

Mayhem 151

Chapter 151 – Talent (2)

The dark red poison energy rising from Mok Gyeong-un's hands.

It could be said to be a sign of unleashing the Toad Poison Demon Palm from the Wave Demon Poison Scripture.

Watching this, Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue inwardly.

'Is he capable of mastering poison techniques right away as well?'

Since his body was essentially that of a Poison Master from the beginning, she had considered the possibility, but to think it was actually possible.

Poison techniques were on a different level compared to other martial arts.

But seeing him embody it in an instant, it was truly a frightening level of talent.

'If it's this brat...'

It might really be possible.

To fulfill her hundred-year-old grudge.

However, he still needed more experience and time.

The true power of the Heaven and Earth Society was not so easy to deal with.

Therefore,

-Hey, mortal. Aren't you revealing too much of your strength?

Cheong-ryeong warned Mok Gyeong-un in a low voice.

If an awl is too sharp, it will pierce the handle.

He needed to show just the right amount, but if he displayed too much talent, it might only raise their guard.

In response to her words, Mok Gyeong-un replied:

-I'm going to change my approach.

-Change your approach? What do you mean?

-It seems that moderation won't work if I want to contact the Society Leader.

-What?

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Cheong-ryeong expressed her concern.

-Mortal. Your rate of development is indeed very fast, but you're still only ahead among the disciples. You mustn't be impatient.

-That's not it. But I think the best choice will be necessary.

-The best choice?

What was this fellow thinking?

Hadn't he decided to build up his strength as much as possible under the shadow of the Shadow Clan Master?

Could it be that he was planning to overturn his plan and get involved in the competition to become the Society Leader's successor?

As she was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un had already kicked the ground and launched himself towards Woo Ho-rang, the trusted subordinate of Wi So-yeon, the Society Leader's third disciple, who was bewildered.

-Swish!

The trajectory drawn by the dark red haze was bold and aggressive beyond measure.

It looked like a surging wave.

"Ugh!"

Woo Ho-rang's expression darkened.

Once he became convinced that Mok Gyeong-un had mastered the Poison King Baek Sa-ha's Wave Demon Poison Scripture, he realized it was dangerous to confront him in close combat.

-Whoosh!

Woo Ho-rang hurriedly used his lightness skill to widen the distance.

It was already troublesome enough that he had to dispel the poison energy in his chest.

He had thought he could easily subdue Mok Gyeong-un since he had the upper hand in internal energy, but the situation had changed.

'I can't understand it.'

How was he able to use the Poison King's martial arts?

Poison techniques weren't something that could be mastered so quickly.

-Swish!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un swung his palm, and the dark red poison energy haze flew towards him in a diagonal line.

In response, Woo Ho-rang raised his sword's sharp energy to cut through the front.

-Slash!

Woo Ho-rang generated wind pressure with the wide blade of his Nine Harmony Blade, which had cut through the poison energy.

-Whoosh!

The dispersed poison energy scattered backward due to the wind pressure.

Passing through the scattering poison energy, Mok Gyeong-un kicked the blade of Woo Ho-rang's Nine Harmony Blade like lightning.

-Clang!

Then, like an eagle snatching its prey, he tried to grab Woo Ho-rang's shoulders with his fingers.

In response, Woo Ho-rang tilted his head back and kicked Mok Gyeong-un's thigh.

-Thud!

Along with that, Woo Ho-rang used the recoil to widen the distance again.

'Annoying.'

Poison was fatal even with a single touch.

No matter how much he protected his body with true energy, he couldn't let his guard down.

Mok Gyeong-un provoked him with a smirk.

"How are you going to subdue me by just dodging?"

'This bastard!'

He was angry at the provocation, but he had to respond calmly.

If the opponent was a master of poison techniques, getting close would be disadvantageous, so he had to maintain distance and defend against the poison energy somehow.

-Tap tap tap tap!

Woo Ho-rang, who had much more practical experience than his disciple Yeop Wi-seon, didn't fall for the provocation and maintained even more distance.

However, there was one thing he had overlooked.

The moment he tried to create distance, a sharp blade energy rushed towards his forehead.

At this,

-Clang!

Woo Ho-rang hurriedly blocked it by swinging his sword.

What had targeted his forehead was none other than Mok Gyeong-un's sword.

-Clang clang clang!

As the blades of the sword and the sword collided, blue sparks flew.

But Woo Ho-rang frowned at the cracks visible between the sparks.

That was because cracks were forming on the blade of the Nine Harmony Blade that was in contact with Mok Gyeong-un's sword.

'Damn it!'

Woo Ho-rang infused true energy into the blade and generated a repulsive force.

-Clang clang clang!

At the same time, he unleashed the 4th stance of the Bright Sun Sword Art, the unique swordsmanship of Bright Blade King Son Yun, called the Orderly Wheel Sword Barrier[1].

The sharp trajectory of blade energy he created formed a barrier.

The Bright Sun Sword Art had six attacking stances and three defensive stances, and this was the most flawless defensive stance among them.

-Clang clang clang clang clang!

The collision between his Orderly Wheel Sword Barrier stance and Mok Gyeong-un's overwhelming sword strikes produced an ear-splitting metallic sound.

'What the hell is this guy?'

Not only poison techniques, but his swordsmanship was also not ordinary.

As a disciple of the Shadow Clan Master, he should have mastered the sword, but how did he learn swordsmanship to this level?

He was puzzled for a moment.

At that instant,

-Thud!

-Clang clang clang clang!

Mok Gyeong-un's short sword pierced through the barrier created by Woo Ho-rang's Nine Harmony Blade and spun around on its own.

In that instant,

-Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un lowered his stance flat towards the ground,

'Flowing Profound Leg Technique[2], 8th stance, Soaring Profound Rising Strike[3]!'

Using his leg energy, he rotated along the ground, digging underneath, and immediately kicked upward, striking Woo Ho-rang's chin.

'Leg technique?'

Poison techniques, sword techniques, and now he even unleashed such a high-level leg technique?

Just how many martial arts did this bastard master?

-Thud!

Woo Ho-rang hurriedly tilted his head back.

However, the key point of the Bi-hyeon-seung-gyeok was to kick upward and then strike downward.

-Bam!

"Ugh!"

Woo Ho-rang's knees buckled as his right shoulder was struck downward.

Not missing this opportunity, Mok Gyeong-un tried to strike Woo Ho-rang's chest with the Toad Poison Demon Palm.

At that moment, Woo Ho-rang let go of his Nine Harmony Blade.

Then, kicking the ground, he rolled backward.

-Thud thud thud!

It wasn't a situation to worry about self-esteem.

If he were to be hit by the poison palm here, the match would be decided.

However, Mok Gyeong-un had already unleashed another leg technique, sending a flurry of kicks towards Woo Ho-rang, who was rolling on the ground.

'Flowing Profound Leg Technique, 9th stance, Torrential Rain Wild Wind[4]!'

-Bam bam bam bam bam!

Mok Gyeong-un's kicks flew with numerous afterimages.

The power was truly unpredictable.

'Damn it!'

With his unstable posture, Woo Ho-rang raised his sharp blade energy with his bare hands, drawing a long line on the ground and slashing upward.

Then, the fragments of the ground mixed with the blade energy and shot upward, colliding with the afterimages created by Mok Gyeong-un's leg strikes.

Woo Ho-rang tried to regain his posture using this opportunity.

Right at that moment,

-Bang!

'What!?'

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been unleashing his stance, suddenly kicked the air.

Then, launching himself into the air, he performed an aerial somersault, rotating his body, and then kicked the air again, unleashing a sword stance towards Woo Ho-rang.

That sword stance was,

'Flying Transforming Ghost Sword Technique[5], 3rd stance, Reflecting Transforming Sword Subjugation[6]!'

It was the Ghostly Sword Art, the unique swordsmanship of the Shadow Clan Master.

The Reflecting Transforming Sword Subjugation, which could be considered the most destructive stance among the Ghostly Sword Art, slashed Woo Ho-rang diagonally from his shoulder to his chest.

-Slash!

“Ugh!”

A scream erupted from Woo Ho-rang’s mouth as he was cut by the sword.

Then, unable to maintain his posture, he collapsed on the ground.

‘...Ha!’

Someone was hiding and watching their confrontation.

That someone was none other than Seo Hye-in, the leader of the Grass-Smoke Clan, one of the five, no, four trusted subordinates of Jang Neung-ak, the Society Leader’s second disciple.

She was genuinely shocked.

‘How could this be...’

She had been hiding and waiting for Mok Gyeong-un on Jang Neung-ak’s orders.

However, before she could make a move, Woo Ho-rang had appeared first, so she had been hiding and observing the situation.

‘...Was he at this level?’

The real reason she had concealed her presence and observed the situation was to gauge Mok Gyeong-un’s true intentions.

If he showed any signs of contact with Wi So-yeon, it would have been an act of betrayal against her lord, so she had intended to observe and judge.

However, something unexpected had occurred.

‘He defeated Woo Ho-rang?’

Who was Woo Ho-rang?

He was the Society Leader disciple of Bright Blade King Son Yun, one of the Five Kings, and the Grand Cland Leader of the Geo-gweol Clan.

This alone was already remarkable, but he was also known to possess the highest martial prowess among the Heaven and Earth Society’s disciples, being one of the Five Tigers.

Defeating him, who was said to have no match except for executives of the Valley Master level or higher, was a shock in itself.

Moreover, what was even more surprising was,

‘Just how many martial arts did he master?’

If her eyes weren’t deceiving her, the martial arts Mok Gyeong-un had unleashed were all transcendent.

From the Poison King Baek Sa-ha’s Wave Demon Poison Scripture, the Shadow Clan Master’s Ghostly Sword Art, to the unpredictable and destructive leg techniques, and the mysterious sword techniques that were difficult to find flaws in, which she had seen somewhere before.

Each and every one of them appeared to be high-level martial arts that were very difficult to master.

‘Impressive.’

She had guessed that he might be at the transcendent stage due to his brief exchange with Wi Maeng-cheon, but she had never dreamed he would be at this level.

‘...I won’t be a match for him.’

She had to admit it.

If he was at this level, it seemed he could even compete with Ko Yeon-hu, known as the strongest of the Five Mountains Alliance and another member of the Five Tigers.

‘No. That’s uncertain.’

Even among the Five Tigers, she believed that Ko Yeon-hu, the First Mountain, was stronger than Woo Ho-rang.

Rather, if she had to name someone who could compete with Ko Yeon-hu, she would compare him to that person who was considered the undisputed best among the Five Tigers.

That was how strong Ko Yeon-hu truly was.

But that wasn’t what mattered now.

‘Is this a good thing?’

Her lord was already in a very unpleasant mood due to the death of Wi Maeng-cheon, the Second Mountain of the Five Mountains Alliance, and the failure to gain the support of the Poison King Baek Sa-ha.

If Mok Gyeong-un, who was the joint disciple of the Poison King and the Shadow Clan Master and had defeated Woo Ho-rang to become a new member of the Five Tigers, joined her lord’s faction, it would improve his unpleasant mood.

'It's even more of a two birds with one stone since he already suspected Woo Ho-rang of killing Wi Maeng-cheon.'

Thinking it was a good thing, she was about to make her move.

After all, the match was over, and since Mok Gyeong-un had so miserably defeated Wi So-yeon's trusted subordinate, there was no reason for him to join her faction, so there was no need to hesitate any longer.

But it was right at that moment.

"Well, well, that was quite an entertaining spectacle."

-Flinch!

'Huh, when did he...?'

Startled by the gruff voice coming from behind her, she hurriedly used her movement technique to create distance.

Since when was he behind her?

She hadn't sensed his presence at all.

-Thud!

After creating distance, she quickly turned her head.

But there was no one there.

‘!?’

What was going on?

She clearly heard a voice from behind her.

As she was puzzled, the voice spoke again from behind her.

“I’ve been watching with you all this time, so why are you so surprised?”

-Shudder!

Those words sent chills down her spine.

That meant he had been behind her the whole time, and she hadn’t noticed until now?

Seo Hye-in was so trembling that she couldn’t turn her head.

Then, the owner of the voice said:

“I was thinking of letting one or two of my disciples have a chance so it wouldn’t end too quickly, but that would be too much of a waste.”

‘!!!!!’

Could it be that the person behind her right now was...

‘The Eldest Young Master?’

Chapter 152 – Talent (3)

‘Flying Transforming Ghost Sword Technique[1], 3rd stance, Reflecting Transforming Sword Subjugation[2]!’

The Ghostly Sword Art, the unique swordsmanship of the Shadow Clan Master.

The Reflecting Transforming Sword Subjugation, which could be considered the most destructive stance among the Ghostly Sword Art, slashed Woo Ho-rang, the trusted subordinate of Wi So-yeon, the Society Leader’s third disciple, diagonally from his shoulder to his chest.

-Slash!

“Ugh!”

A scream erupted from Woo Ho-rang’s mouth as he was cut by the sword.

Then, unable to maintain his posture, he staggered backward and collapsed on the ground.

Was this how he was going to die?

At that moment, Woo Ho-rang’s closed eyes opened,

“Cough... Cough...”

Woo Ho-rang coughed up blood.

Fortunately, he had not lost his life.

“Haa... Haa...”

How long had it been since he was directly cut by someone else?

No, this was the first time he had suffered like this.

'I... lost?'

Mok Gyeong-un was not a superior martial artist compared to him, but rather inferior in terms of internal energy.

Yet, he had never predicted that he would be defeated in a duel of technique execution.

What was the reason for his defeat?

It seemed to lie in Mok Gyeong-un's unconventional nature and his ability to utilize various martial arts.

If he had even a little understanding of him from the beginning, he might not have let his guard down like this.

But what good would it do to dwell on it now?

Defeat was defeat, with no room for excuses.

A shadow fell over his face.

It was Mok Gyeong-un, who had approached and was looking down at him from above.

At this, Woo Ho-rang said:

“Cough cough... Why... didn’t you... cut me properly?”

Although there was quite a bit of bleeding, Mok Gyeong-un’s sword had not cut him deep enough to be fatal.

If it had been even an inch deeper, he might have died.

In response to his words, Mok Gyeong-un smirked and bent down to perform acupressure on Woo Ho-rang’s chest.

-Tap tap tap tap!

‘Blood stopping points.’

The points Mok Gyeong-un had pressed were acupoints for stopping bleeding.

To the puzzled Woo Ho-rang, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders and said:

“If I kill you, your lord, Lady Wi So-yeon, and even Elder Bright Blade King will try to kill me, so that would be a reckless move.”

“...”

-Clench!

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Woo Ho-rang bit his lower lip tightly.

It was truly humiliating beyond measure.

To put it differently, it meant that if it weren't for his lord, the young lady, and his master, Mok Gyeong-un wouldn't have spared him.

But what could the loser say at this point?

"Go."

Woo Ho-rang said to Mok Gyeong-un briefly.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un asked:

"Where should I go? Didn't you come to take me? Since the young lady called for me, I'll escort..."

"Are you trying to make me miserable?"

"Miserable? Ah, is it because of your injuries?"

He could just let it slide, but this fellow deliberately poked at the sore spot.

Woo Ho-rang spoke with a forceful voice:

"I will tell the young lady that I proposed a duel first to repay my disciple's debt, so just leave."

This was the maximum concession he could make.

Having been defeated in the duel, he didn't want to show this miserable state to the young lady and see this fellow gloating.

"Ah. So you're asking me not to meet the young lady."

“Who said that...”

“Yes, yes. If that’s what you want, I should comply.”

“...Then just leave quietly. With you, I...”

“Aren’t you forgetting something?”

“What?”

“Don’t you have something to give me?”

“Something to give?”

For a moment, Woo Ho-rang’s eyes wavered.

In his resentment over the defeat, he had forgotten about it.

He was the one who had proposed the wager using the young lady’s tokens they each possessed before the duel.

‘Damn it.’

At that time, he had been certain that he would win.

But the result had turned out to be the opposite.

Woo Ho-rang gritted his teeth and gestured with his eyes, pointing to his lower body, and said to Mok Gyeong-un:

“It’s in the pocket on the right side of my waist.”

“Is that so?”

Mok Gyeong-un unhesitatingly took out the token from the right pocket hanging on his waist.

