the sword energy was more focused.

‘I'll settle this.’

The reason he hadn't unleashed his energy until now was to protect his sword with aura.

Since Mok Gyeong-un's Evil Commandment Sword was even sturdier and sharper than the Bamboo Sword, the sword had been somewhat strained with each clash, so he had chosen this approach.

However, if he turned all that energy into offensive sword energy instead of a defensive form...

-Clang!

-Bam bam bam!

With just a single clash, Mok Gyeong-un's body was pushed back nearly three steps.

The power had increased tremendously.

However...

-Crack!

Cracks appeared on the sword.

It was affected by the switch between offense and defense, but it seemed like it could endure a few stances at least.

He could sufficiently settle the match within that timeframe.

-Whoosh!

Wi Maeng-cheon tried to unleash a dominating sword stance against Mok Gyeong-un once more.

Right at that moment...

“It seems your reserves have run out.”

“What?”

“Seeing the repetition of stances.”

‘!?’

-Clang clang clang clang!

The moment the swords clashed, Wi Maeng-cheon’s expression distorted.

He had unleashed a sword stance with sword energy, but Mok Gyeong-un didn’t budge at all.

Rather, they were evenly matched.

But what was even more surprising?

“You bastard... Just what...?”

The sword stance he had just unleashed was exactly the same as his own Flashing Star Sword’s Seventh Stance, Breaking the Void.

Right now, Mok Gyeong-un was performing the exact same sword stance as him.

Wi Maeng-cheon couldn’t believe this situation.

Thus...

-Swish swish swish swish swish!

He unleashed another sword stance towards Mok Gyeong-un, but...

-Swish swish swish swish swish!

As if he were a mirror, Mok Gyeong-un performed the same sword stance.

For a moment, Wi Maeng-cheon was dumbfounded.

Just what was happening?

His unique martial art, the Flashing Star Sword, was a secretive sword art passed down to a single inheritor and was never revealed to the outside.

Yet this fellow was imitating it.

He shouldn't know the breathing technique of the stances and had only seen it for the first time while dueling.

'Impossible.'

But how could such a thing happen?

Was it possible to learn the opponent's sword art in the midst of a life-and-death duel where they were trying to kill each other?

Was this even possible?

No matter how outstanding his talent was, wasn't there a limit?

This was too unfair.

-Grind!

After being surprised by this unprecedented situation, Wi Maeng-cheon became enraged to the point of welling up.

He detested Mok Gyeong-un for so easily imitating his unique sword art, which he had painstakingly mastered even after losing his sight.

‘How dare you try to steal my sword art?’

It was unforgivable.

Yes, then can you imitate this too?

Even if you somehow imitated the external appearance of the sword art, the essence of swordsmanship wasn't acquired that way.

He had completely grasped the essence of the Flashing Star Sword by practicing it for decades, allowing him to bring various changes to his swordsmanship.

Can a fellow like you imitate even these variations...?

-Swish swish swish!

‘What?’

Wi Maeng-cheon hurriedly tilted his head to the side and launched his body backward to dodge Mok Gyeong-un's sword.

A cold sweat dripped down his forehead as he gained distance.

The three sword stances just now...

They were variations.

Even if it were him, if he were to bring variations, he would have done it the way Mok Gyeong-un did.

‘... Ha.’

What kind of fellow is this?

He was imitating the variations in swordsmanship at a level nearly identical to his own.

His innate martial talent alone was insufficient to describe this.

He was truly a monster.

-Gulp!

Wi Maeng-cheon swallowed his dry saliva, perhaps out of tension.

If he didn't kill the fellow here, he would become a major hindrance to the path of the second disciple, Jang Neung-ak.

He had to kill him even at the cost of his life.

He had to deal with him right away before he grew further and reached a level they couldn't even touch.

Fortunately, he still had the upper hand in internal energy, so if it was now, somehow...

-Flinch!

At that moment, a chill ran down Wi Maeng-cheon's spine.

An ominous feeling enveloped his five senses, and it was a kind of brutality.

Sensing it, Wi Maeng-cheon hurriedly raised his sword while igniting sword energy without a moment to think.

However...

-Clang!

The Bamboo Sword wrapped in sword energy broke.

And...

-Swish!

‘!!!!!!’

Something chilling and cold brushed past his neck in an instant.

Wi Maeng-cheon instinctively hurried to grasp his neck.

‘This... What...’

The internal energy in that last strike had surged by nearly three times.

He was dumbfounded by the sudden increase in internal energy.

Could it be that he hadn’t been using his full strength until now?

As he was perplexed, Mok Gyeong-un whispered softly in his ear,

“Why did someone who can’t even see boast so much? If you had just kept your mouth shut, you could have at least preserved your neck longer.”

‘You... You bastard...’

“Then sleep well.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un brought his finger to Wi Maeng-cheon’s forehead.

Feeling that, Wi Maeng-cheon inwardly cried out as if screaming,

‘S-Stop! Please! Please!’

However...

-Tap!

Wi Maeng-cheon’s consciousness was severed in an instant.

It was because Mok Gyeong-un had pushed Wi Maeng-cheon's forehead, which he was barely holding, with his finger.

At the same time, Wi Maeng-cheon's severed head fell limply to the ground, and blood gushed like a fountain from the cross-clanion of his neck.

-Splatter!

Chapter 137 – Shadow Clan Master (1)

The Five Mountains Alliance, a group of faithful subordinates to Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Society Leader.

The severed head of Wi Maeng-cheon, the second-ranked member known as "Second Mountain," fell lifelessly to the ground as blood gushed like a fountain from his neck.

-Thud!

Although Wi Maeng-cheon always maintained a calm demeanor, his final expression was close to a scream.

-Thump! Thump!

Soon, Mok Gyeong-un's right hand, which had turned black and grotesquely swollen, returned to its original state.

This was the essence of the Acupoint Striking Technique.

It was difficult to maintain for long due to its severe side effects, but it could increase one's power by two to three times for a short period.

Mok Gyeong-un had carefully saved this technique and utilized it at the appropriate moment to behead Wi Maeng-cheon.

-Swish!

Cheong-ryeong lightly descended in front of Mok Gyeong-un.

-It was decent, but you still have a long way to go.

“You’re right.”

Mok Gyeong-un readily admitted it.

Even though his other senses were extraordinarily sharp, his opponent was a blind man.

He had struggled quite a bit in a pure duel against such an opponent.

Initially, he had intended to win the fight solely with the death energy from his lower danjeon and pure techniques, but as the battle prolonged, he ended up using the power of his danjeon and the Acupoint Striking Technique.

Thus, despite eliminating the target, he wasn’t entirely satisfied.

On the other hand,

‘He’s fast.’

