

Mayhem 201

Chapter 201 – Water Demon (3)

“You don’t seem to know what a threat is, should I explain it to you?”

The calm voice coming from behind caused Elder Beom’s expression to stiffen.

In an instant, he didn’t even perceive it. For someone to be able to take his back with such internal skill, they were definitely not a low-level martial artist.

‘Hmm.’

Based on his perception, they were clearly at the peak realm.

But for them to be able to conceal their qi to this extent and deceive his senses meant they were a master who could fully control their energy.

‘...Unbelievable.’

Elder Beom inwardly denied this.

That’s because in order to deceive him to this degree, one would have to surpass the wall.

But wasn’t this brat before him only 17 or 18 years old at most?

To have reached the Transformation Realm at such a young age?

‘Right. That’s impossible. It’s more likely he cultivated some special internal cultivation method.’

Even he, who had cultivated martial arts for nearly 60 years, had not reached that realm.

How could a young lad like this possibly have surpassed the wall?

Convinced of this, Elder Beom stomped on the ground.

-Pop!

He had to get away from the bastard first.

Leaping forward, Elder Beom twirled his body, his gray Taoist robe fluttering.

‘Two Extremes Connected Hands!’

The moment he spun, the sleeves of his robe turned into sharp blades, unleashing a murderous energy.

It instantly sliced through the heavy downpour within a radius of almost 50 feet.

-Swish!

But it didn’t end there.

Elder Beom stomped his foot towards the ground.

‘One Step Scattering Strength!’

The instant he stomped on the accumulated rainwater, the splashing droplets absorbed his true energy and transformed into a dispersing hidden weapon.

The range was so wide that–

“Damn it!”

“Block it!”

-Shing!

Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak simultaneously drew their sabers to fend off the incoming water droplets.

-Clang clang clang!

The power of the droplets infused with true energy was enough to make their hands holding the sabers go numb.

The two of them defended against it while inwardly clicking their tongues.

Not only had he reached the peak-stage of the Transcendent Realm, but it would be no exaggeration to say the old man’s internal energy had already surpassed that level.

-Clang! Tremble!

With internal energy of this caliber, he could almost be considered on par with the Five Kings, who were high-ranking executives.

Seeing them being pushed back while blocking the true energy-infused water droplets, Elder Beom rolled his eyes and searched for Mok Gyeong-un.

He had unleashed quite a powerful technique to distance himself from the fellow.

Both were quite formidable, but they consumed a considerable amount of internal energy.

However, Elder Beom felt that at least this much was necessary to definitively separate the fellow from his back.

‘Where is he? Where the hell is he?’

The downpour was so heavy that it was difficult to secure his vision right away.

But then,

“What an interesting technique.”

Elder Beom’s expression stiffened at the voice coming from behind him.

Naturally, he had thought he had gained some distance.

But what was going on?

‘...I failed to create distance?’

Elder Beom was utterly baffled.

He had unleashed an omnidirectional offensive technique, yet not only did he fail to gain distance, but his back was still being seized. How was this possible?

-Nngh!

Elder Beom gritted his teeth.

How could he repeatedly have his back taken by this young brat?

“Impudent bastard!”

Elder Beom changed his approach.

Rather than trying to gain distance, he took the Five Sequential Steps, a poison stepping method, to change direction while simultaneously unleashing the Two Extremes Connected Hands to attack Mok Gyeong-un.

This time, since he hadn’t gained distance, if Mok Gyeong-un wanted to block or dodge the Two Extremes Connected Hands, the boy wouldn’t be able to continue his antics of seizing his back.

-Swish!

At that moment, a dark shadow appeared before his eyes.

‘Got you!’

Elder Beom unleashed his claw technique towards the dark shadow.

‘Two Extremes Roaring Claws, Overturning Grasp!’

-Bam bam bam!

It was like a roaring tiger lunging at its prey, baring its sharp fangs.

Elder Beom intended to seize the victory the moment he caught the figure.

However,

-Swish!

‘What?’

At that instant, his two hands executing the claw technique grazed past the shadow.

Then, a voice came from behind.