This token was not directly given by Wi So-yeon anyway, so taking it would only raise unnecessary suspicion and have no effect.

However,

“It’s a pity. You shouldn’t have made such a wager.”

-Crack!

The token crumbled and shattered in Mok Gyeong-un’s hand, and Woo Ho-rang lost the ability to use the token he had received from his lord, Wi So-yeon.

Seeing the fragments of the shattering token, Woo Ho-rang couldn’t hide his despair.

He had wanted to use that token as a pretext to express his feelings to her when he would one day become the most precious person to her.

But all of that had turned to dust.

“Well then, take care of your body, and next time... Ah! I almost forgot.”

Mok Gyeong-un, who was about to get up, bent down again and whispered in his ear:

“Just in case, let me tell you, I don’t care who you like. So you don’t have to worry about me telling her.”

“ ... ”

At his words, Woo Ho-rang frowned.

Could he trust this fellow’s words?

He had been worried that this fellow might reveal his hidden true intentions to the young lady.

As he was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smile:

“Rather, thanks to you, it has become much easier for me to choose. Thank you.”

“What?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Woo Ho-rang’s expression stiffened.

What did he mean by that?

It had become easier for him to choose?

‘Could it be?’

Realizing the true meaning behind those words, Woo Ho-rang’s face turned red, but Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly got up, leaving him behind.

Mok Gyeong-un looked at the blade of his short sword.

“It’s magnificent.”

It indeed seemed like a precious sword made by the legendary craftsman Gu Ya-ja before it became the Demon Sword.

There was not a single drop of blood on the blade.

Swords that were crudely forged or made would have blood sticking to the body after cutting something, making them sticky or rusty, but strangely, this sword was clean.

As if it had cleansed itself.

-...That mortal won’t choose that wench.

As Mok Gyeong-un was looking at the sword with satisfaction, Cheong-ryeong’s voice reached his ears.

Mok Gyeong-un didn’t deny it.

-Probably not.

After dealing with Yeop Wi-seon and now his elder martial brother Woo Ho-rang, there seemed to be no one particularly useful around the Society Leader’s third disciple, Wi So-yeon.

The so-called trusted subordinates saw her as a woman before seeing her as their lord.

Therefore, Mok Gyeong-un had decided to exclude her.

-I agree with your judgment.

Cheong-ryeong also agreed with Mok Gyeong-un's decision.

Woo Ho-rang, who had fought against Mok Gyeong-un, was one of the Five Tigers, known as the top disciples of the Heaven and Earth Society, and could be considered her right-hand man.

Such a person harbored romantic feelings and acted against the will of his lord?

If that was the case, there was no need to consider that organization anymore.

-The lack of capable subordinates can also be said to reflect the poor qualities of the leader.

No matter how outstanding Wi So-yeon was as an individual, if the people around her were not up to par and had other ulterior motives, the position of the successor would be out of reach.

-But what will you do? The second disciple doesn't seem like a good choice either.

In Cheong-ryeong's view, it wasn't just the third disciple, Wi So-yeon, who was the problem.

The second disciple, Jang Neung-ak, seemed to have many capable talents under him, but he himself didn't seem to possess good qualities as a leader.

-It's difficult to choose between the two.

-That's true.

What Mok Gyeong-un wanted now was someone who was closest to and most suitable for the position of the successor.

By getting close to such a person, the chances of somehow contacting the Society Leader would increase.

-If you're not satisfied with either of them, there's another option.

-...Another option?

-Why are you asking when you already know?

-Are you referring to the original plan?

-Yes.

-That's also one way, but the situation has changed.

-...It's still a time when you need to build your strength, mortal. The situation hasn't changed.

-Focusing solely on building strength seems a bit inefficient.

-Inefficient? Are you getting too impatient after finding out that the Society Leader is connected to your revenge target?

-Well, I just want to know.

-Don't rush. To shake things up from the inside, you still need to grow and make allies internally.

In response to Cheong-ryeong's words, Mok Gyeong-un showed a faint smile.

Mok Gyeong-un's goal was to find the one who killed his grandfather, but her goal was to fulfill her own grudge.

Therefore, their thoughts were bound to differ at this point.

Mok Gyeong-un halfheartedly replied to her advice.

-Yes, yes.

---At least try to listen, even with one ear.

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue inwardly.

This fellow never listened to other people's advice once he made a decision.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un said:

-I don't think we need to limit ourselves to the second or third disciple.

-What? Don't tell me you're...?

-I want to meet the Eldest Young Master once.

---Are you talking about that fellow who is currently closest to the Society Leader's position?

-Yes. I remember him being mentioned as such.

Both the Corpse Blood Valley Leader Lee Ji-yeom and the Shadow Clan Master had said that the one who currently had the most support within the Heaven and Earth Society and was closest to the successor's position due to his strength alone was none other than the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.

Considering this, joining his faction might actually increase the chances of contacting the Society Leader.

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue and said to Mok Gyeong-un:

-Tsk tsk. It doesn't seem like a particularly good choice.

-Why not?

-The second and third disciples are in a position to follow you, but that Eldest Young Master fellow has nothing to gain. Do you think you can make him move according to your will?

-There's some truth to that. But there's no harm in trying.

-You're the type who won't be satisfied until you try it yourself, whether it's dung or paste. Anyway, I've warned you. It's still too early.

-Yes, yes. I understand...

-Flinch!

Suddenly, Mok Gyeong-un frowned.

-Why are you doing that?

-The energy...

-Energy?

Mok Gyeong-un turned his head and looked at the southwest corner of the wall.

In fact, he already knew that someone else was hiding there and observing him.

Mok Gyeong-un guessed that this person was probably sent by Jang Neung-ak, the Society Leader's second disciple.

So, he thought that if he moved from this spot, they would reveal themselves.

But suddenly, the person's energy fluctuated and then subsided.

'What?'

The sudden subsiding of energy meant that there was an incident such as the consumption of true energy or injury.

As he was puzzled,

-Thud!

'!?'

At the sound of someone collapsing, he turned his head and saw that his guard, Seok Jung, had collapsed on the ground at some point.

He looked around, but no one was in sight.

Mok Gyeong-un frowned and approached Seok Jung to check his pulse, and it seemed that he had fainted after his acupoints were suppressed.

'Who is it?'

“Hmm.”

Then, when he heard something again and turned his head, Woo Ho-rang, who had been lying on the ground with injuries, had his eyes closed and his head drooping to the side.

He also seemed to have lost consciousness.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un let out a soft sigh and said:

“Who are you?”

There was definitely someone there.

At that moment, a voice came from behind.

“You’re a peculiar fellow.”

‘When?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed.

Without him even noticing, an unidentified person had approached him from behind at some point.

Since gaining enlightenment at the Corpse Blood Valley’s treasure warehouse and thanks to his keen eyes, he had become more sensitive to energy and could quickly find the energy of others.

Yet, he couldn’t sense the other person’s energy.

That meant,

‘Can they conceal their energy like the Death Qi?’

It seemed to be the case.

Otherwise, there was no way he wouldn’t be completely caught by his energy perception.

As he was thinking that, the voice continued:

“Judging from your fighting, you seem to have reached the level of a grandmaster, but the energy you emit is at most at the early peak stage.”

The unidentified person was evaluating him.

What was peculiar was that this person seemed to be deliberately disguising their voice, making it thick, as if to conceal their identity.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un spoke:

“...I apologize, but may I ask who you are?”

In response to Mok Gyeong-un’s question, a smirking laugh was heard.

Then, the unidentified person said:

“Try to guess.”

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un scratched his head as if he was in a difficult situation.

“Oh my, this is quite troublesome. Hearing your voice, I’ve never met you before, but you’re telling me to guess.”

“Then why don’t you directly confirm my face?”

“Is that so? Since you say that...”

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un quickly turned his head.

But there was no one behind him.

There was hardly any sound of movement, but in an instant, the person had left his field of vision.

This alone was enough for Mok Gyeong-un to know for certain.

‘...Fast.’

The fact that their movement was faster than the speed of turning his head meant that the other person had definitely reached a higher realm than him.

They seemed to be much stronger than Woo Ho-rang, who was known as one of the Five Tigers (五虎, o-ho), the top disciples within the Heaven and Earth Society.

That meant they were at least at the level of a Valley Master (谷主, gok-ju) or above.

“How can you face me like this?”

The unidentified person lightly provoked Mok Gyeong-un.

It seemed as if they were testing him.

‘Hmm.’

Should he play along?

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

-That mortal fellow behind you. The colors of his pupils are different. The right one is white.

‘!?’

Unlike Mok Gyeong-un, Cheong-ryeong could clearly see her immediate surroundings.

At Cheong-ryeong’s words, Mok Gyeong-un realized the identity of the person behind him.

It was because he had heard about the appearance of some important figures through the Shadow Clan Master.

At this,

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un brought his hands together, slightly bowed his head, and said:

“Mok Gyeong-un, disciple of the Shadow Clan, greets the Eldest Young Master.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s greeting, there was a brief silence behind him.

Then,

-Swish!

Someone poked their face out to Mok Gyeong-un’s right.

As Cheong-ryeong had said, one of his pupils was black, while the other was white, or more precisely, a grey-white color. He was a handsome man with thick, striking features.

The moment their eyes met, Mok Gyeong-un felt a strange sensation.

That sensation was none other than a sense of kinship.

‘What is this?’

As he was wondering, the handsome man asked in an intrigued tone:

“How did you know?”

Chapter 153 – Kinship (1)

[Since the Corpse Blood Valley was established, there has been only one person who acquired all the Society Leader disciple tokens.]

Those were the words of Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom before the final gate of the Corpse Blood Valley.

At the time, Mok Gyeong-un, who wasn't particularly interested in who had obtained all the Society Leader disciple tokens, only asked one thing.

[May I ask what benefits there are to obtaining all the Society Leader disciple tokens?]

[You can receive teachings from the Society Leader.]

This answer left everyone unable to hide their surprise.

The reason was simple.

[Is it that surprising to receive teachings from the Society Leader?]

Mo Ha-rang had satisfied Mok Gyeong-un's curiosity when he was puzzled.

[The Society Leader is known as one of the Six Heavens, the pinnacle of the current martial arts world. Putting everything else aside, receiving teachings from one of the six strongest people in the world is...]

She couldn't even finish her words.

That's how much the prestige of the Six Heavens could be considered the highest in the Central Plains.

If one could gain the opportunity to receive teachings from such a great figure, who wouldn't be willing to risk their life?

However, since the Corpse Blood Valley was established, there was only one such person.

And that one person was none other than,

‘Is it this person?’

The man whose eyes were locked with Mok Gyeong-un’s.

The Society Leader’s first disciple, the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.

It hadn’t been long since Mok Gyeong-un had learned this fact.

It was the Shadow Clan Master who had informed him.

[Both the second disciple, Young Master Jang Neung-ak, and the third disciple, Young Lady Wi So-yeon, possess innate martial talent. However, even they can be considered lacking compared to the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.]

[To that extent?]

[Yes. Let me put it this way to make it more impactful.]

[What?]

[The Eldest Young Master was the first and last person to obtain all the Society Leader disciple tokens of the Corpse Blood Valley since its establishment and become the Society Leader’s disciple.]

‘!?’

He obtained all the Society Leader disciple tokens of the Corpse Blood Valley and became a disciple?

Was the Eldest Young Master the one and only person the Corpse Blood Valley Master Lee Ji-yeom had mentioned?

It was truly astonishing.

[While the second young master and the third young miss were selected based on their talent, the Eldest Young Master rose from the bottom and reached his current position on his own.]

[...That's impressive.]

[Yes. He has charisma and is impressive. But more than that, he is also a truly fearsome person.]

[A fearsome person?]

The Shadow Clan Master had described the Eldest Young Master as a fearsome person.

Compared to the second lord, Jang Neung-ak, whom he had described as cunning and tyrannical, requiring caution, he seemed to show considerable wariness towards the Eldest Young Master.

Why was that?

As he wondered, the Shadow Clan Master said:

[Actually, if we only consider his talent in both civil and martial arts, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the position of the next Society Leader is reserved for the Eldest Young Master.]

[If it's not an exaggeration, why are the disciples competing for the successor's position?]

It made no sense to him.

If he was that outstanding, was there a need to have them compete?

Didn't they say he had the most support among the disciples and was recognized by everyone for his excellence in both civil and martial arts?

Then why hadn't the Society Leader, who was said to be bedridden, appointed him as the successor yet?

In response to Mok Gyeong-un's question, the Shadow Clan Master said something unexpected.

[...The Society Leader might be wary of him too.]

[What?]

What did he mean by that?

The Society Leader of the Heaven and Earth Society, known as one of the Six Heavens, the strongest in the world, was wary of his own first disciple?

Something seemed odd.

[...Is there a reason to be wary? If it's because of his talent, shouldn't he be happy since he's the next successor?]

[Normally, that would be the case.]

[Is there another reason?]

[If there's a reason, there must be one.]

[What is it?]

[He possesses overwhelming martial talent to the extent of passing all the gates of the Corpse Blood Valley as the top disciple and is proficient in both civil and martial arts, so why do only 40% of people support him?]

[Hmm?]

Come to think of it, that was true.

Before hearing from the Shadow Clan Master, he had thought that since they were competing for the successor position, all three of them were either outstanding or nearly equal in level, so a decision couldn't be made.

That's why he had thought 40% each was reasonable, but if he was as dominant as the Shadow Clan Master said and was known as the Society Leader's first disciple, it wouldn't be strange for him to have 80% or 90% support, not just 40%.

That meant one thing could be inferred.

[Is there a disqualifying factor that could overturn all of that?]

Unless there was something that could be a decisive flaw, there was no reason for the Society Leader not to appoint him as the successor.

In response to Mok Gyeong-un's question, the Shadow Clan Master spoke in a meaningful tone.

[He's different from ordinary people.]

[What do you mean by different?]

[Exactly what I said. The Eldest Young Master's standards of thinking, thoughts, and emotions are very different from ordinary people.]

[...]

[I don't know if it's something he was born with or if it's due to environmental factors, but his difference seems to have prevented the Society Leader from making a definite decision.]

[Different...]

In what aspect was he different from ordinary people?

What was certain was that many people were reluctant about the Eldest Young Master because of this difference.

Those who followed the second disciple Jang Neung-ak, the third disciple Wi So-yeon, or remained neutral were probably such people.

“How did you know?”

At the question of the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, who had one pupil black and the other gray-white, Mok Gyeong-un suddenly recalled what the Shadow Clan Master had said.

[He's different from ordinary people.]

‘Hmm.’

Mok Gyeong-un's lips twitched slightly.

He didn't quite understand in what sense the Shadow Clan Master had said those words.

Rather, he felt a strange emotion for the first time.

It was a kind of kinship.

‘Interesting.’

For the first time in his life, he felt this kind of feeling from someone else.

However, it wasn’t just Mok Gyeong-un who felt that emotion.

The moment his eyes met Mok Gyeong-un’s, Na Yul-ryang was also captivated by a peculiar feeling.

“Hoh.”

A mysterious feeling he had never experienced from ordinary people.

It was emanating from this fellow.

Even though he knew his identity, their eyes met without wavering. Na Yul-ryang could instinctively tell.

“Interesting.”

“What do you mean?”

“You... We’re of the same kind.”

At Na Yul-ryang’s words, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed.

Did this person also receive the same feeling as him?

Kinship, the same kind.

[Cough cough... Promise me.]

[What are you saying?]

[That you will never... reveal your true nature...]

His grandfather had warned him until the very end.

Not to reveal his true nature that was different from ordinary people.

When his grandfather was by his side, he had tried his best to do so, but as he witnessed countless bloodshed, his suppressed true nature awakened.

His grandfather had called it a murderous nature, but Mok Gyeong-un didn't think so.

It was a kind of liberation of his confined self.

‘Different, huh.’

If this was the reason Na Yul-ryang said he was different from ordinary people, did that mean he also fell into that category?

It was truly fascinating.

At that moment, Na Yul-ryang said to Mok Gyeong-un:

“I was wondering why a fellow who was taken as a hostage by the righteous faction defected to our association, but I think I know the reason now.”

“...”

“You don’t fit in with those old-fashioned places that talk about justice or whatever.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un was about to reveal his true feelings but changed his answer.