Although Cheong-ryeong had said Mok Gyeong-un still had a long way to go, she inwardly clicked his tongue at Mok Gyeong-un’s growth rate.

Strictly speaking, the blind Wi Maeng-cheon was a superior master compared to Mok Gyeong-un.

He was far above in both internal energy and experience.

In fact, befitting his experience, he even demonstrated the ability to pressure Mok Gyeong-un by using variations at every appropriate moment.

However, Mok Gyeong-un was learning as he fought.

It was admirable to witness.

‘I thought he would struggle more.’

It was different from what she had expected.

Due to the lack of time, even if they had fought more with just their lower danjeons, Cheong-ryeong thought there might have been a chance for Mok Gyeong-un to win.

From the perspective of someone observing closely, it was a growth rate that defied explanation.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un spoke while looking at Wi Maeng-cheon’s corpse.

“Hoh.”

-Why are you... Hm?

Cheong-ryeong’s eyes also widened in surprise.

That's because the death energy from Wi Maeng-cheon's corpse was gathering and condensing.

"What's happening?"

Mok Gyeong-un had intended to absorb the death energy before it dispersed.

However, unlike before, the death energy wasn't scattering but converging.

Cheong-ryeong chuckled and said,

-It's your first time seeing this, right?

"Seeing what?"

-The birth of a proper vengeful spirit.

"Ah... Is this it?"

-That's right.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had mastered various techniques, including the Six People Spirit Summoning Technique, could artificially create vengeful spirits using death energy.

However, this was the first time he had witnessed one naturally forming.

If that was the case,

-He must have felt quite wronged.

Ordinary resentment isn't enough for a vengeful spirit to form.

If the death energy was condensing to this extent, it meant that the resentment had reached its peak.

Soon, the condensed death energy began to take on a human form.

The level of a vengeful spirit is determined by the strength of the obsession and resentment the individual possessed during their lifetime.

-Tremble!

As it took shape, the handle of the broken Bamboo Sword trembled.

A soul that has lost its physical body clings to an object to prevent itself from leaving the mortal realm.

That handle was likely that object.

-It seems his resentment was quite strong.

Cheong-ryeong was intrigued.

Even though it was still in the process of fully taking shape, judging by the spiritual energy emanating from it, it was at least at the Orange Spirit level or above.

The vengeful spirit finally took complete form.

-Grrr!

With flickering white eyes, Wi Maeng-cheon glared at Mok Gyeong-un.

-How unjust. How unfair. I wanted to follow that person, achieve great things, and open my eyes, but to die like this and become a ghost...

A voice filled with resentment.

Wi Maeng-cheon didn't take his eyes off Mok Gyeong-un.

-In death, I get to see the face of my enemy. I curse you. I will follow you until you die and torment you...

Wi Maeng-cheon, who was speaking, suddenly stopped mid-sentence.

Something was strange.

As he had become a vengeful spirit naturally, he was aware of his own death.

Thus, he also instinctively understood the principles of the boundary between the living and the dead.

However, why did he feel like Mok Gyeong-un was making eye contact with his dead self?

At that moment,

“You seem to have a lot to say. A newly formed vengeful spirit is quite talkative.”

-You? Could it be that you can see me?

“If I can see you, that's why I'm responding like this, right?”

-You! You did this to me!

Realizing that Mok Gyeong-un could see him, Wi Maeng-cheon, filled with even more rage, lunged at Mok Gyeong-un with the intent to kill.

At that instant,

-Grab!

-Ugh!

Wi Maeng-cheon's white pupils trembled.

It was because Mok Gyeong-un had suddenly grabbed his neck.

-What, what is this?

He was a dead man.

How could Mok Gyeong-un grab the neck of his dead self?

-What the hell are you? How...?

As he was utterly baffled, a voice from behind startled Wi Maeng-cheon.

-Hey, youngster. For someone whose corpse hasn't even gone cold, you sure are lively.

‘!?’

Vengeful spirits can instinctively distinguish levels.

Wi Maeng-cheon's mind grew hazy from the immense spiritual pressure he felt from behind.

'What... What kind of energy is this...?'

This wasn't just a simple vengeful spirit level but a calamity-level existence.

His spirit body trembled, and his lips wouldn't close.

To the terrified Wi Maeng-cheon, Mok Gyeong-un said,

"This is the first time I've seen a case of someone becoming a vengeful spirit like this. What should I do?"

-What do you mean, what should you do? Just absorb the death energy and exorcise it.

"Ah, right. That would be better."

-Squish!

With that, Mok Gyeong-un raised his death energy and tried to apply more force to Wi Maeng-cheon's neck.

At first, Wi Maeng-cheon didn't understand what exorcism meant.

-Sizzle!

However, along with a strange sense of pain, he felt a threat as if his spirit body was gradually disappearing.

It instilled an even more intense fear than when he had faced death.

Wi Maeng-cheon hurriedly cried out,

-S-Spare me!

“You’re already dead.”

-Please... Please give me a chance.

“Would a chance hold much meaning for you?”

-I, I don’t wish for anything else. Just let me see the faces of my wife and child one last time. Then I’ll accept exorcism or whatever else.

“Wife and child?”

Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head slightly as if puzzled.

Wi Maeng-cheon spoke in a pleading voice,

-Long ago, after losing my eyesight to the Glorious Snake Poison, I had a single wish. It was to see the faces of my wife and child.

This was true.

Wi Maeng-cheon had an earnest desire.

It was to somehow cure his blinded eyes and see the faces of his family.

Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Society Leader, had promised Wi Maeng-cheon that if he achieved great things, he would help him find the Medicine Immortal Hae Yeong to restore his eyesight, which had been blinded by poison, though it was uncertain whether it would be possible.

But who would have known that he would be able to see after dying?

-I beg you. I can't leave this world like this. If you grant me this, you can kill me or do whatever you want.

He had no significant lingering attachments to anything else.

Wi Maeng-cheon simply wanted to see.

The faces of his wife and child, whom he had never seen while alive.

As he expressed his wish, the corner of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth curled up.

“Ah, I thought you became a vengeful spirit solely due to resentment, but there were also precious beings who left you with lingering attachments in life.”

-Gasp!

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Wi Maeng-cheon instantly realized his mistake.

He had said those words out of fear of being extinguished and a desire to resolve his only lingering attachment, but upon reflection, it wasn't something he should have asked of this bastard.

Wasn't this bastard the very culprit who had killed him?

As he thought he had made a mistake, Mok Gyeong-un whispered in his ear, just like before killing him.

“That’s fortunate. Then you’ll be able to work a bit more voluntarily compared to other spirit servants.”

‘!?’

What the hell was he talking about now?

As he was puzzled, Wi Maeng-cheon noticed Cheong-ryeong looking at him with sympathetic eyes.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had finished his business outside and returned from his outing.