“Too slow.”

“You punk!”

Elder Beom swung his claw backwards.

-Swish!

But his hand touched nothing.

Instead, only Mok Gyeong-un’s mocking voice reached his ears.

“At this rate, will you even be able to see my face?”

‘Is this bastard toying with this old man!’

-Bam bam bam bam!

Enraged by the mockery, Elder Beom was about to unleash his claw technique indiscriminately.

He felt that he had to get this brat in front of him to vent his frustration.

But right at that moment,

-Thud!

A piercing pain shot through his right leg, and Elder Beom's figure slipped on the rainwater, about to collapse on the ground.

Startled, Elder Beom hurriedly reached out his hand to avoid falling.

However,

-Thud!

“Ugh!”

A kick struck his exposed left rib as his figure crumbled, and he was sent tumbling to the ground.

-Bang!

“Aargh...”

Fallen on the ground, Elder Beom clutched his ribs and groaned.

It seemed his bones had been broken by that recent strike.

It was difficult to even breathe.

Mok Gyeong-un's voice reached Elder Beom's ears.

"You're quite the exaggerator. Or is it that you've aged to the point where enduring this level of pain is challenging?"

"Cough, cough."

Elder Beom raised his head with a stiff expression.

He saw Mok Gyeong-un standing there with his hands behind his back, looking down at him.

To be so humiliatingly knocked to the ground and have to look up at this punk's face...

Elder Beom was genuinely at a loss for words.

'...Did this brat really surpass the wall?'

The gap was so evident that he had no choice but to acknowledge it.

This bastard was truly a master of the Transformation Realm.

'For someone not even in his prime to reach such an astonishing realm...'

He was a true monster.

Which sect was he from?

With martial prowess like this, his reputation should have been well-known in the martial arts world.

Even though he was from “that place,” Elder Beom was still aware of individuals with great renown in the martial arts community to a certain extent.

Elder Beom struggled to regulate his breathing and asked,

“Haa... haa... What is your name?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“Haa... I don’t have any particular intentions. I was simply in awe of your martial prowess and curious about your esteemed name.”

“Then you can remain curious.”

“.....”

It meant he had no intention of revealing it.

Elder Beom let out a sigh that was almost a lament.

The situation had become quite ironic.

To think that the person he provoked at the young lady’s insistence turned out to be a master of the Transformation Realm...

How absurd could things get?

He had truly messed with the wrong person.

'...It was this old man's mistake.'

In fact, it was difficult to call this a mistake.

Encountering a supreme master who could completely deceive one's senses was extremely rare.

And so was meeting someone who had reached the Transformation Realm at such a young age.

It could be said to be close to the realm of misfortune.

"Haa... haa..."

Elder Beom straightened his body and said,

"Alright. If you won't reveal your esteemed name, I'll just call you Little Junior."

-Clasp!

Elder Beom brought his hands together in a polite gesture and bowed his head.

"This Elder Beom sincerely apologizes to Little Juniors."

"Apologize?"

"That's right. Regarding this matter, even if I had two mouths, I would have nothing to say. But this old man truly had no intention of causing harm. However, regardless of the circumstances, it's clear that I made you feel threatened. For that, I apologize and will provide the maximum compensation within my means. So please, just this once, show some leniency."

Elder Beom bowed his head respectfully once again.

Unlike that place, the martial arts world operated on the logic of power, so he discarded his pride and apologized accordingly.

But if he only did this verbally, it might not be effective at all, so...

-Swish!

Elder Beom took out a square jade token from his bosom.

He then presented it to Mok Gyeong-un and said,

“This is a first-grade jade token issued by the Seo Pyeong Money Vault.”

“Seo Pyeong Money Vault?”

“That’s right. This jade token allows you to withdraw 100 gold taels at once.”

“100 gold taels?”

A glint flashed in Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes.

100 gold taels were equivalent to 10,000 silver taels.

It was a tremendous sum of money, enough for a sect of considerable scale to operate for about a year.

With this much, anyone would have to let the matter go.

“Oh? Is that so? I’ll gratefully accept it.”