“The Heaven and Earth Society just suited me better, that’s all.”

Regardless of the kinship he felt, there was a difference in their positions.

The other person was the Eldest Young Master, the Society Leader’s first disciple.

Even if he gave a similar feeling, he wasn’t someone to be treated casually considering his position and martial prowess.

-Swish!

At that moment, Na Yul-ryang put his hands behind his back and leisurely circled around Mok Gyeong-un.

He was examining him from head to toe with his eyes.

Being observed like this, aside from the kinship, wasn’t a pleasant feeling.

“It’s truly strange that even when you’re this close, I can’t properly sense your energy. Where did you learn this technique?”

At the direct question, Mok Gyeong-un lowered his head and replied:

“I learned it from the Shadow Clan Master.”

“The Shadow Clan Master?”

“Yes.”

“That’s odd. Although the Shadow Clan Master’s energy is known to have a stronger tendency towards yin energy compared to others, it’s not at a level where he can completely control and conceal himself.”

“...”

Judging from Na Yul-ryang’s tone, he spoke as if he was a level above the Shadow Clan Master.

However, it was difficult to simply deny this because the energy emanating from Na Yul-ryang was strongly condensed into a single point in his lower abdomen, unable to leak out.

Although it was condensed, the energy faintly leaking from that point seemed like it could explode at any moment.

‘Strong.’

It was difficult to even estimate how strong he was.

From what he could see now, he might even be comparable to the level of the Five Kings (五王, o-wang).

He seemed to understand why the Shadow Clan Master had said he was more outstanding than the second disciple Jang Neung-ak and the third disciple Wi So-yeon.

At that moment, Na Yul-ryang said with a smirk:

“You’re already trying to hide it.”

“No, I wouldn’t dare do that to the Eldest Young Master.”

“Really?”

“That’s right.”

“Good. As a martial artist, there might be aspects you want to hide at first. Since it’s the first time, I’ll let it slide. Well, that’s not my real concern anyway.”

With those words, Na Yul-ryang suddenly stroked his chin.

Then, as if pondering, he stared at Mok Gyeong-un and opened his mouth.

“How did you know earlier?”

“Earlier?”

“How did you know who I was? I disguised my voice, and you couldn’t have met me before.”

Even if he could receive information about appearances as a disciple of the Shadow Clan, who was in charge of information and artifacts, he had guessed correctly without even seeing him.

Na Yul-ryang wanted to solve that mystery.

At his question, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly said:

“It was a guess.”

“A guess?”

“Yes.”

“You guessed who I was based on a hunch without any information...”

“It wasn’t without any information.”

“It wasn’t?”

“Poison King was the only one who hadn’t visited me, and I guessed based on the fact that you knocked out the subordinates of the second young master and the third young miss who had tried to contact me.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Na Yul-ryang extended his hand and said:

“I might not know about knocking out the third junior sister’s follower, but where was the second junior brother’s subordinate?”

At this, Mok Gyeong-un pointed to the corner of the wall with his hand.

It was the place where the emanating energy had suddenly decreased for a moment.

“Didn’t you knock out Seo Hye-in, the leader of the Grass-Smoke Clan, a subordinate of the second young master?”

‘!?’

These words brought a glint to Na Yul-ryang’s eyes.

He was surprised not only that he had noticed someone secretly observing him with his perception but also that he had correctly guessed who it was.

“You... Your energy perception is very sensitive.”

“That’s not true. I had no idea you were here.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Na Yul-ryang chuckled and snorted.

It was a reaction as if it was natural.

It could be seen as arrogant, but it rather suited him well.

“Well, leaving that aside, you guessed based on knocking them out?”

“Yes. There’s no way their lords, the second or third disciples, would suddenly knock them out when they were trying to bring me into their factions...”

“And there would be even less reason for other executives to knock them out, right?”

“Yes.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s answer, Na Yul-ryang said with a smile:

“I thought your martial prowess was decent, but you also use your head quite well.”

“...You flatter me.”

“If I had left it to my apprentices, it would have been somewhat enjoyable to watch you fight, but now that I’ve seen you in person, I can’t do that.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un thought.

As expected, was the Eldest Young Master also trying to bring him into his faction?

However, unexpected words came out of his mouth.

“You must have also felt that you’re a similar kind to me, right?”

“...”

“So, here’s the thing. I’ve changed my mind. For a fellow like you, it’s either I can control you completely, or it’s best to kill you right now.”

-Swish!

As soon as he finished speaking, a blue blade energy gathered at the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s index finger.

It was a sword force.

Chapter 154 -Kinship (2)

“So, here’s the thing. I’ve changed my mind. For a fellow like you, it’s either I can control you completely, or it’s best to kill you right now.”

-Swish!

The blue blade energy emanating from the two gathered fingertips of the Society Leader's first disciple, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, was the sword force formed by the condensation of true energy.

-Crack crack crack!

Cracks began to form on the ground around where Na Yul-ryang was standing.

It was the aftermath of the blade energy flowing from his body.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes became sharper than before.

‘...This is troublesome.’

Although he had anticipated Na Yul-ryang's martial prowess to some extent, it completely exceeded his expectations.

Contrary to his expectation that he might have reached the pinnacle of the peak stage, surprisingly, the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang had broken through the bottleneck and reached the Transformation Realm.

Cheong-ryeong, who was inside Mok Gyeong-un, also noticed this and said:

-He has broken through the bottleneck.

-It seems so.

-This is serious. Now I understand why he called you his kind.

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue.

Even if they were the Society Leader's disciples, if they were involved with the executives, they wouldn't carelessly mess with them.

But this fellow, the Eldest Young Master, was different.

The killing intent in his eyes and the way he immediately invoked the sword force reminded her of Mok Gyeong-un, showing that his thinking was different from ordinary people.

How many people would judge their opponent based on their own perception and try to kill them at their first meeting?

In that regard, they were indeed similar.

-Swish!

At that moment, the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang's fingers twitched.

Mok Gyeong-un had no time to think and quickly twisted his body to the left.

-Thud!

-Slash!

As soon as he did that, the air right in front of his nose was cut by a sharp energy, and a blue light sliced through space.

Then, it cleanly cut into the ground in a straight line.

The distance stretched over ten zhang.

Mok Gyeong-un frowned.

-That bastard really intends to kill you.

‘I know.’

Otherwise, there was no way he would show such an incredible thing.

If he had reacted a little slower, his body would have been precisely split in half.

Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue inwardly.

From the way he acted immediately upon making up his mind, his way of thinking was indeed quite similar to his own.

He was an extremely efficient person.

Even if he were in the opposite position, he would have made a similar judgment.

Neither Na Yul-ryang nor himself were the type to truly be loyal to someone or open their hearts.

Right at that moment,

-Swish!

“You have good eyes.”

-Thud!

Along with the voice, two fingers flew towards his eyes.

The moment he heard the word “eyes,” he reflexively tilted his head to the side, allowing Mok Gyeong-un to narrowly avoid having his eyes pierced.

However,

-Thud!

As soon as he dodged, Na Yul-ryang swung his arm in that state and struck his face.

The martial power was so strong that Mok Gyeong-un’s body flew to the side and crashed into the wall of the courtyard.

-Crash!

As his body collided, the wall crumbled.

‘Haa.’

Blood flowed from Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth.

The moment the martial power penetrated his face, he had tried to disperse it with the Death Qi, but it was too fast, and it seemed his mouth had been torn.

‘Troublesome.’

This was too strong.

Mok Gyeong-un staggered and regained his stance.

Seeing him like this, a glint appeared in the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang's eyes.

‘He endured?’

He had felt surprised three times now.

The first slash he had swung was intended to kill Mok Gyeong-un instantly.

But surprisingly, the fellow saw his fingers moving and moved his body without hesitation to dodge it.

So, thinking he had better eyes and insight than expected, he tried to take his eyes first.

But he dodged this too.

‘Sturdy.’

The arm he had swung right after dodging the eyes was not only aimed at striking Mok Gyeong-un's face but also intended to blow his head off entirely, using more than 70% of his martial power.

But the moment he was hit in the face, he entrusted his body to the force and managed to survive.

“Ha. Is it innate?”

Na Yul-ryang raised the corners of his mouth.

He immediately realized that Mok Gyeong-un's senses were different from ordinary people.

His senses were sensitive and innate, almost like a beast.

Ordinary fellows would have already been dead.

"Not bad."

Na Yul-ryang praised Mok Gyeong-un.

At this, the staggering Mok Gyeong-un said:

"You flatter me."

"No. You're the first one to endure three times when I intended to kill, besides that guy from the Five Tigers."

That guy from the Five Tigers?

The Five Tigers were the top disciples of the Heaven and Earth Society.

Since Mok Gyeong-un had defeated Woo Ho-rang, one of them, he felt puzzled by Na Yul-ryang's words.

If it were Woo Ho-rang, he would have lost his life to Na Yul-ryang's first slash.

Did that mean there was an even more skilled expert?

But that wasn't important right now.

Mok Gyeong-un said:

“...While I understand your reason for wanting to kill me, others might not. Will that be all right?”

“Hahaha. It’s hard to endure, so you’re using your head. It’s useless.”

“I know. But I also have to use my head to preserve my life.”

“You know how to move your tongue despite having only three inches, but it’s useless. Once I’ve made up my mind to kill you here today, you absolutely cannot escape that outcome.”

-Swish!

As soon as he finished speaking, the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang reached Mok Gyeong-un’s front.

Na Yul-ryang struck down with his palm towards Mok Gyeong-un’s head.

He intended to shatter his head and kill him instantly.

‘He can’t dodge this time.’

Just as he thought that,

The moment Na Yul-ryang’s palm touched Mok Gyeong-un’s head,

‘Ritual of Repulsion.’

-Whoosh!

Strangely, as if grasping an eel in his hand, his palm slipped to the side and staggered, missing its target.

In that fleeting gap, Mok Gyeong-un launched a palm strike towards Na Yul-ryang's heart.

-Bam!

“Hahaha!”

At that moment, Na Yul-ryang let out a laugh filled with madness.

Along with it,

-Thud! Boom boom!

Mok Gyeong-un's body was bounced back, crashing into the opposite wall and breaking it.

Mok Gyeong-un coughed up blood as he collapsed along with the shattered wall.

“Cough cough.”

He was the one who had struck, but due to the tremendous repulsive force surging from Na Yul-ryang's chest, he had instead suffered internal injuries.

Thanks to that, he clearly realized.

Currently, it was extremely difficult to deal with an expert of the Transformation Realm.

In his mind, he listed various secret techniques such as opening the middle elixir field, reverse acupoint technique, left sword right palm, and tried to come up with a plan, but no answer emerged.

The difference in level was too great to compensate with secret techniques.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un asked:

-Haa... Haa... What should I do?

In response to Mok Gyeong-un's question, Cheong-ryeong said:

-It's impossible. If the opponent is a pinnacle expert of the Transformation Realm, the level is completely different. No matter what technique you use, you can't win.

The answer Cheong-ryeong gave was the cold reality.

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth with his sleeve and smacked his lips.

This time, it was truly difficult.

After meeting someone of the same kind, he clearly understood.

Unless someone appeared and intervened midway, there was almost no chance of surviving this situation.

At that moment, the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang walked over and said:

“You're a really interesting fellow.”

-Sizzle sizzle sizzle!

A dark red haze was rising from his chest area.

It was a phenomenon caused by Mok Gyeong-un's poison palm.

Na Yul-ryang was genuinely intrigued.

He had tried to blow off his head, but due to a mysterious technique, the true energy was pushed in all directions and slipped.

Not only that, but he had also launched a full-force poison palm strike towards his heart.

Since he had already watched the fight with Woo Ho-rang, dealing with the poison palm wasn't difficult.

From the moment he had broken through the bottleneck, he could handle true energy as if breathing, so he could easily dispel the poison as well.

"The more I see, the more tricks you have up your sleeve."

"Haa... Haa... Those tricks... I could use them... for the Eldest Young Master..."

"No. Even if it's one-tenth or one-hundredth of loyalty to me, if there's a possibility of stabbing me in the back, it's better to kill you now."

"Too much... distrust... don't you think?"

"Distrust? No. It's certainty. You're the same kind as me. You probably don't have any fear of death or terror of others."

"..."

“The most definite emotion you feel is probably the desire to kill. That’s what makes you feel alive. Can you deny it?”

Mok Gyeong-un’s lips twitched.

He now understood why he had felt a sense of kinship.

Except for one thing.

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un’s face, the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang raised the corners of his mouth and said:

“I am curious. If you’re truly the same kind as me, you won’t show any despair even at the moment of death.”

“...Who knows.”

“I’ll find out by cutting off your limbs one by one.”

-Swish!

As soon as he finished speaking, the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang moved.

Once again, his figure blurred, and in an instant, he reached right in front of Mok Gyeong-un.

Na Yul-ryang’s sword force aimed to precisely cut off Mok Gyeong-un’s right arm.

-Slash!

Mok Gyeong-un concentrated intensely and tried to unleash the Ritual of Repulsion, one of the techniques of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques, at the moment the sword force was about to touch.

But at that instant, Na Yul-ryang's left hand struck Mok Gyeong-un's neck first.

-Thud!

“Ugh.”

-Bang!

Along with it, Mok Gyeong-un's body fell sideways and was thrown to the ground.

The shattered ground alone showed how hard he had been hit.

Na Yul-ryang said with a sneer:

“That mysterious technique earlier seemed to target the moment the attack was about to land, but it seems difficult to respond to sudden changes like this.”

-...Ha.

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue.

She had thought there wouldn't be anyone like Mok Gyeong-un in the world.

But this bastard was not only of the same kind but also had an innate sense of combat.

He had responded to the Ritual of Repulsion in just a single attempt.

No matter how much of an expert who had broken through the bottleneck, it was difficult to do this.

‘Impossible.’

This was an existence that Mok Gyeong-un absolutely couldn’t handle at his current level.

To think there was such a monstrous fellow.

At that moment, the Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang aimed his sword force at Mok Gyeong-un’s right shoulder.

“Well then, shall we start with the right arm?”

-Shing!

Na Yul-ryang’s appearance, with the corners of his mouth reaching his ears, was the embodiment of madness itself.

He seemed to feel joy from someone’s suffering.

The sword force was about to pierce Mok Gyeong-un’s shoulder.

-Swish!

Right at that moment,

-Crack!

The sound of something breaking was heard.

At this, one of Na Yul-ryang's eyebrows rose.

What was that sound just now?

-Roar!

Right then,

Suddenly, blood droplets began to surge upward from all directions.

Then, starting from the ground, the walls, and everything around began to be dyed in red blood.

The sky, which was gradually darkening as evening approached, was suddenly tinged with a bloody color, engulfing everything.

‘What the hell is this?’

The moment he thought that, everything disappeared as if it had been an illusion.

‘!?’

What could it be?

It was too vivid to be a hallucination.

Sensing an eerie premonition from this unknown and bizarre phenomenon, Na Yul-ryang felt a strange sense of wariness.

An ordinary person would have felt fear or been at a loss due to the wariness, but he was different from normal people.

Na Yul-ryang judged that this sudden and bizarre phenomenon must be related to Mok Gyeong-un.

So,

‘I should just kill him.’

The moment he made up his mind, he tried to swing his sword force towards Mok Gyeong-un’s neck.

At that instant,

-Clang!

Something blocked his sword force.

The thing that blocked the sword force was none other than a long pipe.

‘A long pipe?’

Mok Gyeong-un breathed heavily and looked up at the being holding the long pipe.

The owner of the long pipe was none other than Cheong-ryeong.

Cheong-ryeong spoke in a cold voice:

-He belongs to me.

-Zap!

Feeling a strange sensation that stimulated all five senses for the first time, Na Yul-ryang retracted his sword force.

Then, he frowned and said:

“Junior sister?”

‘!?’

Chapter 155 – Coercion (1)

The Society Leader’s first disciple, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, retracted his sword force, frowned, and said:

“Junior sister?”

‘!?’

Junior sister?

A glint appeared in the eyes of Mok Gyeong-un, who had been breathing heavily.

Na Yul-ryang had just called Cheong-ryeong the youngest apprentice.