As he was about to pass through the entrance pavilion leading to his private residence, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed.

‘Hmm.’

He lightly scanned the surroundings and immediately noticed that the guard warriors who were supposed to be protecting the area had disappeared.

The people who should have been there were absent.

Smirking, Mok Gyeong-un entered the building of his private residence as if he didn’t mind.

Walking along the corridor, he opened the door to a room.

“You’re late.”

As the door opened, a familiar voice came from inside.

It was none other than the Shadow Clan Master.

Surprise flickered in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

He had dismissed everyone earlier without much explanation, so why was he waiting alone for Mok Gyeong-un?

There was no presence felt within a radius of about twenty zhang around them.

Puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un was about to clasp his hands and bow in greeting, but the Shadow Clan Master interrupted him.

“Where have you been?”

“Training...”

“You don't need to make such a flimsy lie about being at the market.”

“...”

The clan master's voice was unusually heavy and cold, different from his usual demeanor.

It seemed to be an extension of his earlier behavior.

The clan master tapped his finger on the table and continued,

“How far did you go with the head of the intruder?”

Mok Gyeong-un feigned ignorance and nonchalantly replied,

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, Master. I...”

“The head was missing from the crematorium.”

“...”

At the clan master’s words, Mok Gyeong-un licked his lips and fell silent.

It seemed that the clan master had personally checked the crematorium after Mok Gyeong-un’s visit.

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and said,

“I apologize, but I don’t understand why you’re asking me about it. I did leave the residence briefly, but if you ask the guard warriors...”

“I still can’t comprehend it even after pondering.”

“What?”

“What kind of trick did you use?”

“What trick are you referring to?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s counter-question, the clan master sighed and shook his head.

Then he stood up from his seat and spoke,

“There’s something called a sense of discomfort or unease.”

“...”

“It was small at first, making it difficult to notice, but at some point, the surroundings centered around you became engulfed in that unease.”

The clan master found it puzzling.

The members of the Shadow Clan were thoroughly trained in mental discipline, as they also acted as spies and handled confidential matters.

Thus, there was a belief that they would never betray the sect.

But how was this possible?

It had only been seven days.

Within this short period, how could they have been swayed by Mok Gyeong-un, who was merely a hostage of the righteous faction?

“I don’t know what strange technique you used, but even though you’ve become an official disciple, it seems you’ve crossed a line that can’t be overlooked.”

-Shing!

The sound of something being drawn was heard.

It was the sound of a blade being unsheathed from the scabbard at the clan master's waist.

In an instant, the sharp blade was pressed against the underside of Mok Gyeong-un's chin.

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes narrowed.

He had anticipated a certain gap in strength, but the clan master's martial prowess was incomparable to Wi Maeng-cheon, who was a subordinate of Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Society Leader.

'He's strong.'

With pure martial arts from the lower danjeon alone, it was utterly impossible to do anything against him.

At that moment, the clan master spoke in an even colder voice,

"Depending on your answer, I may have to behead you. So from now on, I'd like you to respond clearly to my questions..."

Before he could finish his sentence, the clan master frowned.

It was because Mok Gyeong-un had laughed.

'!?'

Seeing this, the clan master recalled the smile filled with malice that Mok Gyeong-un had shown when he beheaded the intruder to quell the confusion.

It was the first time he had felt a chill down his spine and sensed danger upon seeing someone's smile.

The clan master's grip on the blade tightened.

"That smile just now..."

"Your intuition is quite sharp. To reach such a conclusion based on a mere sense of unease."

"You..."

"So, are you going to behead me?"

"..."

At that question, the clan master's gaze sharpened.

Mok Gyeong-un's response just now was tantamount to affirming that the clan master's suspicions were correct.

Although he didn't reveal how he had done it.

One thing was certain: this child was truly dangerous.

It wasn't simply because he was a hostage of the righteous faction or had outstanding talent, but the person himself was completely different from the ordinary.

"It seems it would be beneficial for the sect to behead you right now."

"Perhaps."

The clan master inwardly clicked his tongue at Mok Gyeong-un's composed reaction.

He had to admit, the child had guts to show such composure even when his life was being threatened.

However, merit was merit, and death was death.

If this child was left unchecked, that sense of unease would engulf the entire Shadow Clan.

-Grip!

The clan master gripped the blade's handle, ready to exert force.

It was at that very moment.

“But you know, if you behead me, everyone will find out that Master is a worshipper of fire. I wonder if that would be alright.”

‘!!!!!!’

The clan master's expression instantly stiffened.

‘This bastard... How does he know that?’

Chapter 138 – Shadow Clan Master (2)

Just an hour and fifteen minutes ago,

Mok Gyeong-un sighed lightly as he looked at the window paper, illuminated by the surrounding torches.

Things were unfolding just as he had anticipated.

Mok Gyeong-un glanced at the scroll he held in his left hand.

It was something that the evil spirit possessing Byeok, the bodyguard of the Shadow Clan Master, had secretly brought.

Every day at the same time, the Shadow Clan Master repeatedly read this scroll.

[Hmm. I think I should read it now.]

-You should.

Judging by the situation, it seemed there wouldn't be an opportunity to examine it leisurely.

And if he were to be caught with it during a room search, things would escalate further.

With that, Mok Gyeong-un unrolled the scroll.

-Rustle!

It was quite worn, indicating how much it had been handled.

The half-unrolled scroll.

The evil spirit possessing Byeok frowned upon seeing it.

[This is...]

The evil spirit had only seen the Shadow Clan Master reading it but had never seen its contents.

So he had no idea what it was about.

However,

-This... It's not our language.

Surprisingly, the scroll was not written in Hanyu (Chinese) but in an utterly unrecognizable script.

Cheong-ryeong, seeing it for the first time as well, tilted his head while holding his pipe.

The curvy writing was difficult to find any regularity in, making it unlikely to be a secret code.

If that was the case, it might not be a language from the Central Plains...

[Oh, this looks like the language of Persia.]

-What?

Cheong-ryeong's eyes widened as she stared at Mok Gyeong-un.

The country known as Persia, or Parsa, was a place he knew to be located on the northern coast beyond the Western Regions, not in the Central Plains.

-Kid, can you read this?

[Roughly, yes.]

-What?

How could this kid read it?

As she was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un scratched his head and said,

[My grandfather taught me.]

-Grandfather?

[Yes. He taught me a few languages besides Hanyu. He said it would be helpful for studying medicine from the Western Regions.]

-Hah...

He taught the language of Persia, which might never be used in a lifetime, just to teach medicine?

Cheong-ryeong became curious about what kind of person Mok Gyeong-un's grandfather was.

But that wasn't important right now.

-What does it say?

[Well, it seems to be some kind of poetic verse. This body, burned in the sacred fire, has no attachment to life and death. On the path I wish to take, I illuminate the light...]