Mok Gyeong-un received the jade token.

Seeing this, Elder Beom thought to himself, as expected.

Even martial artists were human.

Naturally, no one could resist such a huge sum of money.

Although it was unfortunate to lose half of the travel expenses he had received, it was better than unnecessarily escalating the situation.

“Thank you.”

Just as Elder Beom was about to break his hand gesture and stand up,

Mok Gyeong-un put the square jade token into his bosom and said,

“Compensation is compensation, but shall we continue the earlier conversation?”

“What?”

Elder Beom frowned.

What was he talking about now?

After receiving a Seo Pyeong Money Vault jade token that could immediately withdraw 100 gold taels, what was he saying?

“Look here. This matter should be concluded like this...”

“It’s not concluded. There are things that can be settled with money and things that can’t.”

“No. After receiving such a huge sum, you’re saying this now?”

“I am. If you were stronger than me, there would be no need to give money or apologize so meekly. You would have achieved what you wanted.”

“.....”

Elder Beom’s mouth closed at Mok Gyeong-un’s words.

It was hard to deny because it was true.

In the first place, he had tried to pressure them with force to take them to the young lady.

In fact, he had said those words, so it was difficult to make excuses.

Elder Beom tried to appease Mok Gyeong-un as tactfully as possible.

“Little Junior. I fully understand your feelings. If it seems like I tried to smooth things over with money...”

“What do you understand?”

“That’s...”

“It doesn’t seem like you understand at all.”

“..... Didn’t I say that’s not the case? This old man simply...”

“Wouldn’t it be faster to directly experience it rather than just talk?”

“Experience?”

“Yes. It seems you can’t differentiate between a threat and cooperation.”

‘Is this guy really...?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Elder Beom’s eyes sharpened for a moment.

Come to think of it, his companions were nowhere to be seen.

Right at that moment,

-Crash!

-How, how dare you!

‘!?’

Elder Beom’s pupils trembled frantically at the thunderous sound and familiar shout coming from the inn.

‘You, you bastard!’

-Whoosh!

With a distorted face, Elder Beom hurriedly leaped towards the inn.

As he entered the inn through the back door, Elder Beom's expression stiffened.

There, along with the collapsed bodyguards, Mong Mu-yak was standing behind the veiled woman, pressing his blade against her slender neck.

Although Mong Mu-yak and Seop Chun were a level below Elder Beom, none of the other bodyguards were capable of handling the two of them.

"You... you bastards! Let go of that person right now!"

Elder Beom pressed them with a voice filled with anger.

In his heart, he wanted to tear them apart for pressing a blade against that person's neck.

In response, Mong Mu-yak spoke in a cold voice,

"It's best not to move."

"Nngh!"

How could he handle this situation?

He hadn't expected these bastards to actually commit such a disrespectful act.

Just then,

"How does it feel? Do you now understand the difference between cooperation and a threat?"

-Clench!

Elder Beom bit his lower lip at Mok Gyeong-un's voice coming from behind him.

He never thought he would be retaliated against in this manner.

He had messed with the wrong opponent.

Chapter 202 – Water Demon (4)

"How does it feel? Do you now understand the difference between cooperation and a threat?"

Elder Beom bit his lower lip at Mok Gyeong-un's voice coming from behind him.

He never thought he would be retaliated against in this manner.

It seemed he had really messed with the wrong opponent.

'These bastards...'

The young fellows were truly vicious.

He never expected they would take the young lady hostage as revenge.

No, there wasn't even an opportunity to anticipate it in the first place.

Elder Beom glared at Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak with sharpened eyes.

'Could these young men possibly not be from righteous martial arts sects?'

Elder Beom's mind became complicated.

Although he had been overbearing due to the young lady's insistence, if they were righteous martial artists who valued negotiation, they wouldn't have gone this far.

In that case,

'Evil sect?'

From what Elder Beom knew, unlike righteous sect members who valued face and honor, evil sect members prioritized profit and benefit, readily engaging in such acts without hesitation.

If that was the case, it would become even more troublesome.

He had already apologized and even offered compensation, yet they still acted this way, meaning negotiation was futile.