If he referred to the junior sister among the Society Leader’s disciples, it meant the third disciple, Wi So-yeon.

‘Ah...’

Come to think of it, Wi So-yeon’s appearance greatly resembled Cheong-ryeong’s.

They looked so similar that they could be mistaken for sisters without any oddity.

The only difference was the unique aura emanating from their appearances.

While Cheong-ryeong gave off an arrogant, cold, and intimidating feeling, Wi So-yeon had a brighter and more lively atmosphere.

However, such subtle differences could only be clearly discerned by those who frequently saw the two or had an interest in them.

That seemed to be the reason for Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s reaction.

‘Junior sister?’

Cheong-ryeong also realized from his words that Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang had mistaken her for that mortal wench, Wi So-yeon.

At this point, her thoughts began to look in a different direction.

Originally, she had revealed her true form at the risk of some danger to save Mok Gyeong-un from the crisis.

Moreover, since it was still daytime and the energy of yang was overflowing, she had risen to the level of an Indigo Spirit, but she couldn’t fully exert her power.

As an example, she had unleashed a small-scale Blood Realm of the Ghost Realm that was difficult for the diviners inside the city to notice, but it quickly dissipated due to the energy of yang.

She could draw out more energy here and forcibly maintain it by expanding the radius, but that was extremely dangerous.

A high-level diviner might immediately notice.

However, a new path had emerged.

‘It might be possible.’

Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang was still confusing her with that mortal wench, Wi So-yeon.

No matter how much Na Yul-ryang pushed his own will, it would be difficult for him to act that way in front of his own junior sister.

It wouldn’t be long, but it was an opportunity.

-I will deal with this fellow. Escape to the old man who uses poisons, mortal.

She spoke so that only Mok Gyeong-un could hear.

Now, while he hadn’t noticed yet, was the only chance to escape.

Right at that moment,

“It’s been a long time since Master has been ill. Junior sister.”

As expected, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang still thought of Cheong-ryeong as his own apprentice, Wi So-yeon.

Judging from his words about it being a long time, it was even better.

At least he wouldn't notice right away.

‘There's no need to engage in conversation.’

Otherwise, she would be exposed quickly.

So, Cheong-ryeong swung her long pipe like a sword towards Na Yul-ryang.

-Swish!

At this, Na Yul-ryang lightly dodged it by tilting his head back, then used his movement technique to take a few steps back and create distance.

“What are you doing, junior sister?”

-...

What was she doing?

Cheong-ryeong smirked, raised the corners of her mouth, and unleashed sword strikes with her pipe towards Na Yul-ryang.

It had been a long time since she had confronted someone with sword techniques after becoming a vengeful spirit.

No, had it been nearly a hundred years?

-Bam bam bam bam!

As Cheong-ryeong unleashed her sword techniques, Na Yul-ryang used his movement technique to dodge the trajectories of the sword strikes.

His movements were extraordinary, befitting an expert of the Transformation Realm who had broken through the bottleneck.

But at this moment, Cheong-ryeong's sword strikes unleashed a sudden change.

-Swish!

Caught off guard by the sudden change from an unexpected angle, Na Yul-ryang, who had one hand behind his back, invoked his blade energy and blocked the pipe.

-Clang clang clang clang!

As the blade energy and the pipe created with spiritual power collided, Na Yul-ryang frowned.

Then he said:

“Your swordsmanship has improved greatly compared to before.”

-...

Cheong-ryeong silently unleashed another sword strike with her pipe.

Her pipe coiled like a snake around Na Yul-ryang's blade energy and bent upward.

‘!?’

Na Yul-ryang immediately moved half a step back to dodge it.

As he dodged, Na Yul-ryang invoked his blade energy and pierced towards Cheong-ryeong's chest with his hand.

But Cheong-ryeong easily dodged it and instead swatted the blade energy to the side.

-Bang!

‘This?’

-Thud!

Na Yul-ryang's expression became quite serious.

That was because the youngest apprentice he knew was tremendous in internal energy due to her unique constitution, but her technique execution was still lacking.

But now, she was wielding sword strikes like an expert who had accumulated considerable practical experience.

Since she hadn't received teachings after the Society Leader, her master, fell ill, there was no opportunity to spar, but her skills had improved tremendously for that reason.

-Swish!

In a moment of doubt, the pipe, imbued with sharp blade energy, pierced towards Na Yul-ryang's forehead.

-Swish!

Na Yul-ryang flung his body back to dodge it.

Then, while maintaining distance from her, who kept trying to attack, he said with a sneer:

“As your eldest senior apprentice brother, I am deeply moved by your remarkable improvement in swordsmanship.”

-...

“Let’s stop now. I understand that your sword skills have greatly improved.”

-...

“Do you not want to engage in conversation with me?”

-...

It wasn’t that she didn’t want to engage, but she couldn’t.

She might be exposed through her voice or way of speaking.

However, Na Yul-ryang didn’t seem displeased by Cheong-ryeong’s attitude, but instead shook his head.

“Are you angry because your senior apprentice brother was trying to kill the fellow you were aiming for?”

-...

-Swish!

As soon as Na Yul-ryang's words ended, she launched her body again.

She was confronting him as a human to give Mok Gyeong-un time to escape, but sparring with someone whose martial prowess was close to hers from her living days as a martial artist after a long time had inwardly excited her.

Even though she had been dead for a long time as a vengeful spirit, it seemed that her competitiveness as a martial artist still remained.

-Swish swish swish swish swish!

Her pipe, imbued with sharp blade energy, targeted Na Yul-ryang's vital points.

Then, Na Yul-ryang immediately,

"You don't know moderation. If that's the case, I have no choice."

-Swish!

He invoked his sword force, surpassing mere blade energy, and blocked Cheong-ryeong's sword strikes.

-Clang clang clang clang clang!

When the blade energy created with spiritual power at the Blue Spirit level collided with the sword force, a strange phenomenon occurred.

Every time the energies clashed, a white flash erupted and a shattering sound spread.

It was a completely different phenomenon from when strong energies collided.

‘What is this?’

Doubt filled Na Yul-ryang’s eyes.

How could Wi So-yeon block the sword force he unleashed with 70% of his martial power?

And with mere blade energy at that.

Moreover, the white flashes that appeared whenever the blade energy and sword force collided, and the strange sensation transmitted were odd.

‘Different.’

It was difficult to understand what this was.

-Clang clang clang clang clang!

On the other hand, Cheong-ryeong, who was intensely exchanging sword strikes with Na Yul-ryang, also couldn’t hide her surprise.

‘He’s no ordinary fellow.’

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue inwardly.

She was unleashing sword techniques that followed the Society Leader’s Heavenly sword techniques, not her original ones, and although her spiritual power was somewhat limited due to the daytime, Na Yul-ryang’s skills were truly remarkable.

She was once called the true sword grandmaster alongside “that damn bastard” a hundred years ago.

Yet, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang was keeping up with her level.

‘If another ten years pass, perhaps no one will be able to defeat this mortal bastard in swordsmanship.’

He possessed innate martial talent that couldn’t be denied.

The current Society Leader had indeed accepted an incredible person as his disciple.

It was worrisome.

Could Mok Gyeong-un catch up to this monstrous fellow in a short period?

Although there was a high risk since he was an expert of the Transformation Realm, it might be better to personally eliminate this bastard right now.

As she was about to unleash the Moon sword techniques to properly demonstrate her skills,

“I didn’t expect you to make me use this too.”

‘What?’

At that moment,

-Swish!

Na Yul-ryang’s right pupil, which had been gray-white, suddenly turned silver.

‘His pupil?’

What kind of phenomenon was this?

As she was wondering, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang suddenly flung his body back to create distance and said:

“You... What the hell are you?”

-...

There was a reason why Na Yul-ryang reacted this way.

He had a special ability.

It was something that had emerged long ago when the blood of a strange being, not human, had fallen into his right eye.

When he concentrated his true energy on his right pupil, he could see the vulnerabilities and the flow of energy in others.

Although he couldn’t maintain it for long due to the pain whenever he used it, it allowed him to easily overpower even experts a level above him.

Na Yul-ryang called this opened eye of his the Penetrating Eye[1].

However,

‘What is this?’

Na Yul-ryang couldn't understand as he looked at Cheong-ryeong.

While most martial artists who had cultivated martial arts had bright and warm energy, she had no energy at all.

No, there was energy, but it resembled the gloomy and chilling energy that briefly rose when someone was killed.

It was so bizarre that he wondered if she was really a living human being.

With suspicion, Na Yul-ryang said:

“Are you... really Wi So-yeon...”

-Flinch!

‘!?’

At that moment, Na Yul-ryang stopped mid-sentence and turned his head.

It was in the direction where Mok Gyeong-un was.

‘What?’

Thanks to that, Cheong-ryeong naturally turned her head as well, and she discovered Mok Gyeong-un still lying on the ground.

She had been so focused on fighting the fellow that she hadn't noticed, but why hadn't he escaped?

Hadn't she barely managed to create an opportunity for him?

-Mortal! I clearly... Huh?

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong frowned.

That was because her ghostly eyes saw Mok Gyeong-un's Death Qi condensing and undergoing a change.

Cheong-ryeong's mouth slightly opened.

‘Ha!’

This change occurring in Mok Gyeong-un's body.

Unlike the normal flow of energy circulation, the Death Qi was circulating through the reverse acupoints, condensing and then spreading throughout his entire body.

It passed through the essence[2] in the lower elixir field, and then gathered in his chest for the second time before spreading, which was the qi in the middle elixir field, with the Death Qi moving through the yin in the reverse acupoints.

‘Three Flowers Gathering at the Crown...’

What Mok Gyeong-un was currently performing was none other than the phenomenon of Three Flowers Gathering at the Crown.

However, it was different from the typical Three Flowers Gathering at the Crown.

Originally, the Three Flowers Gathering at the Crown was called the Three Yang Gathering at the Crown, where the yang within yin, the yang within yang, and the yang within yin and yang, these three yangs,

headed towards the inner origin and returned to the heavenly palace, which was called the ancestral source.

But since Mok Gyeong-un used the reverse acupoints, it was the opposite.

‘Three Yin Gathering at the Crown[3]!’

It was the yin within yang, the yin within yin, and the yin within yin and yang.

In other words, the three yins were heading towards the inner origin, and the heavenly palace was reversely returning, which was the ancestral source.

‘...Mortal, you?’

Mok Gyeong-un was not yet at the stage to gain enlightenment.

He hadn’t even reached the pinnacle of the transcendent realm, so he couldn’t fully comprehend the qi.

Yet, such Mok Gyeong-un was currently performing the Three Flowers Gathering at the Crown, no, the Three Yin Gathering at the Crown, to break through the bottleneck on his own.

In other words, he was forcibly trying to break through the bottleneck, not through enlightenment.

‘How in the world?’

At the moment of wonder,

-Swish!

Na Yul-ryang launched his body like lightning.

‘I have to kill him.’

Until now, Na Yul-ryang had been extremely relaxed.

But through the Penetrating Eye, he felt wariness for the first time upon seeing the strange change in Mok Gyeong-un.

An eerie energy that was not normal, but only briefly seen in the dead, was reversely circulating throughout Mok Gyeong-un’s body, trying to create the three yin flowers.

How could this make sense?

He instinctively felt that he had to stop this bizarre phenomenon.

Chapter 156 – Coercion (2)

“I shall face this person. Flee to the poison-wielding elder, mortal.”

Upon hearing Cheong-ryeong’s words, Mok Gyeong-un realized her intent to engage the Society Leader’s first disciple, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, in order to buy time.

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes sharpened at this.

Her judgment was undoubtedly correct.

The gap between himself and Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, who had overcome his wall and ascended to the Transformation Realm, was vast.

At present, fleeing was the only answer.

However, two issues remained.

First,

‘My left ankle.’

It seemed Cheong-ryeong had failed to notice in her haste that Na Yul-ryang had swiftly crushed Mok Gyeong-un’s left ankle, fracturing the bone.

This was no coincidence.

It was a calculated move to hinder his mobility and prevent his escape.

A person like Na Yul-ryang, so similar to Mok Gyeong-un, would not release him so lightly merely because Cheong-ryeong, or his assumed junior sister, had appeared.

Second,

‘The Poison King...’

Baek Sa-ha, the Poison King who had also reached the Transformation Realm, could likely protect Mok Gyeong-un from Na Yul-ryang.

However, Mok Gyeong-un’s thoughts did not end there.

His gaze shifted to Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, who was engaged in battle with Cheong-ryeong.

If the person was truly akin to himself, this would not be the end.

‘...He will seek to kill me, by any means necessary.’

Even under the Poison King Baek Sa-ha’s protection, Na Yul-ryang would undoubtedly attempt to eliminate Mok Gyeong-un through whatever method he could devise.

He had already made up his mind to do so.

It was both instinct and conviction.

‘Troublesome.’

Just as he was finding his footing, this was a truly vexing variable.

Failure to overcome it would mean death before vengeance.

As his thoughts reached this point, Mok Gyeong-un began seeking a new solution.

‘I need more power.’

Power was necessary to protect himself from Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, not anyone else.

However, this could not be achieved in a short time.

Even in the current martial arts world, only an extremely small number of innately gifted individuals could attain enlightenment, shatter their threshold, and reach the Transformation Realm.

Ascending to such a realm was not a feat that could be accomplished through talent alone.

Yet,

‘Could it work?’

A scene flashed through Mok Gyeong-un’s mind.

It was the moment when the Poison King Baek Sa-ha attained enlightenment and surpassed his threshold.

Although invisible to others, Mok Gyeong-un, who had opened his Ghost Eye, remembered what had transpired within Baek Sa-ha’s body as he broke through his threshold.

Energy had traversed three points, forming the Three Yang of essence, energy, and spirit.

The reason behind this occurrence was unknown.

However, he was confident in his ability to replicate it almost identically from memory.

‘Is it possible?’

The act of forcibly inducing the Three Yang without enlightenment.

There was no way to know if this would succeed.

Perhaps it would lead to qi deviation, endangering his life.

‘.....’

Then, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes fell upon Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, who was fiercely crossing swords with Cheong-ryeong.

For now, it remained a stalemate.

However, as it was daytime, Cheong-ryeong, a vengeful spirit, was at a disadvantage.

It would not be long before the person could repel Cheong-ryeong's sword.

Such was the extent of his extraordinary talent with the blade.

“Haa... Haa...”

Mok Gyeong-un attempted to move his left ankle.

The pain was still immense.

It would likely be difficult to even put weight on his left foot.

‘It will be challenging in a short time.’

Even with his exceptional recovery ability, a fractured bone could not heal instantaneously.

Na Yul-ryang was gradually adapting to Cheong-ryeong's swordsmanship.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un made his decision.

‘It will be a gamble.’

Regardless, the moment he moved, it was evident that Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang would cease his duel with Cheong-ryeong and change course.

In that case, he had no choice but to take the risk, even if it carried a higher degree of danger.

Fortunately, his energy was composed of deathly qi, making it difficult for others to accurately detect.

Even Na Yul-ryang, who had reached the Transformation Realm, had failed to discern it properly. Thus, even if he were to channel his energy through the Three Yang here, it would be challenging for others to notice.

“Phew.”

Mok Gyeong-un, lying down, contemplated the energy within his body.

Then, recalling the Poison King Baek Sa-ha, who had shattered his threshold, he slowly began to circulate his energy, intending to forcibly break through.

‘...It must be done in reverse.’

He had nearly made a mistake in that instant.

The energy Mok Gyeong-un wielded was not the energy of life, but the energy of the deceased.

The approach had to be the opposite of the norm.

-Rumble!

With that, Mok Gyeong-un began forcibly piercing through the threshold by circulating his deathly qi through his reverse acupoints, relying on his memory.

The deathly qi gathered and spread throughout his body as it circulated through the reverse acupoints.

He perfectly recreated the phenomenon that had occurred within Baek Sa-ha's body.

‘First, the lower danjeon.’

-Rumble!

The concentrated deathly qi passed through the essence of the lower danjeon.

Then, it converged near the chest before spreading throughout the body, forming the yin through the deathly qi in the reverse acupoints of the middle danjeon, the energy.

‘The second is also a success.’

If the supreme masters who had surpassed their thresholds were to witness Mok Gyeong-un's current actions, they would have been unable to conceal their astonishment.