-Enough.

[Pardon?]

-... I understand.

[You do?]

-Yes. I thought it might be a martial arts verse, but it's not. This is a scripture.

[Scripture?]

A scripture, like a Buddhist sutra, isn't it a text used for religious prayers?

What kind of scripture was this?

As Mok Gyeong-un was puzzled, Cheong-ryeong clicked his tongue and said,

-It's truly deplorable. The head of the confidential information department in the sect is a worshipper of fire.

[Worshipper of fire?]

Something came to Mok Gyeong-un's mind as he tilted his head.

It was the word "Baehwa" mentioned in the conversation between the Shadow Clan Master and the External Affairs Director.

Baehwa literally meant bowing to fire.

Could it be related to this scripture about worshipping fire?

[Worship... Baehwa[1]...]

-Huh? How do you know about the Baehwa Faith?

[Baehwa Faith? What's that?]

-This scripture. It seems to be a scripture of the Baehwa Faith.

[Baehwa Faith?]

“Ah...”

Unlike Mok Gyeong-un, who was questioning, the evil spirit also nodded as if he knew something.

Cheong-ryeong puffed on his pipe and explained to the puzzled Mok Gyeong-un,

-They'll likely break in soon, so I'll give you a brief explanation. The Baehwa Faith is literally a religious group that reveres fire. They worship a god from the Western Regions that you've never heard of.

[A god from the Western Regions?]

-Yes. It's a kind of impure heresy. Well, it's tiresome to discuss such things. At one point, this Baehwa Faith entered the Central Plains and spread among the common people.

[Hmm.]

Most religions were like that.

They started from the lowest class, the commoners.

Those who had nowhere to rely on and were impoverished wanted to hold onto something and rise.

-As the doctrine of the Baehwa Faith spread, it suddenly grew rapidly and became a threat to those who believed in Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism as their core principles.

‘A threat?’

Rather than a threat, wouldn't they have viewed it unfavorably?

Anything new was bound to face rejection in some way.

[... Listening to the story, it doesn't seem to have had a good outcome.]

-That's right. They were accused of deceiving the world and misleading the people, leading to a massive crackdown. That was about a hundred years ago. But I didn't know there were still people who believed in the Baehwa Faith, let alone someone in charge of information and secrets in the Heaven and Earth Society.

Cheong-ryeong spoke as if disappointed.

From this, it seemed that she also didn't view the Baehwa Faith favorably.

If a dead spirit like her felt this way, it could be imagined how most people would think about this religious group.

At that moment, a shout was heard from outside.

-Intruder, listen up. If you don't surrender immediately, we will shoot to kill.

Mok Gyeong-un tried to roll up the scroll again.

But as he did so, something fell out from inside and was about to hit the floor.

He caught it as if snatching it mid-air.

-Tap!

'Hmm?'

What was this?

[منی اهر]

Along with this word, something was written below.

Rather than a doctrine, it seemed to be giving a strong warning.

Mok Gyeong-un stared at it intently, then inserted the paper with that word back into the scroll and handed it to the evil spirit.

Back to the present.

The Shadow Clan Master gripped the blade's handle, ready to exert force.

It was at that very moment.

“But you know, if you behead me, everyone will find out that Master is a worshipper of fire. I wonder if that would be alright.”

‘!?’

At those words, the Shadow Clan Master’s expression stiffened.

Seeing his reaction, a glimmer of surprise flashed in Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes.

His prediction was indeed correct.

When he mentioned reciting the scripture at a similar time every day, Cheong-ryeong had said that the Shadow Clan Master might be a believer of the Baehwa Faith, a religion that worships fire.

-Slam!

At that moment, the Shadow Clan Master grabbed Mok Gyeong-un by the collar and roughly shoved him against the wall.

-Bang!

His characteristic demeanor that seemed infinitely light had completely vanished, and he glared with eyes filled with murderous intent as he spoke,

“You bastard... Where did you hear such a rumor?”

“A rumor?”

-Slice!

The blade slightly dug into Mok Gyeong-un's neck.

If he slashed here, his neck would be cut.

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said,

“If it's a rumor, you could just laugh it off. Why are you overreacting like this?”

“You...”

-Stab!

The blade dug deeper into Mok Gyeong-un's neck.

It was to clearly show that he could kill him.

However,

‘This kid?’

The Shadow Clan Master's eyes sharpened.

Even when his life was in immediate danger, Mok Gyeong-un still maintained a smile.

It wasn't because he was confident that the Shadow Clan Master wouldn't slash him.

It seemed as if he had no attachment to his life or wasn't afraid of death at all.

This was the first time he had seen someone like this.

“Aren't you afraid?”

“Of what?”

“That you might die at any moment.”

“If I die, I die. If I live, I live. What more is there to think about?”

“...”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the Shadow Clan Master fell silent.

Then, after glaring at Mok Gyeong-un for a moment, he spoke again,

“You said everyone would find out if you killed me. Have you told this to anyone else?”

The Shadow Clan Master's eyes trembled slightly as he asked this.

He was worried that someone else might already know.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“Who knows? Maybe I said that because those who should know already know?”

-Thud!

“Ugh!”

As soon as he finished speaking, the Shadow Clan Master’s hand struck Mok Gyeong-un’s abdomen.

It looked like a simple strike, but the impact spread inward, causing pain throughout his internal organs.

But it didn’t end there.

-Twist!

The Shadow Clan Master grabbed Mok Gyeong-un’s abdomen with his five fingers and twisted it as if turning.

As the muscles twisted, immense pain surged through him.

“If you don’t speak properly right now, you...!”

The Shadow Clan Master frowned as he spoke.

This technique was something he had personally devised as a master of torture, maximizing pain by inducing internal pain and then twisting the muscles.

It was a method as painful as bone-breaking and muscle-tearing.

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

‘This kid?’

Except for briefly holding his breath the moment the internal pain was inflicted, he maintained a smile amidst this tremendous pain.

What kind of person was he?

-Drip!

At that moment, blood flowed from Mok Gyeong-un's mouth.

It was a natural phenomenon since he had suffered internal injuries.

He was such a vicious person that his expression didn't change even when he was in pain and bleeding.

The more he learned about him, the more he realized that this kid was truly unique in many ways.

From his martial arts talent to everything else.

Although it was a pity, this secret must never be revealed.

“... Tell me who you told. Then I'll spare your life.”

“You shouldn't do that.”

“What?”

“If you find out who I told, you'll have to kill that person and me too. That's how a secret disappears, right?”

-Twist!

The Shadow Clan Master twisted Mok Gyeong-un's abdominal muscles even more.

And he pressed on in a low voice,

“Who are you trying to teach?”