-Clench!

Elder Beom gritted his teeth.

The situation was so disadvantageous that he was getting angry.

However, it was crucial to remain calm in times like these.

The young lady, who had been taken hostage, must also be feeling fear in this unfamiliar situation. If he didn't handle it carefully, it could lead to the worst outcome.

Right then,

“Impudent bastards...”

The veiled woman, whom he thought would be frightened, opened her mouth, her cheeks trembling.

Seeing her attitude, Elder Beom clicked his tongue inwardly.

She was indeed that person's daughter.

Even in a life-threatening situation, she still uttered such words.

‘This won’t do.’

Elder Beom shook his head while looking at the veiled woman.

It meant to refrain from speaking as the situation was dangerous.

No matter how preciously she was raised or how carefree she was, she was fundamentally intelligent.

At the very least, he believed she wouldn’t do anything foolish in a situation like this.

“Listen.”

Elder Beom calmly addressed Mok Gyeong-un.

“Yes.”

"Regarding this matter, it's indeed this old man's fault. However, even in the martial arts world where grudges are settled decisively, targeting the elderly, children, and women is going too far. Please release that person and direct all your anger towards this old man instead."

Elder Beom spoke as humbly and pleadingly as possible.

The situation was already close to the worst, so he was trying to appeal to their compassion.

Of course, this plea for sympathy was not only aimed at those threatening them but also to garner public sympathy from the bystanders.

-Murmur murmur!

With Elder Beom's intentions, the people in the inn started whispering and causing a commotion.

From their perspective, it appeared as if Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak had suddenly barged in and attacked the veiled woman and her bodyguards.

"No way. Who are those guys?"

"Why are they doing this?"

They were murmuring, but naturally, it could be heard.

'This isn't good.'

Seop Chun, the Third Captain Commander of the Heaven and Earth Society's headquarters, found the gazes of the bystanders burdensome.

He had followed Mok Gyeong-un's sudden order, but there were too many onlookers in this situation.

In such circumstances, regardless of one's identity, pressing a blade against a woman's neck and threatening her wasn't a good look.

"My lord."

Seop Chun called out to Mok Gyeong-un and signaled with his eyes.

It meant that they had sufficiently warned these people, so wouldn't it be better to end it here?

Reading this, Elder Beom spoke again in an imploring voice,

"I beg you. Please, at least release that person."

Even if they were from evil sects, they were still human, so he believed they couldn't simply ignore an appeal to their compassion.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth,

"Hmm. Two out of the three—the elderly, children, and women—are included."

"...You don't need to include this old man."

"Yes. Of course not. If a supreme master like you, who has reached the peak-stage of the Transcendent Realm, tries to be treated as a frail elderly, it would be shameless."

"I understand what you mean. So please, that sword, currently pointing at the young lady..."

"But you know what? Who was the one who ordered such a formidable master to forcefully bring us even if it meant using force?"

“.....”

Elder Beom's words were blocked by Mok Gyeong-un's remark.

“Didn't you mention outside that it was due to that veiled lady's insistence?”

At these words, Elder Beom spoke in a flustered tone,

“He-hey. When did this old man say that?”

Speaking like this would make it seem like he was using the young lady as an excuse.

Conscious of the veiled woman's mood, Elder Beom hurriedly made an excuse.

“The young lady didn't give such an order. This is purely because this old man...”

“Don't bother trying to smooth things over.”

“I'm not trying to...”

-Grasp!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed Elder Beom's shoulder.

And as he pressed down forcefully,

“Urgh.”

-Thud!

Elder Beom's knees were forcibly made to kneel.

Although he had profound true energy cultivated over many years, he couldn't possibly compare to a master who had reached the Transformation Realm.

-Gnash!

Elder Beom gritted his teeth.

Unlike before, being humiliated like this in front of so many people and that person was extremely shameful.

However, Elder Beom had endured even greater humiliations for a long time in "that place."

Therefore, he could bear something like this to escape the situation.

Elder Beom calmly opened his mouth again,

"Look. Isn't this enough? Please, stop here..."