This was because it differed from the typical Three Yang Convergence.

Originally, the Three Yang Convergence, also known as the Three Yang Gathering, referred to the convergence of yang within yin, yang within yang, and yang within yin and yang, with the three yang heading towards the inner origin and returning to the heavenly palace.

However, due to the reverse acupoints, Mok Gyeong-un's process was the opposite.

It was literally the Three Yin Convergence.

This was yin within yang, yin within yin, and yin within yin and yang.

In other words, the three yin were heading towards the inner origin, with the heavenly palace inversely returning.

‘Ugh.’

Beads of sweat formed on Mok Gyeong-un’s forehead, and faint steam escaped from his mouth.

Finally, the energy had to penetrate the top of his head, but this was proving difficult as it was a forceful attempt without enlightenment.

At that moment,

-Whoosh!

Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang launched his figure towards Mok Gyeong-un with lightning speed.

It was to prevent him from accomplishing whatever he was attempting.

Mok Gyeong-un, who was focusing all his attention on piercing through the spirit in order to achieve something, was unable to notice this.

However,

-Swish!

Cheong-ryeong blocked Na Yul-ryang’s path.

‘As if I would allow anyone to interfere.’

Whether forcibly forming the Three Yang of essence, energy, and spirit without enlightenment was possible or not, if Mok Gyeong-un were to be interrupted here, he would undoubtedly die.

‘In any case, that mortal brat...’

It was not audacity but sheer recklessness.

She had told him to flee while she held off this person, yet he was engaging in such a perilous challenge at this very moment.

Regardless, she had to protect that mortal...

“Do not interfere!”

-Swish swish swish swish swish!

At that instant, a dazzling trajectory resembling a meteor shower was drawn from Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s sword energy.

Cheong-ryeong’s gaze turned frigid for a fleeting moment.

This was the Heavenly Sword Meteor, one of the three secret techniques of the Heavenly Sword’s swordsmanship.

It was a sword technique the person had created while gazing upon the falling stars in the night sky.

Although her resentment ran deep, she had no choice but to acknowledge that these three secret techniques devised by the person were truly unparalleled and could be considered supreme.

While they were called secret techniques, flawless and domineering sword techniques,

‘It’s not without weaknesses.’

Cheong-ryeong, who had deconstructed the person's swordsmanship over a hundred years, had discovered the sole weakness in this technique.

Amidst the densely packed sword techniques that approached like a meteor shower, there was a single trajectory that could be exploited.

If she were to thrust a single sword towards that spot,

-Stab!

-Swish swish swish!

‘!?’

At that moment, Na Yul-ryang's sword techniques abruptly changed direction, entrapping Cheong-ryeong's single sword that had aimed for the opening.

‘A variation?’

It was an entirely unexpected sword path.

As a result, the pipe created by spiritual power was trapped within the trajectory of the strong energy and instantly disintegrated.

However, this was not the end.

-Swish swish!

‘Oh no!’

Cheong-ryeong swiftly utilized her lightness skill to evade the sword trajectories that targeted her.

Her eyes sharpened as she dodged.

She had discovered the method to break the Heavenly Sword Meteor through countless deconstructions, but it had been refined to the point of being even more formidable, far beyond her expectations.

‘...I underestimated the person.’

The person, too, had once vied for the title of the world’s greatest swordsman alongside her.

As time had passed, it was only natural for him to develop his sword techniques and compensate for their weaknesses, yet she had been too fixated on the past.

‘It was a mistake.’

Cheong-ryeong inwardly reflected on her error.

At that moment, Na Yul-ryang, who had been pressuring Cheong-ryeong with his dense sword techniques, forcefully thrust his sword energy towards her brow.

In that instant,

-Boom!

A sharp sword energy of blue hue sliced through the air.

It was the Sword Energy Blast, a technique that could directly launch condensed strong energy.

‘Oh no!’

The final strike was a Sword Energy Blast from an inescapable position.

Cheong-ryeong hastily crossed her hands and created a red blood-like barrier using spiritual power.

-Crash!

However, the power of the Sword Energy Blast, the final strike that served as the climax of the sword techniques, was so immense that her body soared through the air along with the Blood Barrier.

Without missing that very moment, Na Yul-ryang changed his direction.

And then,

“Haa!”

He unleashed another Sword Energy Blast, aiming it towards Mok Gyeong-un.

‘Where do you think you’re going!’

Cheong-ryeong, who had been launched into the air, disregarded her gaze and everything else, waving her hand.

Blood from the ground rose in the form of thorns, attempting to pierce Na Yul-ryang’s right shoulder as he tried to extend his sword.

“Hmph!”

Na Yul-ryang hurriedly twisted his body.

Thanks to that, the trajectory of the Sword Energy Blast slightly deviated from its original intention.

The blue sword energy extended in a straight line, piercing not Mok Gyeong-un's neck, as originally intended, but right beside it.

-Boom boom boom!

As a result, the strong energy penetrated the ground, raising fragments and dust.

The power was sufficiently potent.

To this extent, the shockwave alone might have disrupted Mok Gyeong-un's attempt to achieve his breakthrough, causing him to suffer critical injuries or even death.

‘This is not enough.’

As visibility was obscured, even with his Penetrating Eye, Na Yul-ryang, who had been unable to properly confirm the situation, launched his figure towards Mok Gyeong-un.

-Bang!

Cheong-ryeong, who had soared into the air and deflected Na Yul-ryang's Sword Energy Blast, also propelled her figure towards Mok Gyeong-un.

He probably hadn't finished his breakthrough yet, and everything might have been ruined by the previous Sword Energy Blast.

-Whoosh!

‘I have to stop it.’

In any case, she had already unleashed her power as a vengeful spirit.

In that case, without any further hesitation,

It was at that very moment.

-Gasp!

-Whoosh!

Suddenly, an unknown energy began to surge from within the hazy dust in all directions.

Cheong-ryeong’s eyes widened.

The energy surging from within the dust was of a distinctly different nature compared to the deathly qi that could be considered the energy of death.

‘What energy is this vicious...’

-Gasp!

Na Yul-ryang, who had been propelling his figure, abruptly came to a halt.

It was at that precise moment.

From within the dust obscuring their vision,

-Boom!

A black strong energy extended towards Na Yul-ryang's face with tremendous force, accompanied by a circular shockwave.

Na Yul-ryang hastily blocked the black strong energy targeting his head with his blue sword energy.

-Clang clang clang clang!

Sparks of pale blue light erupted as the strong energies collided.

The clash of strong energies, almost at a stalemate, neither side yielding.

‘What in the world...’

Na Yul-ryang's eyes sharpened.

This black strong energy exuded a brutality and ferocity he had never experienced before.

The momentum was so vicious that it disrupted the convergence of his own strong energy.

‘This won't do.’

Forcibly clashing energies led to the loss of true energy.

Realizing it was futile, Na Yul-ryang extended one foot back, applying force to his Yongchuan acupoint, and used the technique of “Borrowing Force to Redirect” to divert the incoming strong energy to the side.

-Boom!

-Crash crash crash crash!

The black strong energy tore through the ground, shattering a wall nearly five jang in length.

From the aftermath of this strong energy, Na Yul-ryang could instinctively comprehend.

‘Ha...’

How could this be possible?

-Grip!

Strength filled Na Yul-ryang’s hand.

It was unbelievable.

The person had shattered his threshold and entered the same realm as himself.

-Swish swish swish!

Mok Gyeong-un’s figure emerged from the dissipating dust.

At the sight of his appearance, Na Yul-ryang’s expression grew even more solemn.

‘!!!!’

It was clearly visible to his Penetrating Eye, which could penetrate through energy.

Mok Gyeong-un, with black energy materializing and surging throughout his body.

Enveloped in the exceedingly vicious black energy, his appearance was reminiscent of a demon that had ascended from hell.

Chapter 157 – Coercion (3)

It was not only him who was surprised.

Cheong-ryeong was also astonished by the vicious energy emanating from Mok Gyeong-un's entire body.

‘What is this energy?’

It might be difficult for ordinary people to perceive clearly.

However, the energy of Mok Gyeong-un, visible through her Ghost Eye, was both ferocious and ominous beyond compare.

This energy had become significantly different from the deathly qi that could be considered the energy of the deceased.

-Whoosh!

Originally, the Three Yang Convergence referred to the energy penetrating the essence, energy, and spirit, completely opening the Ren and Du meridians, and surpassing one's limits.

However, Mok Gyeong-un had forcibly pierced through it using the opposite method of reverse acupoint energy circulation with deathly qi.

He had achieved this through the contrasting yin.

The energy that had been condensed and exploded through the Three Yang had now transformed.

A new energy had been born, unlike anything Cheong-ryeong, who had existed for over a hundred years, had ever encountered before.

‘Vicious... Ferocious... The embodiment of ominousness. How was such energy created? This is truly akin to a demon.’

It differed from both the vengeful and malevolent spirits.

It had completely transformed into a new energy unique to Mok Gyeong-un himself.

At that moment, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, the Society Leader’s first disciple, spoke.

“I thought you were just an immature brat, even if we were of the same ilk... You, bastard. You’re a more bothersome existence than I anticipated.”

“I share a similar opinion.”

It was mutual.

Mok Gyeong-un also recognized Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang as someone who needed to be killed rather than a mere tool to be exploited.

In response to Mok Gyeong-un’s answer, Na Yul-ryang clicked his tongue.

Then, he spoke again.

“Are you truly human?”

Na Yul-ryang's question was entirely reasonable.

In this urgent situation, Mok Gyeong-un had performed the outrageous feat of forcibly breaking through his threshold.

It was an absurd pace of advancement and a gamble with his life on the line.

"I am human. Do you think I might turn into a monster?"

"A monster? ...That makes sense too. That ominous black energy emanating from you... It's like a demon from hell."

"A demon?"

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

A demon, he said.

He understood why Na Yul-ryang would say such a thing.

Since it was his own energy, he could comprehend it even more clearly.

[Forget the viciousness within you. Only then can you live on.]

Come to think of it, those were the words his grandfather had spoken to him since childhood.

He had assumed it was simply due to a strong sense of liberation, a desire to destroy something.

However, this energy that had transformed after penetrating the essence, energy, and spirit.

Somehow, it did not feel unfamiliar.

The darkness and chaos that seemed to suck him into an abyss felt as though they originated from himself.

“Demonic energy... Not bad. Then, shall we call this Demonic Qi?”

“Demonic Qi? Ha! You speak as if you’re some kind of sect leader.”

“Who knows? More importantly, it’s intriguing. Those eyes of yours.”

“...”

“Can you see my energy with those eyes?”

Mok Gyeong-un, who had opened his Ghost Eye, could clearly discern.

Na Yul-ryang’s right eye, from which a silver light flowed, was certainly extraordinary.

However, Mok Gyeong-un’s words became the trigger.

As soon as the question ended,

-Whoosh!

Na Yul-ryang’s figure swiftly charged towards Mok Gyeong-un.

Before forcibly achieving the Three Yin Convergence, Mok Gyeong-un had struggled to grasp Na Yul-ryang's movements.

But now that he had accomplished it,

‘I can see.’

He could finally perceive Na Yul-ryang's movements.

As Mok Gyeong-un extended his hand, the Wicked Blade that had fallen to the ground was drawn into his palm.

-Whoosh!

Black strong energy surged from the Wicked Blade.

Simultaneously, Mok Gyeong-un swung his sword diagonally upward.

-Clang!

At that moment, sparks erupted as the blue sword energy collided with the black strong energy of the Wicked Blade.

-Skid!

At the same time, Mok Gyeong-un's figure was pushed back by about two steps.

Although he could grasp Na Yul-ryang's movements, Na Yul-ryang still held the upper hand in terms of martial power.

Having forcibly broken through the threshold without enlightenment, Mok Gyeong-un was still inferior to Na Yul-ryang in martial power.

However, Na Yul-ryang's expression was not particularly pleased.

‘He has become capable of properly perceiving my movements.’

Although he could still claim superiority as Mok Gyeong-un had just broken through his threshold, the fact that someone who had merely been at the pinnacle of Peak Realm had entered the same realm as himself in an instant was significant.

The realm of Transformation.

This was not something that could be ignored and brushed aside.

‘This won't do.’

He had to kill Mok Gyeong-un on the spot to prevent future troubles.

Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, who had elevated Mok Gyeong-un from a future headache to a dangerous individual who must be eliminated, no longer held back his energy and unleashed his martial power to the extreme.

-Rumble!

As Na Yul-ryang raised his energy, the grains of sand on the ground began to tremble and heave.

“Abandon any thoughts of returning alive.”

“Will that be easy?”

-Rumble!

In response, Mok Gyeong-un also raised his martial power to the extreme.

Having just broken through his threshold, his energy had not yet stabilized, but if he did not match Na Yul-ryang's momentum, he would be cut down by the overwhelming force.

-Clang! Clang!

Na Yul-ryang's eyes narrowed as he clashed sword energy with Mok Gyeong-un.

He was clearly superior in martial power.

However, as his sword energy made contact with Mok Gyeong-un's, a phenomenon of gradual dispersion began to occur.

It seemed to be due to the destructive nature of this energy.

As a result, Mok Gyeong-un did not easily yield, drawing upon more true energy to prevent his energy from scattering.

‘Bothersome.’

Realizing that a clash of martial power would not suffice, Na Yul-ryang stomped his foot on the ground.

-Thud! Crack!

At that moment, the ground beneath Mok Gyeong-un's feet shattered, causing his figure to waver.

Not missing this opportunity,

-Clang!

Na Yul-ryang deflected the clashing strong energy with his sword strike and aimed for Mok Gyeong-un's left shoulder.

However,

-Gasp!

A sharp murderous intent was sensed from behind.

‘Oh no.’

Na Yul-ryang kicked off the ground and twisted his body, enveloping himself with strong energy.

-Whoosh!

As he rotated his body, the strong energy formed a whirlwind, scattering sharp murderous intent in all directions.

-Clang clang clang clang clang!

-His senses are keen.

-Clang clang clang clang!

Cheong-ryeong, who had attempted to target Na Yul-ryang's back in an instant, blocked the flying strong energy with her pipe.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un also stabilized his wavering figure and deflected Na Yul-ryang's strong energy, seeking an opening to exploit.

There were no gaps in this technique of enveloping oneself with strong energy.

-He's still stronger than you. We need to cooperate. I will obstruct his movements, so...

Before Cheong-ryeong could finish her words, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head.

-What?

What was this fellow thinking?

If they did not kill Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang on the spot, they would create the worst enemy within the Heaven and Earth Society.

Forcibly breaking through the threshold was indeed a miraculous feat, but the opponent was already a supreme master who had reached the Transformation Realm, so Mok Gyeong-un's chances of victory alone were still low.

-It's still too risky...

-I have spare puppet figures, so hide yourself.

-What?

-I sensed a vast curse power from that direction.

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Cheong-ryeong's eyes flickered with surprise.

She had thought he wouldn't be able to pay attention to anything else while focused on the person, but had the fellow also detected it?

In fact, Cheong-ryeong had also sensed the curse power.

Curse power could be considered the foundation of sorcery and magic.

The moment Cheong-ryeong fully unleashed her power as a vengeful spirit, known as spiritual power, a wave of vast curse power had surged.

It likely meant that an exceptional diviner had noticed her presence.

It wouldn't be long before the diviner tracked down her location.

However, Cheong-ryeong was willing to take that risk to assist Mok Gyeong-un.

-No. Then you'll be in danger, mortal...

-I'm fine now. You know what it means if the diviner here has noticed, right?

-...

At Mok Gyeong-un's telepathic message, she fell silent.

What was this fellow thinking?

Even if he had broken through his threshold, he would still be at a disadvantage in terms of martial prowess.

-Whoosh!

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong and Mok Gyeong-un simultaneously glanced at a certain direction.

Just now, the vast curse power had spread throughout the entire inner city.

It meant that the pursuit had begun.

-Hurry.

-You...

-Do you want to ruin everything?

After a moment of hesitation, Cheong-ryeong finally spoke.

-...If you sense danger, immediately flee to the poison-wielding elder.

With the current gap, she believed he could escape to that distance.

With those words, Cheong-ryeong merged into Mok Gyeong-un's body.