“I'm not trying to teach you. I just said that because you were telling such an obvious lie about sparing my life.”

“You...”

Mocking him in this situation?

It was incomprehensible what he was doing in a situation where provoking the other party would bring no benefit.

Even if he wasn't afraid of death, this was going too far...

It was then.

“This body, burned in the sacred fire, has no attachment to life and death. On the path I wish to take, I illuminate the light. Joy and sorrow shall remain as mere dust. Pity the troubled sentient beings.”

‘!!!!!!’

At the scripture recited from Mok Gyeong-un's mouth, the Shadow Clan Master's expression froze.

How did this kid know the scripture, the doctrine of the Baehwa Faith?

The Shadow Clan Master couldn't hide his bewilderment.

'How could it be?'

It was absolutely impossible for him to have seen his scripture.

Even if he had seen it, it was written in the language of Persia, the predecessor of the Baehwa Faith, so only a handful of people in the Central Plains, let alone within the Heaven and Earth Society, could read it.

Even among the few remaining believers of the Baehwa Faith, who had barely survived the persecution, most couldn't read it properly, so how could this kid recite it?

That was absolutely not the case.

But how could he recite the contents of the scripture so fluently and accurately?

Unless he already knew...

-Release!

The Shadow Clan Master hurriedly removed his hand completely from Mok Gyeong-un's abdomen and said,

"You... Could it be that you're a believer of our faith?"

Chapter 139 – Shadow Clan Master (3)

After nearly a hundred years of constant persecution, few believers of the Baehwa Faith could read the original scriptures, even among the surviving members.

The Shadow Clan Master didn't think Mok Gyeong-un would be able to read the original text in the Persian language.

Persian was unexpectedly difficult to learn, and experts in it were extremely rare throughout the Central Plains.

'Ah!'

Assuming all of this, it meant that Mok Gyeong-un already knew the doctrine of the scripture.

-Release!

The Shadow Clan Master hurriedly removed his hand completely from Mok Gyeong-un's abdomen and said,

"You... Could it be that you're a believer of our faith?"

'Believer?'

At the Shadow Clan Master's question, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes sparkled.

He had predicted various scenarios of how the Shadow Clan Master would react if he recited the contents of the scripture, and quite an interesting reaction had emerged.

-... Don't tell me you're planning to pretend to be a believer?

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue and spoke.

She didn't approve of Mok Gyeong-un getting involved with the Baehwa Faith.

And,

-It's your choice if you want to deceive him. But how much do you think you can deceive him with just one scripture? A suspicious eunuch like him will quickly see through it.

'Well, if it's just that, it might be possible.'

The Shadow Clan Master was in charge of information and spies in the Shadow Clan.

Regardless of his hidden identity, he was a suspicious person, so if Mok Gyeong-un clumsily pushed forward as a believer, he could be easily exposed, as Cheong-ryeong warned.

Deception is a gamble.

The way to increase the probability of that gamble is to base it on as much truth as possible.

With that, Mok Gyeong-un,

"Who knows."

"What?"

"Although I have received teachings about the scripture, it's difficult to call myself a believer with just that."

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, one of the Shadow Clan Master's eyebrows arched up.

What was this kid saying now?

He received teachings about the scripture?

“What do you mean by that?”

“It’s exactly as I said. I received teachings about the scripture, but I didn’t become a believer. If I had to specify, should I say I’m a follower?”

“Follower?”

There is a strict difference between a believer and a follower.

A believer is someone who is completely subordinate to the faith and works for it.

On the other hand, a follower refers to someone who believes in the religious group and its doctrine.

‘Follower...’

With that, the Shadow Clan Master asked in a voice filled with suspicion,

“... You said you’re a follower, so who taught you about our faith’s scripture?”

“I don’t know.”

“What? You don’t know?”

What was he saying now?

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and said,

“The old master who taught me the scripture didn’t tell me his name.”

“He didn’t tell you his name?”

“Yes... He firmly refused to tell me. He said if I knew his name, I would face the same difficulties as him.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the Shadow Clan Master’s eyes narrowed.

The Baehwa Faith had long been heavily persecuted, so most of its believers were organized in small groups, and sometimes they didn’t even know each other’s identities.

‘There’s some truth to that.’

There was no way he would reveal his true identity to a non-believer.

However, as a high-ranking position of Father, he had some knowledge of the identities of important believers in each base.

“Do you remember the appearance of the old master you met?”

At the Shadow Clan Master’s question, Mok Gyeong-un casually replied,

“He had a face full of age spots and a thick gray beard that reached his chest.”

“Any other distinguishing features?”

It was impossible to identify someone with just that.

Wasn't what he just described a natural phenomenon of aging that occurs with age?

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and said,

“His thick beard and long eyebrows covered half of his face, and he had a shabby appearance, so it's difficult for me to describe any specific features.”

“There's no way to know who he is like that.”

“Of course not. But would someone who doesn't even teach his name carelessly show his proper appearance?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the Shadow Clan Master's eyes narrowed.

It was definitely a valid point, but he couldn't trust it.

The Shadow Clan Master spoke in a sharp voice,

“Do you think I would readily believe that you received teachings about our faith's scripture from an old master whose name and face you don't even know?”

“Of course, it would be hard for you to believe.”

“Then why would I...”

“I received teachings about the scripture from him in the original language.”

‘!?’

The Shadow Clan Master frowned.

Receiving teachings about the scripture in the original language meant he had learned it in Persian, not Hanyu (Chinese).

If he knew the original text to that extent, he was definitely not an ordinary believer.

But there was no proper evidence.

As if reading his thoughts, Mok Gyeong-un turned his head and pointed to the desk with his eyes.

On the desk were writing tools.

Seeing his intention to write, the Shadow Clan Master glared at Mok Gyeong-un's face for a moment before releasing his remaining hand that was grabbing his collar.

“... Try writing it.”

Mok Gyeong-un went to the desk, poured water to grind the ink, dipped the brush in the ink, and began writing on the paper.

-Swish!

ی راه به نور دی گذارب. است سوخته مقدس آتش به اجسد نی رایز ستمین مانی پیش یزد دگ و مرگ از من
[زی انگ رقت احساس به موجود چه. بود خواهد خاک جز همه غم و ی شاد و تابد دی برو دی خواه می که ه

[This body, burned in the sacred fire, has no attachment to life and death. On the path I wish to take, I illuminate the light. Joy and sorrow shall remain as mere dust. Pity the troubled sentient beings.]

‘!!!!!’

The Shadow Clan Master’s eyes trembled rapidly as he watched this.

The gaze that had been filled with disbelief until before Mok Gyeong-un started writing changed in an instant.

‘How can this be?’

This wasn’t a handwriting that could be written by clumsily memorizing the shape, but one that required proper learning.