"Judging whether it's enough or not isn't up to the one who started this."

-Crunch!

"Argh."

Elder Beom's face contorted in pain as the hand gripping his shoulder tightened as if it would crush it.

The veiled woman then shouted,

“Sir!”

Seeing that, Elder Beom shook his head with all his might despite the agony.

It meant to absolutely not intervene.

However,

“Stop! Stop it!”

The veiled woman, unable to bear it any longer, shouted at Mok Gyeong-un.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“You finally open your mouth.”

“Impudent fellow. Remove your hand from sir immediately!”

“Removing my hand or not is up to me.”

“Ha!”

The veiled woman found it absurd.

No one had ever insulted her in this manner.

Yet a mere ruffian with a barely handsome face dared to ignore her order?

The veiled woman trembled and spoke,

“You are truly the epitome of impudence.”

“The impudent one is you. The culprit who summoned a busy person and caused this mess shouldn’t be saying such things.”

“You! How dare you!”

“Ah, words won’t work after all.”

-Crunch!

“Aaaargh.”

At that moment, an even louder scream escaped Elder Beom’s mouth.

He had been enduring it by gritting his teeth, but judging from his reddened face with bulging veins, one could imagine how painful it was.

Moreover, the shoulder being gripped was turning red with blood.

“Stop! Stop it!”

“Is that what you want?”

“Yes. I want it! So now, stop...”

“...If you want me to let go, there’s a simple method.”

“A simple method?”

“Yes.”

“What is it?”

“Kneel and apologize. Then perhaps the strength in my hand will loosen.”

“.....”

Those words made her entire body tremble with anger.

When leaving “that place,” Elder Beom had earnestly advised her to avoid revealing her identity unless absolutely necessary, but now she couldn’t bear it anymore.

She immediately removed her veil.

Beneath it, a beautiful face was revealed.

“Oh my.”

“Wow...”

Gasps of admiration flowed from here and there.

Not only was her face beautiful, but she also possessed a truly noble appearance.

Even Mong Mu-yak, who had his blade against her neck, was inwardly astonished upon seeing her face.

‘Who the hell is this woman?’

Beyond her appearance, the air of elegance she exuded was extraordinary.

It wasn’t something ordinary people could possess.

Then, the woman who had revealed her face glared fiercely at Mok Gyeong-un and spoke,

“Rude fellow. Do you know who I am to do such a thing?”

‘What’s with this woman?’

Mong Mu-yak frowned at her words.

He had already guessed that she wasn’t an ordinary person, considering she had a formidable master like Elder Beom as a mere bodyguard and was wearing luxurious clothing.

However, even if she was such a woman, in a situation like this, she should normally be frightened, trembling, or submitting, yet she still maintained her composure.

Moreover, judging from her tone, she seemed to have considerable pride in her identity.

In that case,

‘Could this woman... be related to the government or the imperial palace?’

Mong Mu-yak swallowed dryly with a stiff face.

If this woman was indeed connected to the government or the imperial palace, it would become quite troublesome.

Although the relationship between the government and the martial arts world had improved significantly recently, they still maintained inviolable territories.

If his guess was correct, it could lead to a truly bothersome situation.

Moreover, their secret mission this time was in the imperial capital, Kaifeng, making it even more so.

‘It might be better to end it here.’

However,

“Am I obligated to know who you are?”

Instead, Mok Gyeong-un went a step further.

Naturally, Mok Gyeong-un’s provocation could only infuriate her further.

“Ha! So that’s how you’re going to be?”

“You’re escalating a matter that could be resolved with a single kneel.”

“The one escalating things is you, bastard. Once you know who I am, let’s see if you can still behave so rudely...”

“Further words would be an unwise choice.”

Mok Gyeong-un interrupted her.

At this, she scoffed and spoke in an arrogant voice,

“Hmph. It’s too late to regret now. I will definitely...”

-Crunch!

“Aaaaargh!”

Before she could finish her sentence,

With a terrible scream, Elder Beom’s shoulder was twisted, and the bone pierced through the flesh, protruding out.