-Swish!

At that moment, Na Yul-ryang, who had been indiscriminately scattering strong energy while rotating, stopped.

Then, he steadied his breathing and surveyed the surroundings with his right eye.

‘Where?’

Where had that existence, taking the form of Wi So-yeon, gone?

It was impossible for her to escape his Penetrating Eye, yet she was nowhere to be seen.

Na Yul-ryang glared at Mok Gyeong-un and spoke.

“Where did that woman go?”

In response to that question, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and replied.

“What are you talking about?”

“The youngest disciple, no... That strange existence taking the form of the youngest disciple.”

“I have no idea what you’re saying. Who are you referring to?”

“What?”

Na Yul-ryang scoffed in disbelief.

They had been engaging in battle until now, so what nonsense was he spouting?

“Do you take this young master for a fool? She was clearly in front of you and suddenly disappeared. Do you think I wouldn’t have noticed even while rapidly rotating?”

The issue was that at the moment of her disappearance, her energy had also vanished completely.

Even with his Penetrating Eye, he couldn't locate her, so Na Yul-ryang was on guard in all directions.

He didn't know when or where she might appear.

Facing such a Na Yul-ryang, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said.

“Perhaps you're seeing things.”

“...”

Na Yul-ryang's expression turned frigid.

After staring intently at Mok Gyeong-un, Na Yul-ryang tilted his neck to the side and stretched his muscles.

-Crack! Crack!

“It seems you're misunderstanding something.”

“Misunderstanding?”

“Yes. You've merely gained the qualification to face this young master. Don't mistake that for becoming equal.”

-Swish!

As soon as those words ended, Na Yul-ryang's figure scattered like smoke.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un swung the Wicked Blade upward.

-Clang!

Sparks erupted as the black strong energy collided with the blue sword energy.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un twisted his body to the side and slashed the Wicked Blade towards the air once more.

Something seemed to appear and disappear like it was dissipating.

-Swish! Swish!

Afterimages were left intermittently, and each time, Mok Gyeong-un's Wicked Blade slashed at them.

This phenomenon of continuously leaving faint afterimages was none other than the Shifting Form and Changing Position technique.

Na Yul-ryang was currently employing an ultra-high-speed lightness skill, rendering his figure invisible except for the moment of attack.

Of course,

-Swish swish swish!

Mok Gyeong-un's pupils were rapidly trembling.

In those eyes, Na Yul-ryang's shadow was imprinted in each fleeting moment.

He was capturing the instantaneous movements.

However, since he couldn't match that level of speed with his lightness skill, he could only respond to the brief moments when Na Yul-ryang attacked.

‘A single mistake, a single error, and your life will end.’

Na Yul-ryang relentlessly pressured Mok Gyeong-un.

Each sword strike that accompanied his ultra-high-speed movement was a fatal technique.

Having just broken through his threshold and entered the same realm as Na Yul-ryang, Mok Gyeong-un had not yet fully embodied his own abilities.

That clumsiness would lead to his own...

-Swish!

It was at that moment.

Mok Gyeong-un moved his foot.

He was trying to disrupt the flow, but he would never allow...

-Clang!

At that instant, Mok Gyeong-un's figure followed behind Na Yul-ryang's back, and black strong energy aimed for his chest.

Na Yul-ryang lightly blocked it and resumed his ultra-high-speed movement.

-Tap tap tap tap tap!

At the speed an ordinary person would take one step, he took nearly twenty steps.

Those steps were graceful and swift, like flowing water.

However,

-Tap tap tap tap tap!

‘!?’

One of Na Yul-ryang’s eyebrows raised.

He had considered it a momentary coincidence, but before he knew it, Mok Gyeong-un was once again attempting to follow his movements.

Moreover, the footsteps he left behind...

‘Clear and Manifest Water Crossing Steps?’

He was imitating Na Yul-ryang’s own lightness skill, the Clear and Manifest Water Crossing Steps.

The Clear and Manifest Water Crossing Steps, which enabled the most ideal ultra-high-speed movement at close range, was not a technique passed down by the Society Leader but a secret of Na Yul-ryang’s own family, the Na clan.

Na Yul-ryang was dumbfounded for a moment.

He, too, could analyze the opponent’s martial arts within a short time using his cold-hearted mind and insight, adapting his own martial arts accordingly.

However, this person was taking a different approach.

‘You dare try to steal this young master’s technique in the midst of our duel?’

It was utterly absurd.

He had never encountered someone like this before.

Not only had he met someone similar to himself for the first time, but that person’s talent might even surpass his own.

‘This won’t do.’

Na Yul-ryang’s eyes glinted with strong killing intent.

He was already using his full power, but he had not yet employed the three secret techniques of the Heavenly Sword.

Even though Mok Gyeong-un had entered the same realm, Na Yul-ryang still did not consider him an opponent worthy of using those techniques.

However, his thoughts had now changed.

He had to quickly kill the person, even if it meant using the secret techniques...

-Gasp!

At the intense energy felt in close proximity, Na Yul-ryang stopped his lightness skill.

The same went for Mok Gyeong-un.

Their gazes simultaneously turned towards the figure who had approached them.

It was none other than...

“Poison King?”

The Poison King, Baek Sa-ha.

“Eldest Young Master.”

“This is... quite unexpected.”

The reason for Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s remark was simple.

It was due to Baek Sa-ha’s appearance, which had become noticeably younger compared to before.

Moreover, the energy of Baek Sa-ha, visible through his Penetrating Eye, had grown incomparably stronger than before.

“You have broken through your threshold.”

In response to his words, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha scoffed and said, “Eldest Young Master... May I ask what you were doing with my disciple?”

“...”

It was a straightforward question.

It was a kind of warning, asked despite already knowing the answer. Instead of answering, Na Yul-ryang looked at Mok Gyeong-un with a hint of regret.

Then, he chuckled and said, "You're fortunate."

At his words, Baek Sa-ha inwardly clicked his tongue.

Even though he had appeared here and revealed that Mok Gyeong-un was his disciple, Na Yul-ryang still boldly refused to extinguish his hostility and killing intent.

He was truly an arrogant individual, both then and now.

This was one of the reasons why Baek Sa-ha did not support him.

-Swish!

The blue strong energy that had enveloped Na Yul-ryang's finger dissipated.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un also released his strong energy.

'Hmm.'

Doubt crept into Baek Sa-ha's eyes as he observed this.

Why was the color of the strong energy enveloping Mok Gyeong-un's sword such a dark hue?

Moreover, the power within the strong energy seemed extraordinary.

‘Just what happened here?’

He couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

With Mok Gyeong-un’s level of martial prowess, he should not have been able to confront Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.

However, judging from the traces of aftermath in the surroundings and a glance from afar, it seemed they had been fighting on almost equal footing.

What on earth is going on?

In that moment of perplexity, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang spoke to Baek Sa-ha.

“Poison King. Congratulations on achieving a breakthrough. Then, this young master shall take his leave.”

With those words, Na Yul-ryang attempted to depart without hesitation. Seeing this, Baek Sa-ha felt a sense of relief in that fleeting moment.

-Whoosh!

At that instant, Na Yul-ryang, who had been about to turn around, suddenly and unexpectedly thrust his finger towards Mok Gyeong-un’s chest.

Mok Gyeong-un hastily grabbed his wrist, but it had already penetrated nearly two joints deep.

-Stab!

“Eldest Young Master!”

Baek Sa-ha shouted, his voice laced with anger.

In response, Na Yul-ryang smiled contentedly and said, “Did you think I would spare this bastard’s life and simply leave?”

With his finger pierced into Mok Gyeong-un’s chest, the situation was already over.

If his finger were to penetrate just an inch further, it would reach the heart.

In any case, Na Yul-ryang held a significant advantage in martial power, so grabbing his wrist was futile.

However,

‘This bastard?’

Mok Gyeong-un was grinning, his smile stretching from ear to ear in an eerie manner.

He was smiling even though his life was hanging by a thread?

“Have you gone mad...”

“Thank you for allowing yourself to be caught.”

“What?”

It was at that very moment.

-Snap!

Na Yul-ryang's wrist was twisted and broken.

‘!?’

Chapter 158 – Coercion (4)

-Snap!

“Ugh.”

Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang's wrist was twisted and broken.

Na Yul-ryang frantically tried to shake off his broken wrist.

However,

-Crack!

‘This fiend?’

He couldn't move his wrist at all.

It was the same even when he raised his right hand's martial power to the tenth level.

Mok Gyeong-un said to him,

“What's wrong? Is it difficult to pull out your hand?”

‘!?’

Na Yul-ryang’s eyes sharpened.

Although the pain from his broken wrist bone should have been agonizing, Na Yul-ryang instead glared at Mok Gyeong-un with a look of disbelief.

The person’s martial power was below his own, so there was no way he could break his wrist.

However, a strange phenomenon occurred.

Suddenly, the person’s martial power surged to twice its previous level.

Wondering what was going on, Na Yul-ryang noticed that the veins on Mok Gyeong-un’s right hand, which was grasping his wrist, had become bulging, black, and grotesque.

‘What is this?’

Na Yul-ryang could see through his Penetrating Eye.

Mok Gyeong-un’s right hand had an eerily surging energy.

This was not a normal form of power.

‘This person has learned a bizarre technique.’

How he learned it was not important.

What mattered was that Mok Gyeong-un’s martial power had surpassed his own, limited to his right hand.

At this,

-Whoosh!

Na Yul-ryang raised his left hand's finger, generating a blue sword energy.

He then attempted to behead Mok Gyeong-un in a single stroke.

This person must be killed on the spot, or he would be far too dangerous.

-Swish! Clang!

However, at that moment, Na Yul-ryang's sword energy was stopped before it could even touch Mok Gyeong-un's neck.

The one who blocked it was none other than,

“Poison King!”

The Poison King, Baek Sa-ha.

Without using poison, he had created strong energy with his hand and blocked Na Yul-ryang's sword energy in an instant.

Baek Sa-ha said to Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang,

“You intend to kill my disciple right in front of me?”

“...”

At Baek Sa-ha's words, Na Yul-ryang's gaze turned frigid.

That person, his disciple, had broken his wrist and was still grasping it, yet Baek Sa-ha was trying to protect him?

At this, Na Yul-ryang warned in a low voice,

“Are you willing to make an enemy of this young master for the sake of a mere disciple? Will that truly benefit the Baek Clan?”

“...Are you threatening me now?”

Faced with Na Yul-ryang's forceful words, anger seeped into the Poison King Baek Sa-ha's voice as well.

No matter how close Na Yul-ryang was to being the Society Leader's successor, Baek Sa-ha was one of the Five Kings, a high-ranking executive of the Heaven and Earth Society.

In terms of position, he could even be considered above Na Yul-ryang.

No matter how arrogant Na Yul-ryang was, to provoke him in such a manner?

“I now clearly understand how you view me and the Baek Clan. Then, let me warn you as well. If you do not immediately withdraw, I will do my utmost to prevent you from becoming the successor.”

“What?”

The expression of Na Yul-ryang, who was receiving a warning in return, grew even more ferocious.

All his attention was focused on somehow killing Mok Gyeong-un, yet this old man kept interfering, fueling his anger even further.

“Did I not say it? If you do not step back, I will ensure to obstruct you from becoming the successor.”

“Poison King!”

-Rumble!

As Na Yul-ryang’s voice rose, his aura surged menacingly.

The wind swirled, causing his clothes to flutter.

Likewise, as if unwilling to be outdone in terms of aura, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha began releasing a poisonous energy from his entire body.

-Rumble!

A purple poisonous energy rose, exuding an ominous aura.

His poisonous energy, having become a complete Poison Master after reaching the 8th stage of the Wave Demon Poison Scripture, was incomparable to before.

As Baek Sa-ha took a step forward,

-Sizzle!

Part of the ground was being corroded.

In an instant, the atmosphere intensified.

It would not be surprising if the two were to engage in a life-and-death battle at any moment.

However, that would signify a complete confrontation between them, so Baek Sa-ha was cautious, and in Na Yul-ryang's case, with one of his wrists grasped by Mok Gyeong-un, neither of them made the first move.

It was at that precise moment.

-Shudder!

An immense killing intent surged.

As if the sudden killing intent was a signal flare, Na Yul-ryang and Baek Sa-ha reflexively separated their clashing hands and unleashed lethal techniques towards each other.

-Clang clang clang!

In an instant, their hands collided about four times at close range.

It was a simplified exchange of techniques.

-Sizzle! Whoosh!

As the poisonous energy and murderous intent clashed, the surrounding ground corroded and cracked.

However, their confrontation did not continue from there.

The reason being,

‘This bastard?’

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been grasping Na Yul-ryang’s wrist, pulled his body into an embrace while still holding his wrist.

Na Yul-ryang was momentarily dumbfounded.

To engage in such antics at this critical moment, had this bastard gone mad?

“Let go immediately!”

“I can’t do that. Master! Please grab Eldest Young Master’s left hand.”

“What?”

-Grab!

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Baek Sa-ha reflexively grabbed Na Yul-ryang’s left hand, with which he had been exchanging techniques.

As a result, Na Yul-ryang was unable to move either his right or left hand.

Na Yul-ryang clicked his tongue in disbelief.

“These bastards, seriously!”

Na Yul-ryang drew upon the energy from his entire body and released sharp murderous intent through his skin.

-Swish swish swish swish swish swish!

For a supreme master of the sword like him, his entire body was akin to a sharp weapon.

However, even as this sharp murderous intent pierced his body, Mok Gyeong-un remained motionless and instead embraced Na Yul-ryang even tighter.

-Crack!

‘This person’s left hand’s energy?’

Na Yul-ryang furrowed his brows.

The energy in Mok Gyeong-un’s left hand, which was wrapped around his waist, was extraordinary.

From this, Na Yul-ryang could discern.

‘It’s not limited to one hand?’

It seemed Mok Gyeong-un could unleash that strange technique with both hands.

As Mok Gyeong-un applied more force to his left hand encircling Na Yul-ryang’s waist, he felt his upper body being compressed.

At this, Na Yul-ryang’s eyes completely lost their sanity.

“You son of a bitch!”

Already filled with madness, his anger reached its peak, and he tilted his head to the side and headbutted Mok Gyeong-un, who was embracing him, with the force of his tenth-level martial power.

-Bang! Crack!

“Ugh.”

Mok Gyeong-un's head was thrown back from the headbutt.

Not missing this opportunity, Na Yul-ryang headbutted him again.

-Bang!

“Ack!”

Blood spurted from Mok Gyeong-un's forehead where he was headbutted.

Na Yul-ryang let out a crazed laugh and headbutted the bleeding Mok Gyeong-un once more.

“Ha ha ha! Try keeping your hold now.”

-Bang! Bang! Bang!

After about three headbutts, at that moment, veins bulged on Mok Gyeong-un's forehead, turning black.

Then, just like Na Yul-ryang, Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head back and headbutted him.

-Crack!

“Ugh!”

“Oof!”

The heads of the two, who had headbutted each other simultaneously, were thrown back.

The force was enough to send them flying apart, but they didn’t separate as Mok Gyeong-un held Na Yul-ryang tightly.

However, both their faces were covered in blood, to the point of making one frown.

“Ha...”

That was Baek Sa-ha’s current expression.

Although he had helped Mok Gyeong-un upon his request, this could hardly be considered a martial arts confrontation.

He had no idea how things had turned out this way.

As he was thinking that, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang, his face distorted, opened his eyes and displayed a crazed look.

“I’ll kill you!”

It seemed he would only be satisfied by killing Mok Gyeong-un on the spot for dragging him into this dog fight.

At this, Na Yul-ryang unleashed the technique of the Golden Silkworm and unexpectedly freed his left hand, which had been grasped by Baek Sa-ha.

-Bang!

“What?”

But it was at that very moment.

‘!?’

-Sizzle sizzle sizzle sizzle!

The parts of his body in contact with the person felt like they were burning in pain.

The reason was the crimson poisonous energy rising from Mok Gyeong-un’s entire body as he embraced Na Yul-ryang.

Na Yul-ryang’s expression contorted at the materialized crimson poisonous energy.

This was none other than,

“Poison Master?”

Releasing poisonous energy from one’s entire body was something only possible for those who had reached the realm of a Poison Master.