If one drew the strokes like a picture, it couldn’t be written like this.

The Shadow Clan Master, who had studied the Persian language for a long time, was even more certain of it.

‘He must have learned from a believer of at least Father level.’

Otherwise, there was no way he could write Persian so skillfully.

The Shadow Clan Master, who had been looking at the scripture written in Persian with amazement, turned his gaze to Mok Gyeong-un.

This could be definitive proof.

Why would Mok Gyeong-un, a 17-year-old from a renowned martial arts family in Anhui Province, learn Persian and use it for anything?

‘Ah...’

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue as he witnessed this scene.

Thanks to Gyeong-un proficiency in Persian, that suspicious eunuch was gradually lowering his guard.

After all, unless one was a merchant or an interpreter authorized to trade across the Western Regions, there would be no reason to learn Persian.

It was truly a coincidence that he had learned it from his so-called grandfather.

At that moment, the Shadow Clan Master spoke,

“The believer who taught you Persian must have been at least a Father.”

“Father?”

“A high-ranking believer who can give teachings about the scripture in our faith.”

“Ah... Is that so?”

“Yes. Those who can teach in the original language are few now, so it would have been better if you knew his name.”

The Shadow Clan Master clicked his tongue as if genuinely regretting it.

Then he asked,

“Did he only teach you the scripture and Persian?”

At this question, Mok Gyeong-un hesitated for a moment as if he had been waiting for it and opened his mouth,

“Ah... Now that I think about it, he seemed to be searching for something.”

“Searching for something?”

“Yes. My memory is hazy, but at that time, I heard him clearly say... Ah, right. He said he was searching for the incarnation of Ahriman.”

At those words, the Shadow Clan Master’s eyes widened in surprise.

Mok Gyeong-un had anticipated that the Shadow Clan Master would react this way.

That’s because,

[منی اهر]

That sentence at the beginning of the paper inserted between the original scripture.

That word was Ahriman.

He hadn’t even told Cheong-ryeong about the interpretation of it, but,

[Beware, for the incarnation of Ahriman may appear in this world.]

It had a sentence of warning written on it.

It seemed to be some kind of revelation within the Baehwa Faith.

He thought this also had value in using it, and judging by the Shadow Clan Master's reaction, it seemed successful.

It was then.

-Grab!

The Shadow Clan Master grabbed Mok Gyeong-un's shoulder and spoke, unable to hide his excitement,

“I think I know who taught you the original text.”

“Hmmm?”

What?

He knows who taught this?

It was truly an absurd situation to say he knew who a non-existent, imaginary person was.

However, Mok Gyeong-un didn't show it.

Regardless, the Shadow Clan Master had a completely excited expression.

‘Only two Guardians, including myself, have heard the revelation of the Holy Fire that he prophesied. Among them, only Guardian Jang is over sixty years old.’

If what Mok Gyeong-un said was true, it had to be Guardian Jang.

He had been discouraged, thinking that both Guardians had died after his disappearance.

But if this was true, it was a great relief.

“If you received teachings from him, you can’t be considered a mere follower. You also have the qualification to be a Father.”

‘Hmm?’

He has the qualification to be a Father?

Who did he guess it was to have this reaction?

Although puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un casually expressed humility.

“I only learned the scripture, so how can I have the qualification to be a Father? But you said you think you know who it is...”

“Since he kept it a secret from you until the end, it’s difficult to tell you right away. But one thing is certain: he is a very high-ranking person in our faith.”

“Ah...”

“Do you happen to know where he went after teaching you the scripture?”

“... I apologize, but I don’t know. He suddenly disappeared one day.”

“Ah...”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the Shadow Clan Master couldn't hide his disappointment.

Still, he thought he should find solace in the fact that the Guardian, whom he had thought dead, was alive.

As he was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un spoke to him in a low voice,

“But before the old master disappeared, he left something behind.”

“He left something behind?”

“Yes.”

“What is it?”

The Shadow Clan Master asked in a voice filled with anticipation, thinking it might be a clue.

“It was a sentence written in Persian, but it was so vague that I couldn't understand its meaning.”

“He wrote it in Persian? Try writing it.”

With that, Mok Gyeong-un picked up the brush and wrote a word.

[روح ری شمش]

‘!?’

Seeing this, the Shadow Clan Master frowned.

Then he soon opened his mouth and muttered,

“Blade of the Soul?”

That’s what it would be if directly translated from Persian.

What does this mean?

After pondering for a moment, he spoke as if he had realized something,

“Ghost... Blade?”

The Blade of the Soul could also be called the Ghost Blade.

If it was according to the sentence he had left, the only thing that immediately came to mind was the Ghost Blade, one of the Eight Stars who was called the current supreme master of the martial arts world.

At the Shadow Clan Master’s speculation, the corner of Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth curled up.

‘Ha!’

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong sincerely clicked her tongue.

What a truly absurd guy.

He created a plausible lie based on the information he knew, matching the Shadow Clan Master’s reactions, and now he was leading the situation as he intended.

‘... He intends to make this ball-less search for the Ghost Blade.’

Chapter 140 – Annihilating Poison King (1)

The Shadow Clan Master gently placed his hand on Mok Gyeong-un's shoulder and spoke with a benevolent smile,

“We are now in the same boat.”

“I will keep that in mind. I will contribute to the revival of the faith.”

The Shadow Clan Master nodded with a satisfied expression, then crossed his hands, brought them to his shoulders, slightly bowed his head, and spoke in a reverent voice,

“May the Holy Fire's blessing be upon you.”

Mok Gyeong-un followed suit.

“May the Holy Fire's blessing be upon you.”

“Ohohoho. Then get some good rest.”

“Yes.”

With that, the Shadow Clan Master left the private residence.

The Shadow Clan Master's attitude, which had been as if he would kill Mok Gyeong-un at any moment until just now, had changed to be quite favorable.

It was because he was convinced that Mok Gyeong-un, who could write and read the original scripture in Persian, was a follower of the Baehwa Faith that worshipped fire.

After the Shadow Clan Master's presence had completely disappeared, Cheong-ryeong's voice reached Mok Gyeong-un's ears.

-You really have a knack for using your head.

With a single lie, Mok Gyeong-un had led the situation as he intended.

He had made it seem as if they were on the same side and made the Shadow Clan Master interested in the person he was searching for, the Ghost Blade.

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and replied,

“The more hands helping, the better.”

Helping hands?

It must mean there are more useful pieces to take advantage of.

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue and said,

-That's true, but it's best to be careful.

“Careful... of the Shadow Clan Master?”

-Yes. Those who worship fire are not called heretics and persecuted for no reason.

“That's interesting.”

-What is?

“It’s surprising that someone who claims to dislike black-and-white logic is so passionate about a religion that came from the Western Regions.”