Witnessing that horrific sight, the woman who was about to reveal her identity turned pale and lost her words.

Mok Gyeong-un then smiled and said to her,

“Shall I tell you in advance what will happen next?”

“You... you! How dare you!”

“I don’t know who you are. Nor do I care. But if a bothersome situation arises because you reveal your precious identity out of pointless pride, I will have no choice but to make an inevitable decision.”

“An inevitable decision?”

“Yes. I’ll make it as if nothing ever happened.”

“What?”

“You don’t seem to understand. Have you heard of the phrase ‘kill to silence’?”

‘!?’

Kill to silence.

It meant killing people to prevent information from leaking out.

At those words, her expression, which had been arrogant and confident, completely stiffened.

However, Mok Gyeong-un didn’t stop there.

Sweeping his indifferent gaze over the surrounding people in the inn, he spoke nonchalantly,

“How unfortunate. If that young lady opens her mouth, you all won’t be able to leave here alive either. Well, it’s not my fault, so blame the young lady.”

‘!!!!!!’

The moment he finished speaking, the atmosphere inside the inn instantly turned deathly still.

He spoke casually as if it were nothing, but the overwhelming pressure was enough to drive everyone into extreme tension.

‘This, this bastard!’

How could he steer the situation in such a way?

As she was about to open her mouth in disbelief, all the gazes in the inn simultaneously turned towards her.

She was perplexed by the gazes filled with resentment and fear, so intense they were suffocating.

‘Why?’

The real target of the threat was that man, so why were they looking at her with such eyes?

Under their gazes, her lips wouldn’t part.

Amidst that, she saw Mok Gyeong-un’s face, shrouded in shadows, through her eyes.

He was grinning with a spine-chilling smile that reached his ears, his face filled with nothing but malice.

-Shiver!

A chill ran down her spine and throughout her entire body.

The moment fear gripped her entire being, her legs turned weak and gave out.

-Thud!

Chapter 203 – Water Demon (5)

Three years ago, one day.

[Hyeon-ah.]

[Yes, Fa...]

[When it's just the two of us, you can call me Dad.]

[Yes, Dad.]

[Our little spitfire has turned seventeen this year, becoming a grown lady.]

[Heh. A lady as in a graceful and beautiful lady?]

The one called Hyeon-ah bragged about her elated mood, twirling her colorful skirt.

The middle-aged man with a refined and elegant appearance smiled and said,

[You've been studying the Book of Songs.]

[Yes. The Book of Songs says, "A graceful and beautiful lady is a good match for a gentleman."]

The Book of Songs states that a graceful and beautiful lady is a good match for a gentleman.

It means that a gentle and chaste woman is a fitting partner for a virtuous man.

[But I don't want to become a graceful and beautiful lady.]

[Why is that?]

[Half the world is women, and they're told to be graceful and beautiful ladies. I don't want to become so old-fashioned.]

[Then what do you want to be?]

[Men can have three wives and four concubines, so is there a law saying I can't do the same?]

[.....]

At her words, the middle-aged man shook his head.

Since she was his only daughter, he had spoiled her, so it worried him sometimes.

This child was still under his protection, so she had nothing to fear, but both this place, full of conspiracies and power struggles, and the world were exceedingly treacherous.

[Hyeon-ah.]

[Yes.]

[You don't need to concern yourself with being a lady or chaste. However, now that you've grown up, your father has one piece of advice.]

[What is it?]

[Everything you enjoy now stems solely from your surname and that blood. You have a nobler bloodline than anyone else and deserve to enjoy it. But...]

[But?]

[The world isn't so easy.]

[What do you mean?]

[Don't be overly confident in the power of your surname and bloodline.]

[..... Why are you saying this?]

[Right now, your bloodline and this father serve as a sturdy fence for you, but there will come a time when that fence will be of no use.]

[.....]

[When that fearful and confusing moment arrives, in the end, the only thing that can protect you will not be this father or this surname, but your own judgment.]

-Thud!

Her legs weakened, and she unintentionally knelt down.

She had lived her entire life without fear or worry.