‘No way?’

Even the Poison King Baek Sa-ha couldn’t hide his shock upon witnessing this scene.

He had surmised that Mok Gyeong-un’s martial prowess had increased at an alarming rate, but it was still unbelievable.

He had not yet properly taught Mok Gyeong-un the Wave Demon Poison Scripture.

He had merely shown him the secret art once.

Yet now, Mok Gyeong-un was displaying the Poison Master Body, which could only be unleashed upon reaching the 8th stage of the Wave Demon Poison Scripture.

‘How can this be?’

How was this possible for someone who had only seen the secret art of the Wave Demon Poison Scripture once?

Then, could it be that he had...?

‘Broken through his threshold?’

In an instant, goosebumps rose all over the Poison King Baek Sa-ha’s body.

He was not easily surprised by most things, but this was something he couldn’t help but be shocked by.

Was this truly possible?

It was at that moment.

-Sizzle!

“Aaaaargh!”

For the first time, a scream of pain erupted from Na Yul-ryang’s mouth.

Even for an expert of the Transformation Realm like him, it was impossible to block all the penetrating poisons while being embraced by someone who had become a Poison Master, releasing poisonous energy from their entire body.

That was the terror of a Poison Master, who themselves became poison.

With a mere touch, they become a lethal venomous hand.

“Aaargh!”

Enduring this immense pain, Na Yul-ryang raised his sword energy on the finger of his left hand, which he had freed using the Golden Silkworm technique.

-Whoosh!

‘You... son... of... a... bitch...’

Then, he attempted to pierce Mok Gyeong-un’s left ear and penetrate his head as Mok Gyeong-un tightly embraced him.

However, at that moment,

-Smack!

Someone forcefully struck the back of Na Yul-ryang’s head.

It was none other than the Poison King Baek Sa-ha.

No matter how much of a Transformation Realm expert Na Yul-ryang was, he couldn't help but have his mind go blank and his inner energy disrupted by this unexpected blow.

Not missing this chance, Baek Sa-ha sealed his acupoints.

-Tap tap tap tap!

With his acupoints sealed, Na Yul-ryang's head drooped.

At this, Baek Sa-ha hurriedly dissuaded Mok Gyeong-un.

"Enough! Stop it!"

In response to his words, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head and said,

"We must kill him."

"I don't know what happened, but if we kill Eldest Young Master now, we will die by the Society Leader's hand. Are you fine with that?"

"..."

-Swish swish swish swish!

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been hesitating for a moment, released his Poison Master Body.

Then, he removed his arms from Na Yul-ryang's body, which he had been embracing.

-Thud!

The unconscious Na Yul-ryang collapsed to the ground limply.

After glancing at the fallen Na Yul-ryang, Mok Gyeong-un turned his gaze towards Baek Sa-ha and said,

“It’s troublesome, but Eldest Young Master is better as an enemy than the Society Leader.”

“Oh my.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha clicked his tongue.

It seemed he had not properly seen this fellow’s true nature.

Baek Sa-ha took something out from his bosom.

It was a red cloth bundle.

Inside the cloth was a golden elixir pill with a faint fragrance.

“What is that?”

“Poison Avoidance Bead.”

“Poison Avoidance Bead?”

“It’s a Poison Avoidance Bead made for consumption, capable of detoxifying most poisons.”

“Most poisons?”

“Yes.”

The Poison Avoidance Bead was an elixir pill with the highest efficacy in detoxification.

Just the ingredients alone cost a thousand gold pieces, and it was so precious that even the Baek Clan only had a few, as it took more than a decade to manufacture.

However, now was not the time to be stingy with it.

If Eldest Young Master were to die, they would make an enemy of the Society Leader.

-Grip!

After crushing the Poison Avoidance Bead, Baek Sa-ha mixed it with other medicinal substances from his waist, opened Na Yul-ryang's mouth, and pushed it down his throat.

‘I don't know how it turned out this way.’

Just a quarter of an hour ago, he had achieved a breakthrough and was savoring the utmost joy.

But now, he was utterly confused.

Both Mok Gyeong-un's rapid advancement in martial arts and these two trying to harm each other.

As he was thinking that, Mok Gyeong-un suddenly approached.

“Why are you doing this?”

“I apologize, but even if we don’t kill him, I think I should take this.”

“What?”

Before he could finish, Mok Gyeong-un plunged his index finger deep into Na Yul-ryang’s right eye, whose acupoints had been sealed, rendering him unconscious.

Then, with his finger,

-Squish!

He gouged out Na Yul-ryang’s right eyeball and pulled it out.

‘!!!!!!!!!!’

Shocked by Mok Gyeong-un’s sudden action, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha was momentarily at a loss for words.

Mok Gyeong-un showed the extracted eyeball to him and said with an eerie smile on his blood-covered face,

“This is a bit troublesome, you see.”

Chapter 159 – Choice (1)

Mok Gyeong-un, smiling eerily while holding up Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s eyeball.

For a moment, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha, at a loss for words, hurriedly applied pressure to stop the bleeding from Na Yul-ryang’s right eye socket and urged Mok Gyeong-un.

“What are you doing?”

Baek Sa-ha was genuinely dumbfounded.

It wasn't as if he had mistaken the warning not to kill Na Yul-ryang as permission to do anything else. He couldn't comprehend what Mok Gyeong-un was thinking.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smile,

“It's as I said. This is a bit troublesome, you see.”

“Troublesome?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Baek Sa-ha suddenly recalled what Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak had said a few years ago.

[Elder Baek. Have you ever sparred with Eldest Young Master?]

[Eldest Young Master, you say? No. I haven't. I heard his martial prowess has progressed rapidly recently?]

[Yes. So, I sparred with him and was amazed. It's hard to compare to how he was before.]

[Oh. To that extent?]

[Yes. But not only his martial prowess, he also had a peculiar eye.]

[A peculiar eye?]

[Yes. One of his eyes glowed silver, and he was able to read my techniques more easily.]

[Read your techniques with ease? Are you saying his eye possesses a unique power?]

[That's what I think. Of course, Eldest Young Master himself wouldn't reveal it.]

Thunderbolt Fist King Won Byeong-hak was Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang's teacher in Bare-Hand, Bare-Fist.

He was the one Na Yul-ryang had requested teachings from as a benefit of obtaining the three Tokens of the Corpse Blood Valley.

Thus, among the Five Kings, he was also the one who knew Na Yul-ryang the best.

At this, Baek Sa-ha clicked his tongue and said,

“I vaguely recall hearing about Eldest Young Master's eye, but if it's truly a special eye, he'll be even more desperate to kill you for being unable to do so.”

“It doesn't matter. We've already become enemies anyway.”

Mok Gyeong-un could tell because he sensed an affinity with Na Yul-ryang.

The moment he woke up, Na Yul-ryang would do everything in his power to kill Mok Gyeong-un, no matter the means.

He would probably stop at nothing.

‘What a pity.’

It would be better to kill him now for the sake of the future.

However, as Baek Sa-ha said, if he were to kill the Society Leader's disciple, he would immediately become enemies with the Society Leader.

There were things he needed to find out from the Society Leader, so he couldn't kill Na Yul-ryang right away.

Therefore, it was better to weaken Na Yul-ryang's power as much as possible.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un suddenly had a thought.

-Cheong-ryeong.

-Speak.

-What if Cheong-ryeong takes possession of this person's body?

Upon reflection, it seemed like killing two birds with one stone if Cheong-ryeong possessed Na Yul-ryang's body.

He wasn't just anyone, but the Society Leader's first disciple, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.

If they could control him, they could approach the Society Leader and also eliminate the troublesome enemy that was Na Yul-ryang in one fell swoop.

However, Cheong-ryeong said something unexpected.

-It's impossible.

-What?

-Didn't I say it's impossible?

-Why is that?

-When one breaks through their threshold and reaches the Transformation Realm through enlightenment, the energy within their body penetrates the essence, energy, and spirit, making not only their physical body but also their soul more resilient, rendering possession impossible.

-...Have you tried it before?

-Do you think I haven't?

Judging from Cheong-ryeong's tone, it seemed she had attempted it at least once.

In that case, the plan to possess and control Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang was out of the question.

It was regrettable, but there was no other choice.

As he was thinking that, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha stood up and said,

"I don't know what happened, but you've crossed a point of no return. To think you've made an enemy of Eldest Young Master, of all people."

Baek Sa-ha shook his head.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un bowed his head in courtesy and said,

"I apologize. Because of me, even you, Master, have been put in a difficult position."

“Difficult? Yes. If it’s difficult, then it’s difficult. But what can we do about what has already occurred? I will never abandon my own.”

At his words, a glimmer of surprise flashed in Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes.

The opponent was none other than the Society Leader’s first disciple, Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.

Putting aside his madness and cruelty, his supporters alone accounted for 40% of the Heaven and Earth Society.

He had truly made the greatest enemy.

Looking at it objectively, if Baek Sa-ha had not helped him just now and had expelled him on the spot, there would have been no need to become enemies with Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.

Moreover, even now, these words were unexpected.

‘Not abandoning his own...’

Contrary to appearances, Baek Sa-ha seemed to place great importance on loyalty.

Did he consider Mok Gyeong-un, whom he had taken as a disciple, as his own as well?

As he was puzzled, Baek Sa-ha said,

“Phew. We don’t have much time, so let’s quickly sort things out.”

“Sort things out?”

“Yes. I will ask you exactly three things. If you trust this master, answer them.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un nodded and replied,

“...I understand.”

Mok Gyeong-un didn't trust anyone.

However, since Baek Sa-ha had opposed Na Yul-ryang for his sake, it was no exaggeration to say that they were now in the same boat.

In that case, it was appropriate to share information to a certain extent and bring Baek Sa-ha to his side.

At that moment, Baek Sa-ha asked,

“How did you end up fighting with Eldest Young Master?”

“Eldest Young Master attacked me first.”

“What? Eldest Young Master attacked you first? For what reason?”

Although Eldest Young Master had aspects that differed from others, he was known to be a fairly rational person.

Why would such a person suddenly attack Mok Gyeong-un first?

“Who knows? I don't know either.”

“...Do you expect this master to believe that?”

“It’s the truth. I have a guess, but...”

“A guess? Tell me.”

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and replied,

“It seemed like he was wary of me.”

“Wary?”

At this, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha frowned and retorted.

Then, he alternated his gaze between Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang and Mok Gyeong-un’s faces, and soon stroked his beard, letting out a groan.

“Hmm.”

In fact, he understood to some extent.

Hadn’t he himself been surprised upon witnessing Mok Gyeong-un’s current martial prowess?

Just a quarter of an hour ago, Mok Gyeong-un had been at the Peak Realm, but now he had broken through his threshold and reached the Transformation Realm.

No matter how he thought about it, this was almost impossible by common sense.

How long had it taken even Baek Sa-ha to break through his threshold?

Despite nearly decades of cultivation, he had only just managed to break through.

Yet Mok Gyeong-un, who was merely 17 years old, had accomplished this.

In the current martial arts world, he had entered the realm of supreme masters at the youngest possible age.

‘Ah!’

Come to think of it, it was Mok Gyeong-un who had given him the catalyst for enlightenment.

Then, could it be that he had already reached the Transformation Realm?

At this, Baek Sa-ha asked,

“When did you break through your threshold?”

“Not long ago.”

“May I ask exactly when?”

“During my fight with Eldest Young Master.”

‘!!!!!!!’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Baek Sa-ha’s jaw unknowingly dropped for a moment.

His assumption that Mok Gyeong-un had already broken through his threshold was wrong.

Then, did he mean that he had gained enlightenment while fighting an opponent stronger than himself?

“Ha...”

He could only express his astonishment, as it was too absurd.

Was this child born under the heavenly fortune?

No, even the term “heavenly fortune” was insufficient.

Without innate talent, it was impossible to gain enlightenment while fighting against others.

Baek Sa-ha suppressed his excitement and soon asked,

“...This is related to my second question. How did you master the Wave Demon Poison Scripture?”

He was already immensely curious about this as well.

He had merely shown Mok Gyeong-un the secret art once.

The purpose was to let Mok Gyeong-un know the excellence and greatness of the Wave Demon Poison Scripture.

At his question, Mok Gyeong-un pondered for a moment.

‘Hmm.’

Normally, he would have concealed this talent, but Baek Sa-ha had already witnessed everything.

There was no way to hide it anyway.

Left with no choice, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly replied,

“I learned it after seeing it once.”

“...What?”

Baek Sa-ha’s expression stiffened.

He had only shown the secret art once, yet Mok Gyeong-un claimed to have learned it by observing it?

For a moment, Baek Sa-ha’s mind became complicated.

For someone who had cultivated martial arts for such a long time, they could quickly understand the principles of any martial art they encountered to a certain extent.

However, it was a different matter to say that one could master a martial art after seeing it only once.

Martial arts did not consist of just techniques.

As one progressed to higher levels of martial arts, it was impossible to completely master them without comprehending the intent or meaning behind each technique.

Baek Sa-ha calmed himself and asked,

“Do you truly mean that you mastered it after seeing it just once?”

“It’s difficult to do so just by reading. While looking at the secret art, I read the traces of intent in the handwriting as mental images and stored them in my mind.”

“Mental images? Oh my...”

Baek Sa-ha let out an exclamation.

Was this fellow, who was only 17 years old, capable of even visualizing mental images?

It was truly astonishing.

Even Baek Sa-ha himself had only become able to visualize traces of intent in his mind upon reaching the peak of the Peak Realm, yet this young fellow could do it?

‘...This is truly a monster.’

Baek Sa-ha had no choice but to acknowledge it.

This child was in a realm that ordinary people could never hope to reach.

It was a realm that could truly be called that of a genius.

Baek Sa-ha glanced at Na Yul-ryang.

‘I understand now.’

He could see why Na Yul-ryang had been so wary of Mok Gyeong-un.

An awl that was sharp would poke out of its handle.

This child’s talent was exactly like that.

He possessed a monstrous aptitude for comprehending secret arts after a single reading and an absurd martial prowess that allowed him to gain enlightenment and break through his threshold while fighting.

It was enough to instill fear, no, even a sense of awe.

‘Perhaps I am witnessing the birth of a monster that will never be seen again in martial arts history.’

With such monstrous progress, perhaps within twenty years, Mok Gyeong-un would reach the realm of the Six Heavens, considered the pinnacle of the martial arts world.

As his thoughts reached this point, Baek Sa-ha couldn’t contain his excitement.

“Keke.”

Even his hands and feet were trembling without him realizing it.

If he had encountered Mok Gyeong-un as an enemy, he would have had to kill him due to his talent, but that was not the case for Baek Sa-ha.

Hadn’t he accepted this fellow as his disciple?

It felt like fortune was piling up as a double blessing in his later years.

‘Following me, there are now two individuals who will make the Wave Demon Poison Scripture prosper. There’s no longer a need to worry about the successor of the main family.’

He had been content with just accepting Mok Gyeong-un as his disciple.

But now, he truly wanted to make Mok Gyeong-un a member of the Baek Clan.

Since Mok Gyeong-un had already turned his back on the righteous factions and his family, there would be no issue in making him an adopted son of the Baek Clan.

‘This fellow is a treasure. The greatest treasure.’

He was so overjoyed that he felt like shouting out loud right away.

However, now was not the time.

They were still faced with a problem that needed to be resolved.

“Kekeke. Good. This master’s curiosity has been satisfied. Now, for the final question.”

“You have many questions, it seems.”

“Of course, there are many. Now, you and this master are in the same boat. Don’t we need to rely on each other to overcome this crisis?”

“...Crisis.”

It could indeed be considered a crisis.

After all, they had made a troublesome enemy.

“What this master wants to ask is simple. What will you do now?”

“What will I do, you ask?”

“Yes. Now that we have made an enemy of Eldest Young Master, there is only one path we can take.”

‘One path?’

It seemed he had something in mind.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un asked,

“Do you have something in mind, Master?”

“Is there even a need to think about it? If Eldest Young Master becomes the successor, both you and our Baek Clan will be in a precarious position.”

“...Well, that’s true.”

“Then, what should we do?”

“We should ensure that someone other than Eldest Young Master becomes the successor.”

-Snap!