-...

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Cheong-ryeong was at a loss for words.

It was difficult to refute a statement that pierced right through the heart of the matter.

She had expressed her hatred for the black-and-white logic between the righteous and evil factions with her own mouth, but when faced with a believer of the Baehwa Faith, which was called a heresy and persecuted, didn’t she treat them with prejudice?

She spoke in a slightly lowered voice,

-... You’re right. This is also a kind of prejudice.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled at her readily admitting it.

He liked this aspect of her.

Of course, her words didn’t end there.

-But I have experienced that era. They also treat those outside their own religious group as heretics. If you know that, it’s best to be cautious.

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

-Anyway, even if you've made the Shadow Clan Master move, there's not much difference in having to move with your own feet.

“That's true.”

Mok Gyeong-un had set up the situation as if the clue to the incarnation of Ahriman might be connected to the Ghost Blade, one of the Eight Stars and possibly the enemy who killed his grandfather.

So he thought the Shadow Clan Master might tell him something he knew about the Ghost Blade, but surprisingly, he also knew nothing.

[... It's quite troublesome that the Ghost Blade might be the clue.]

[Do you know something?]

[About the Ghost Blade?]

[Yes.]

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, the Shadow Clan Master shook his head.

As the head of the Shadow Clan in charge of information in the Heaven and Earth Society, he thought he might know something.

But the unexpected answer drained his energy.

[... I've heard rumors that the Ghost Blade might be a master of the Heaven and Earth Society.]

[You mean the rumor that the Ghost Blade might be the Society Leader's personal bodyguard?]

[Yes.]

[A kid who hasn't been in the organization for long has heard all sorts of rumors. Yes, there was such a rumor at one point.]

[Is it just a rumor?]

[I don't know.]

[What do you mean, you don't know?]

[Rumors can have various tendencies. They can be completely false, or they can circulate because they are close to the truth.]

[... Which side do you think it is, Master?]

[I can't give a definite answer.]

[Why?]

[Only the Society Leader himself knows the identity of his personal bodyguard. I've heard that even the vice-leader, known as the Society Leader's right-hand man, doesn't know.]

At the Shadow Clan Master's words, Mok Gyeong-un thought it seemed fishy.

Rumors didn't spread for no reason.

However, at this point, even if he was suspicious, it was difficult to directly contact the Ghost Blade.

He had considered using Cheong-ryeong and the spirit servants, but since the spiritual perception of masters above the peak was incomparable to those below, it was difficult to make them move recklessly.

Moreover, he had heard that Cho Tae-cheong, who might surpass even the Primal Killing Pavilion's diviner In Seo-ok with his techniques, was guarding the main hall where the Society Leader resided.

In many ways, he still lacked strength.

However, Mok Gyeong-un, who couldn't just wait while building his strength, carefully said to the Shadow Clan Master,

[I heard that Elder Baek Sa-ha, the Annihilating Poison King, had confronted the Ghost Blade. I know he's the only one who survived after fighting him. Wouldn't he know something?]

[... He probably would.]

[Then how about trying to contact Elder Baek Sa-ha?]

[That would be difficult.]

[Pardon?]

Why was it difficult?

As Mok Gyeong-un was puzzled, the Shadow Clan Master clicked his tongue and said,

[The Annihilating Poison King is currently in seclusion, observing a three-year mourning period for his deceased mother. Unless it's a special case, he's not meeting anyone.]

[Ah...]

The three-year mourning period is observed for three years after a parent's death to fulfill one's duty and filial piety towards them.

After the burial, the ancestral tablet is enshrined in the mourning hall, and the mourner resides in a hut, offering ritual meals to the deceased morning and evening.

Sometimes, during the three-year mourning period, especially in the early stages, no guests are received except for blood relatives.

The Baek family, the Annihilating Poison King's household, was like that.

‘This is unexpected.’

If the Shadow Clan Master moved, wouldn't it be easier to obtain information?

But with this, it became difficult.

Mok Gyeong-un said as if he had no choice,

[... Then how about I go?]

[You?]

[Yes. I happen to have three first-place tokens, so I can ask the executives for guidance.]

[You're going to use that for this?]

[Yes.]

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the Shadow Clan Master couldn't hide his bewilderment.

It was an opportunity to receive guidance from two of the Eight Stars, known as the supreme masters of the era, among the Five Kings.

Why would he give up that opportunity and ask for guidance from the Annihilating Poison King, who, in a sense, practiced a unique poison art different from ordinary martial arts?

[Isn't that too much of a waste?]

[Of course, it could be, but I also want to do something for our faith. Please let me lend a hand.]

[Ah...]

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the Shadow Clan Master couldn't hide his satisfaction.

What believer wouldn't be happy to hear that he would fulfill his duty as a follower of the Baehwa Faith?

[If you're willing to do that, there's nothing more I could ask for. Then, since we're already at it, tomorrow might be a good day.]

[Tomorrow?]

[Yes. It seems that Baek Sa-ha's grandson is having his first birthday tomorrow.]

[First birthday?]

[Even if he's in the middle of a three-year mourning period, he won't just overlook his grandson's first birthday, who will carry on the family line. They'll have a simple feast, even if it's just with close relatives.]

Since it was his grandson's first birthday, his mood would be better than usual.

The Shadow Clan Master suggested taking advantage of this.

[I was planning to send a gift to the Annihilating Poison King anyway. If you deliver it and carefully request the benefit of the three first-place tokens, it should work out.]

Early in the morning before the sun had risen,

-Creak!

Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Society Leader, hurriedly came to the residence of his blind subordinate, Wi Maeng-cheon, after receiving an urgent message.

Jang Neung-ak, who had come to the residence, couldn't contain his anger and gnashed his teeth.

Wi Maeng-cheon's head, decapitated and dead.

What kind of sudden calamity was this?

-Grab!

Jang Neung-ak grabbed the collar of Jong-im, Wi Maeng-cheon's subordinate, and pressed him,

“What the hell were you doing for this to happen?”

“... I apologize.”

Jong-im couldn't say anything and only uttered an apology.

At his response, Jang Neung-ak threw Jong-im to the floor.

-Bang!

“Ugh.”

Jang Neung-ak, who had thrown him to the floor, glared at the guard warriors prostrating as if confessing their sins with sharp eyes.

Then he soon spoke,

“What kind of guards are you who can't even protect your own master? Behead them all.”

“Yes.”

-Swish!

At Jang Neung-ak's order, Ho Jong-hyeok, the third-ranked member of the Five Mountains Alliance and the Grand Clan Leader of the Destruction Clan, raised the huge ax he was carrying on his shoulder.

The four guards, frightened, pleaded with tears in their eyes,

“P-Please spare us!”

“We were also suddenly attacked.”

At their pleas, Jang Neung-ak snorted.