However, the unprecedeted terror stemming from another's malice shredded her heart and made her tremble incessantly.

-Tremble tremble!

Seeing her uncontrollably shaking hands and feet, she suddenly recalled her father's words.

Her father, who had always been lenient, had advised her with a stern face for the first time.

[When that fearful and confusing moment arrives, in the end, the only thing that can protect you will not be this father or this surname, but your own judgment.]

At the time, she thought her father was in a bad mood.

So she didn't take it seriously.

Would such a moment, as her father mentioned, ever come?

She firmly believed that she had an absolute bloodline and surname, so no one could touch her unless they shared the same blood.

However, upon venturing outside and facing a dangerous moment where all of that was useless, she inevitably collided with the wall of reality.

The bastard's voice reached her ears.

"You've knelt, so all that's left is to apologize."

These words caused her eyes to tremble violently.

'I... I have to kneel and apologize to such a lowly thug?'

She had the noblest bloodline in the Central Plains.

For someone like her to suffer such humiliation was unthinkable.

Even if it meant death, it might be right to maintain face for the sake of this noble bloodline.

However, reality wasn't so simple.

"It seems difficult for you to say those words. It would inconvenience everyone here."

As soon as Mok Gyeong-un finished speaking,

The people inside the inn glared at her with resentful eyes and whispered.

'Damn it. Is it that hard?'

'Just apologize and be done with it!'

'Why do we, who have nothing to do with this, have to suffer like this?'

'Who does she think she is!'

They were murmuring quietly, but all those voices strangely rang in her ears as if they were pounding.

This drove her into a corner, making it impossible for her to maintain her pride.

She lifted her head with difficulty and looked at someone.

That someone was Elder Beom.

"Argh..."

Elder Beom, who had suffered an injury where his shoulder bone was broken and pierced through the flesh.

Suffering in agony, Elder Beom desperately tried to say something to her.

'You... must... endure...'

-Clench!

At Elder Beom's words, she bit her lower lip hard.

Enduring humiliation at every moment was painful and infuriating, but if she let it all out here, she and everyone else would die.

'.....'

The lowly ones in the inn could all die for all she cared.

However, not only her own life, belonging to a noble bloodline, but she couldn't let Sir Beom, whom her father had assigned to her, die in a place like this.

As a result, she opened her mouth with the determination to endure humiliation.

-Gnash!

"I... to you, sir... have committed... a great... sin... ugh..."

-Drip drip!

Her pride was so wounded that tears wouldn't stop flowing as she spoke.

[In the end, the only thing that can protect you will not be this father or this surname, but your own judgment.]

However, pondering her father's words, she finally finished speaking.

"Please... forgive... me."

Finally, after submitting and completing her apology, all eyes in the inn turned to Mok Gyeong-un.

Everyone had tense looks on their faces.

They feared, what if that fellow broke his promise and killed them all?

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un licked his lips and said,

"Unfortunately, I'll have to end it here."

'Unfortunately?'

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Elder Beom sincerely clicked his tongue.

It was no different than saying he really intended to slaughter everyone in the inn if the young lady had held out until the end.

He hadn't expected it, but this fellow had a truly vicious nature.

'Young lady...'

Elder Beom was truly proud of her.

If she hadn't endured and had let out her anger and maintained her pride, everything would have been over.

In that sense, this incident might have been medicine rather than poison for her.

At the very least, she had realized the reality that her noble status and bloodline didn't protect her from everything.

-Swish!

Elder Beom carefully looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

Mok Gyeong-un then grinned and signaled to Mong Mu-yak, saying,

“Sheathe your sword.”

“Yes.”

As the order was given, Mong Mu-yak removed the sword from her neck.

With the sword removed from her neck, the woman who had endured humiliation and apologized inwardly vowed.

She would take this incident as a stepping stone and never again allow herself to be in a situation where she had to kneel or suffer humiliation.

And,

'I won't forgive you.'

That man who had subjected her to such humiliation.

She would never forget him.

Since he had inflicted such humiliation and disgrace upon her, the one who inherited the noblest bloodline in this country, he would definitely pay the price.