Baek Sa-ha snapped his fingers and said,

“Exactly! That’s precisely what I want to say. We must support a different successor other than Eldest Young Master for us, master and disciple, to overcome this crisis and survive.”

“...”

“Originally, Eldest Young Master’s support base was so strong that the other two successors had virtually no chance, but now the situation has changed.”

“In what way?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha smirked and then said in a meaningful voice,

“Depending on your choice, the dynamics can shift.”

Chapter 160 – Choice (2)

“Originally, Eldest Young Master’s support base was so strong that the other two successors had virtually no chance, but now the situation has changed.”

“In what way?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha smirked and said in a meaningful voice,

“Depending on your choice, the dynamics can shift.”

“My... choice?”

“Yes. Your choice.”

Mok Gyeong-un’s choice.

That was the Poison King Baek Sa-ha’s judgment.

In fact, this judgment was not made lightly.

Mok Gyeong-un was the disciple of the Shadow Clan, which oversaw confidential matters and intelligence within the Heaven and Earth Society, and he was also the disciple of the Baek Clan, which specialized in poison and mass killing.

That alone placed him in a significantly important position.

“Within the Heaven and Earth Society, there are numerous martial arts families, sects, and factions. Each of these groups, when gathered together, can become a great force, but among them, there are particularly important groups that play crucial roles. Representative examples are our Baek Clan and the Shadow Clan, which handles confidential matters.”

The power of these two groups was extremely important for those vying for the position of successor, considering their future prospects.

That was why the second disciple, Jang Neung-ak, and the third disciple, Wi So-yeon, coveted Mok Gyeong-un.

As if recalling this, Mok Gyeong-un nodded.

“Moreover, an even greater variable of power has been born today.”

“A variable of power...”

“Keke, it’s none other than this master and you.”

Baek Sa-ha said with a triumphant expression, shrugging his shoulders.

Coincidentally, both Baek Sa-ha and Mok Gyeong-un had broken through their thresholds and reached the Transformation Realm.

Even within the Heaven and Earth Society, only a handful of individuals had reached this realm, and their power was no exaggeration to say it was on par with the scale of a small to medium-sized sect.

“With the power of this master and you, we can change the dynamics of this competitive landscape. Even with just the two of us, it’s sufficient. Kekeke.”

“Ah... I see.”

“Why is your reaction so lackluster? Do you lack confidence in the power you possess?”

Baek Sa-ha frowned and asked, dissatisfied with Mok Gyeong-un’s flat response.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head and replied,

“It’s not particularly that.”

“Then why do you seem so deflated?”

“I just think it’s meaningless if it’s not definite.”

“If it’s not definite? Don’t tell me you’re not satisfied even after breaking through your threshold?”

“It’s just a path that needs to be traversed anyway.”

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un answered nonchalantly.

At his words, Baek Sa-ha inwardly clicked his tongue.

Baek Sa-ha had broken through his threshold after a long time, so he felt no regrets.

Countless martial artists aspired to break through their thresholds and become supreme masters, but the reality was that many failed to surpass the first-rate level.

Yet this child was continuously looking upward.

Was his goal from the beginning different?

At this, Baek Sa-ha patted Mok Gyeong-un's shoulder and spoke in a solemn voice,

“Your words are correct. This master was about to be satisfied with a small achievement and fail to see the bigger picture. I was truly foolish as a cultivator of martial arts.”

‘Hmm?’

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes flickered with surprise at Baek Sa-ha's self-reflection.

Mok Gyeong-un had not meant it in that sense.

He simply believed that his current martial prowess was still insufficient, considering the various threads involving his targets of vengeance.

To Mok Gyeong-un, martial arts were merely a tool for revenge.

Of course, for Baek Sa-ha, who was unaware of this, Mok Gyeong-un's attitude seemed like the true stance of a martial artist.

-It seems that old man is misunderstanding something trivial.

Cheong-ryeong chuckled, finding this scene amusing.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and replied,

-Misunderstanding is one's own freedom.

-Well, that's true.

-By the way, Cheong-ryeong.

-What is it?

-Didn't we have a bet?

-What bet are you talking about?

-If I recall correctly, Cheong-ryeong clearly said that if I overcome the wall within three years, you would become my slave...

-Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

Cheong-ryeong screamed so loudly that it seemed like her ears would tear.

Mok Gyeong-un, who usually remained unfazed by most things, felt like his eardrums would fall out from the noise.

-Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

-...Are you going to keep doing this?

-Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

-I'll consider the bet void, so stop it. It's noisy.

-...

As soon as Mok Gyeong-un nullified the bet, Cheong-ryeong fell silent as if nothing had happened.

Mok Gyeong-un inwardly clicked his tongue at Cheong-ryeong's behavior.

On the other hand, Cheong-ryeong inwardly let out a sigh of relief.

She was already living a life as a spirit servant, no different from a slave, and if she had to treat this fellow like a true master on top of that, she would rather be completely annihilated.

‘This annoying brat.’

It was a bet that could never have been valid in the first place.

What kind of madman would reach the Transformation Realm within a mere two months of learning martial arts?

If he had reached the Transformation Realm through enlightenment, it would have been understandable, but he had even forcibly penetrated the essence, energy, and spirit by inferring the flow of energy.

He was truly a monstrous fellow.

Perhaps he was a variable in and of himself, created by the heavens.

At that moment, the Poison King Baek Sa-ha spoke,

“I apologize for getting carried away with excitement and engaging in idle chatter. Anyway, as you said, regardless of achievements or such matters, we still need to make a choice.”

“...”

“Given Eldest Young Master’s temperament, once he regains his senses, he will pressure you and this master in any way possible. His speed will be very swift.”

Mok Gyeong-un also agreed with this.

If Na Yul-ryang was similar to him, it would be no exaggeration to say that the war would begin the moment he opened his eyes.

In that case, as Baek Sa-ha said, they had no choice but to build a force that even Na Yul-ryang could not recklessly move against.

“Your words are correct, Master.”

“Then, will you choose Jang Neung-ak or Wi So-yeon? In this regard, I will fully follow your choice.”

In fact, the person Baek Sa-ha had in mind was the youngest disciple, Wi So-yeon.

The second disciple, Jang Neung-ak, had a treacherous side to him and was not a trustworthy figure.

However, the reason he gave Mok Gyeong-un the choice was that he believed the future leaders of the Heaven and Earth Society would be the younger generation of successors, not his own generation.

‘But this fellow will also choose Wi So-yeon, won’t he?’

What Wi So-yeon lacked was a support base.

If the Baek Clan, the Shadow Clan, and their master-disciple duo supported her, she could establish a force that rivaled Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.

‘For now, Wi So-yeon is the most suitable candidate. With your astute insight, you should be able to see that much, right?’

That’s what he thought, but...

“Then, I think Jang Neung-ak would be better.”

“What?”

For a moment, Baek Sa-ha’s expression stiffened.

He was inwardly disappointed by Mok Gyeong-un’s unexpected choice.

‘No, why would you choose that fellow of all people?’

Among the three, Jang Neung-ak had the weakest martial prowess, was treacherous, and had a personality close to being reckless.

In Baek Sa-ha’s view, Jang Neung-ak was the least suitable to be the Society Leader.

At this, Baek Sa-ha sighed and asked,

“Are you sure about choosing Jang Neung-ak?”

Since he had given Mok Gyeong-un the choice, it was difficult for him to openly oppose, but he at least wanted to know the reason.

It was unlikely that this cunning fellow would make such a decision without any thought.

Or could it be...

Baek Sa-ha's gaze turned towards the unconscious Woo Horang.

He was aware that Woo Horang was the chief disciple of Bright Blade King Son Yun and the leader of the Giant Watchtower Group.

He was said to be Wi So-yeon's right-hand man, wasn't he?

Judging from the traces around, it seemed that Mok Gyeong-un had also fought him before Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.

‘Could it be related to that?’

If that was the case, Baek Sa-ha could mediate to some extent.

Although he couldn't interfere with the enmity between the Society Leader's successor, he had some room to intervene in conflicts between young individuals.

However,

“Jang Neung-ak's subordinates are extremely loyal to their lord, regardless of what kind of person he is. On the other hand, Wi So-yeon's subordinates seem to view her as a woman to be admired rather than their lord, regardless of her character.”

“What? A woman to be admired?”

“Yes.”

“Oh my...”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, a sigh of disappointment escaped Baek Sa-ha’s mouth.

He had intended to mediate if the conflict was the cause.

However, if what Mok Gyeong-un said was true, it meant that Wi So-yeon lacked the fortune of having talented subordinates, regardless of her character.

Of course, if they supported her, the situation would improve considerably.

But if the person who was to become the leader fundamentally lacked the ability to lead subordinates, supporting them would not end the problem.

‘...Could her beauty be a disaster?’

Wi So-yeon was a peerless beauty.

Any man would inevitably fall for her dazzling beauty.

Baek Sa-ha had not considered this to be a significant problem.

He believed that as long as she led her subordinates with strong leadership, it would be fine.

However, if her close subordinates viewed her as an object of desire rather than their lord, as Mok Gyeong-un said, he might need to reconsider.

‘If she can’t lead her subordinates...’

He couldn’t say that Mok Gyeong-un’s judgment was wrong.

Although Jang Neung-ak’s personality and talent could be considered inferior to Wi So-yeon’s, when it came to the position of leading a group, Jang Neung-ak seemed to be the better choice.

At this, Baek Sa-ha nodded, indicating his understanding.

“Alright. Do as you wish. Then, go to Jang Neung-ak and convey your intentions.”

“I understand. Then, what about you, Master?”

“I will quickly clean up this place, meet with the Shadow Clan leader to inform him of this matter, and then discuss an alliance between the Shadow Clan and the Baek Clan.”

“Ah...”

He had indeed needed someone to handle the situation.

Thinking it was a good opportunity, Mok Gyeong-un clasped his hands in a gesture of gratitude towards the Poison King Baek Sa-ha.

“Thank you.”

“Keke, what are you thanking me for? Your affairs are now this master’s affairs as well.”

“...”

“What are you doing? Hurry. We need to quickly establish our forces before Eldest Young Master wakes up.”

“I understand. Then, I’ll leave it to you.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un turned his body and approached someone who was lying unconscious.

At this, Baek Sa-ha frowned and asked,

“What are you trying to do? Didn’t this master say he would handle things here?”

“Ah. I think I need to take this friend with me.”

The person Mok Gyeong-un pointed to was none other than Woo Horang, the Grand Leader of the Giant Watchtower Group and a close subordinate of the third disciple, Wi So-yeon.

At this, Baek Sa-ha, not understanding, asked,

“Why would you, who said you’re going to meet Jang Neung-ak, take that fellow with you? Don’t tell me you’re planning to give him as a gift to show your support?”

“No. It’s not that. I’m going to visit Wi So-yeon first.”

“What?”

Now what was this about?

He said he wouldn’t choose Wi So-yeon, so why was he going to her?

As Baek Sa-ha was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un approached him and whispered something quietly in his ear.

Hearing this, Baek Sa-ha frowned and asked,

“No. Is that even possible?”

“We’ll know once we try.”

“...I’m not sure if you’ll unnecessarily provoke Wi So-yeon.”

Baek Sa-ha couldn’t hide his concern.

However, Mok Gyeong-un, as if not minding it at all, hoisted the unconscious Woo Horang over his shoulder and said,

“We’ll know once we try. Then, please take care of cleaning up this place. Ah... That friend lying over there is Seok Jung, the escort the Shadow Clan leader assigned to me. You can take him with you when you go to the Shadow Clan.”

Having made his request, Mok Gyeong-un carried Woo Horang and left.

Watching his back, Baek Sa-ha clicked his tongue.

He wasn’t sure if things would go according to the fellow’s intentions.

Would Wi So-yeon, who desired to be the Society Leader of the Heaven and Earth Society, accept that?

He was concerned that it might only increase the number of enemies.

‘Hmm.’

Baek Sa-ha, who had been staring in the direction Mok Gyeong-un had gone, clicked his tongue and soon approached the unconscious Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang.

He didn’t know how things had come to this point, but the war of life and death with this fellow had begun.

However, now that the war had started, he had no intention of losing.

‘Since you’ve touched me and the Baek Clan, be prepared for the consequences.’

Baek Sa-ha, who had issued a warning in his mind, carefully glanced around.

He couldn’t detect anything with his senses.

After surveying the surroundings, Baek Sa-ha...

“Ahem.”

Slyly placed his foot on Eldest Young Master Na Yul-ryang’s right ankle and applied force, pressing down firmly.

-Crack!

The sound of the ankle breaking could be heard.

Since his right wrist was already broken and his right eyeball had been taken by Mok Gyeong-un, it wouldn’t be strange if his right ankle was additionally broken here, would it?

“Kekeke.”

The residence of the Society Leader’s third disciple, Wi So-yeon.

A man with a bruised face was entering that place.

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

“Oh! Brother Yeop!”

As he entered the pavilion, a young man who had been training by balancing a large stone on a thick short sword in the courtyard of the residence greeted him cheerfully.

His name was Yang Il.

He was the leader of the Transient Sword Group[1] and one of Wi So-yeon’s close subordinates.

“Brother Yang.”

Yeop Wi-seon clasped his hands in a greeting, his face somewhat flushed.

Inwardly, he was extremely embarrassed.

He had gone to the Corpse Blood Valley to report but ended up fighting with a trainee, and to make matters worse, he had caused an incident that resulted in him being locked up in a dark room for several days of secluded training.

He thought he would be imprisoned for at least a few months.

However, for some reason, his master, Bright Blade King Son Yun, had released him about half a quarter of an hour ago.

[If you cause trouble one more time, you'll truly be in secluded training for a year. Understand?]

Of course, he had given a chilling warning.

At this, Yeop Wi-seon had even shed tears as he begged for forgiveness.

It was fortunate that no one had seen it, but thinking about it now made his teeth grind.

If it weren't for that bastard named Mok Gyeong-un, he wouldn't have suffered like this and fallen out of favor with the young lady.

‘That son of a bitch.’

Someday, he would get his revenge.

He had already heard that the bastard had become the disciple of the Shadow Clan leader.

At least that was fortunate.

If the bastard had become the disciple of the Thunderbolt Fist King or his master, Bright Blade King Son Yun, it would have been difficult to seek revenge, but since he became the disciple of an executive below the Five Kings, there would always be an opportunity.

Anyway, this wasn't important right now.

He was already on his way here with his master's orders.

“Brother Yang. Where is our senior brother? Is he with the young lady?”

“Grand Leader Woo Horang has gone to fetch someone on the young lady’s orders.”

“...He went to fetch someone? Then where did he go?”

“Why? Did something happen?”

“Our master is looking for him.”

“Ah. Did the Bright Blade King master call for him?”

“Yes.”

“Grand Leader Woo Horang is waiting for someone named Mok Gyeong-un near the residence of the Poison King’s Baek Clan.”

‘I?’

At those words, Yeop Wi-seon tilted his head.

Now what was this about?

Why was he waiting for Mok Gyeong-un near the Baek Clan’s residence?

“...Why?”

“What do you mean why? It’s to recruit him, of course.”

“What?”

Yeop Wi-seon showed disgust at those words.

He was already planning to tell the young lady that they shouldn't recruit Mok Gyeong-un, that bastard, especially after learning that he was a hostage of the righteous faction, but what was this absurd news?

This wouldn't do.

If this was true, he had to immediately inform the young lady...

-Creak!

At that moment, the entrance to the residence opened, and someone entered.

Yeop Wi-seon's expression instantly distorted hideously.

That was because the one who had entered was none other than that damn bastard.

“Mok Gyeong-un!”

However,

“Oh. It's been a while. What a coincidence. This person is your senior brother, right?”

“What?”

-Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un lifted someone he was carrying on his shoulder with one hand, as if he were a sack.

Seeing him, Yeop Wi-seon and Yang Il's eyes simultaneously widened.

‘No way?’

‘S-Senior brother?’

The person lifted by Mok Gyeong-un's hand was none other than Woo Horang, the chief disciple of Bright Blade King Son Yun and one of the Five Tigers, known as the top successors of the Heaven and Earth Society.

He was known to be someone that only executives could handle, yet seeing him unconscious and covered in blood, as if he had suffered serious injuries, the two couldn't hide their shock.