They all claimed to have fallen asleep at that moment and knew nothing, yet now they were begging to be spared.

“Kill them.”

-Slice!

“Ugh!”

Despite their desperate pleas, they all ended up with their heads cut off by Ho Jong-hyeok’s ax.

Still not appeased, Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Society Leader, considered killing even Jong-im, who was known as Wi Maeng-cheon’s right-hand man.

However, the other subordinates dissuaded him.

“Please hold back. If you do that, there will be no one to lead Maeng-cheon’s subordinates.”

“...”

There were about fifty elite warriors personally trained by Wi Maeng-cheon.

If Jong-im, a lieutenant-level subordinate who had been managing them, was also killed, their morale might decline, and it could become difficult to control them.

Knowing this, Jang Neung-ak also barely restrained himself.

However, this was not something that could be overlooked.

‘How dare they kill this young master’s subordinate.’

What an absurd bastard.

He had carried out this audacious act not elsewhere but within the inner city of the Heaven and Earth Society.

Touching his person, who might become the next Society Leader, was essentially equivalent to declaring war.

-Swish!

At that moment, someone touched the cut surface of Wi Maeng-cheon’s severed neck and spoke,

“He’s no ordinary person.”

“What?”

“He cut Maeng-cheon’s sword and neck with a single slash.”

A man with an angular jaw and a fierce-looking face pointed to Wi Maeng-cheon’s broken Bamboo Sword on the floor.

Although it was impossible to know exactly how the duel unfolded since the cunning bastard had erased all the footprints on the floor, one thing could be inferred from the broken sword and the cut surface of the neck.

Jang Neung-ak’s eyes sharpened.

‘He cut Maeng-cheon’s sword and neck with a single slash?’

To do that, one had to be a tremendous master of the sword and have reached the perfected realm of the supreme stage.

A woman in colorful clothes with thick lips approached and said,

“Then the suspects are narrowed down to some extent.”

Wi Maeng-cheon was a subordinate of Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Society Leader.

If someone was bold enough to kill Wi Maeng-cheon in the middle of the night, it would be the work of those who wanted to hold him back from becoming the next Society Leader.

‘Na Yul-ryang... Wi So-yeon...’

The first people that came to mind were naturally his older and younger martial brother and sister competing for the position of the next Society Leader.

They were also supreme masters of the sword, so this kind of thing was possible.

Moreover, they were in a situation where they were fiercely competing for power with him, so they had sufficient justification to carry out such an act.

However, it was unlikely that they had personally come out like rats just to deal with one of his subordinates.

In that case, the number of suspects was significantly reduced.

The two wenches that Grand Young Master Na Yul-ryang boasted about and that bastard who was Wi So-yeon's right-hand man.

Except for them, no one could have possibly cut Wi Maeng-cheon's sword and neck with a single slash.

-Creak!

“Find them. No matter what.”

“Yes, sir!”

At his words, the remaining four members of the Five Mountains Alliance bowed their heads and shouted in unison.

Amidst this, there was one person watching with frustrated eyes.

It was none other than Jong-im, Wi Maeng-cheon's subordinate.

‘Damn it... They're not even considering me as a suspect.’

Jong-im knew the true culprit behind this incident.

Of course, he would.

Because he was the one who had moved together with Wi Maeng-cheon on his orders.

However, apart from that, he couldn't reveal this fact.

The reason was that he himself was not Jong-im, but Wi Maeng-cheon, who had become a spirit servant and possessed the body of his subordinate.

‘My lord... I apologize.’

He could no longer serve Jang Neung-ak.

Since he had become a spirit servant, he couldn’t defy Mok Gyeong-un, and if he did, his wife and child would lose their lives.

At that moment, Jang Neung-ak, who had been gnashing his teeth, muttered while glaring at somewhere,

“No. This is perfect timing. I can see those damned things there.”

‘There?’

Where was Jang Neung-ak referring to when he said “there”?

Around noon.

Mok Gyeong-un was heading somewhere, accompanied by his guard warrior, Seok Jung.

That place was none other than the estate of Baek Sa-ha, the Annihilating Poison King, one of the Five Kings of the Heaven and Earth Society.

‘Damn it.’

Seok Jung, who was in charge of guarding Mok Gyeong-un, found this situation quite awkward.

He had tried to avoid encountering him as much as possible, but he had no choice but to deliver the gift from the Shadow Clan Master.

He had no choice but to cater to him as much as possible.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said to him, who was very tense,

“Is your lover doing well?”

-Flinch!

When Mok Gyeong-un asked about his lover under the pretext of a greeting, Seok Jung felt shivers all over his body.

Mok Gyeong-un’s words sounded more like a warning after a long time rather than a greeting.

Seok Jung spoke in a trembling voice,

“I, I will never act in a way that harms you, Young Master.”

“What did I say?”

“...”

Damn it.

Then he should have just asked if he was doing well instead of asking about his lover.

Seok Jung felt an urge to retort, but he didn’t show it.

Mok Gyeong-un was too frightening for him to do that.

“Is that large case on your back the gift prepared by Master?”

“Yes, it is.”

“The gift should be to his liking.”

“I believe he put a lot of thought into it.”

“That’s a relief, then.”

Well, the gift wasn’t the essential thing.

He had to somehow persuade Baek Sa-ha, the Annihilating Poison King, to obtain information about the Ghost Blade, one of the Eight Stars, from his mouth.

However, the timing was really bad.

Of all things, he was observing a three-year mourning period.

‘Persuade him.’

For now, he had received and familiarized himself with the information about Baek Sa-ha and his family from the Shadow Clan Master.

But it seemed that Baek Sa-ha was a person with a more difficult personality than he had thought.

So persuading him didn't seem like it would be easy.

At that moment, Seok Jung, who was walking ahead, pointed somewhere with his chin and said,

“It's over there.”

A grand estate was visible where he pointed.

In terms of size, it was smaller than the Shadow Clan, which handled confidential information, but it was quite large, befitting one of the Five Kings, who could be considered high-ranking executives.

“Shall we go, then?”

Mok Gyeong-un approached the entrance of the estate with him.

Two warriors wearing mourning clothes were guarding the front gate.

However, before they could reach there,

‘Hmm?’

Mok Gyeong-un turned his head and saw a group of people approaching.

Leading the group was a woman wearing a bamboo hat and a veil, and she was none other than,

‘Wi So-yeon?’

She was Wi So-yeon, the third disciple of the Society Leader.

Why was Wi So-yeon coming here?

As he was thinking that, he saw another group of people coming from a different path.

They were none other than,

‘Oh... Goodness.’

Jang Neung-ak, the second disciple of the Society Leader, and his subordinates from the Five Mountains Alliance, no, the Four Mountains Alliance now, were coming here together.