Enjoy it while you can.

But before long, you will beg me in the most miserable way.

She raised her head and looked at the people in the inn.

Everyone was relieved and happy that the situation had ended peacefully because she had knelt and apologized.

Seeing them like that made her feel disgusted.

Those bastards were all the same.

They only cared about their own safety and couldn't say a word to the one threatening them, instead cornering her.

'How dare these lowly ones!'

She couldn't forgive these bastards either.

They had contributed to her humiliation and witnessed it without missing a single detail.

She glared at them.

As if sensing her gaze, they all avoided meeting her eyes.

‘Just wait a little.’

Once those fellows left this place, she would have to tell the guards to kill them all without leaving a single one.

Although she hadn’t revealed her identity, she didn’t want this shameful incident to reach anyone’s ears.

Seeing her murderous expression, Mok Gyeong-un raised the corners of his lips.

Then he lightly tapped Elder Beom’s uninjured shoulder and headed towards the inn’s entrance.

-Whoosh!

As they distanced themselves from the inn, Mong Mu-yak glanced back with somewhat worried eyes.

Seop Chun asked him, puzzled,

“What’s wrong?”

At his question, Mong Mu-yak looked at Mok Gyeong-un, not Seop Chun, and said,

“My Lord.”

“What is it?”

“Is it alright to just leave like this?”

At this question, Seop Chun was about to ask why but then nodded his head in agreement and said,

“Actually, I have the same thought as Mu-yak.”

“About what?”

“Although she submitted under the pressure of power, she seemed to have considerable pride. And the way she kept mentioning her identity...”

“She seemed to be the child of a high-ranking government official or someone from the imperial palace.”

At Mong Mu-yak’s speculation, Seop Chun tilted his head and said,

“The imperial palace? But isn’t that going too far? If she were a member of the imperial family, wouldn’t she have had more guards than that?”

“She had an old master who had reached the peak-stage of the Transcendent Realm and eight first-rate warriors as guards. Isn’t that quite a lot?”

“Still, if she were a member of the imperial family, I think she would have brought soldiers as well.”

“Well, who knows? She might have come out quietly for a secret mission.”

At Mong Mu-yak's words, Seop Chun frowned.

If what he said was true, there could be repercussions from ending it like this.

Therefore, Seop Chun said to Mok Gyeong-un,

"My Lord. Since things have already happened, it might be better for us to..."

"There's no need for that."

"What? Why?"

"Have you heard of the phrase 'killing with a borrowed knife'?"

"Killing with a borrowed knife?"

Killing with a borrowed knife.

It means harming others by using someone else, like borrowing a knife to kill.

He didn't understand why Mok Gyeong-un was saying this.

As he was puzzled,

-Aaaaargh!

A scream came from the direction of the inn.

Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak turned their heads with confused expressions to look in that direction.

As Mok Gyeong-un and his group left, she hurriedly rushed to the injured Elder Beom.

She asked worriedly,

“Sir Beom, are you alright?”

“Haa... haa... I’m fine. I can endure this much.”

“Still...”

Seeing the bone broken and piercing through the flesh, she wasn’t sure if she could call this fine.

However, Elder Beom was a formidable master of martial arts recognized even by her father.

As he said himself, he could overcome this much without difficulty.

“Are you sure you’re alright?”

“Please don’t worry too much.”

At Elder Beom’s answer, she whispered in his ear,

“Alright. Then, Sir. Can I ask you a favor?”

“What is it?”

"After you recover, can you take care of all the people in this inn with the help of the guard warriors?"

'!?'

At her words, Elder Beom's pupils trembled.

He had sensed that she was in a bad mood to some extent, but he never thought the repercussions would extend to the people in the inn.

Of course, it wasn't incomprehensible.

She, with a great bloodline, had shown everyone the sight of her suffering humiliation.

'There's no other choice.'

He couldn't blame her for this cruel decision.

Therefore, Elder Beom was about to nod and agree.

Right at that moment,

-Swish swish!

'!?'

At the sound ringing in his ears, Elder Beom hurriedly tried to move his body.

However, perhaps due to the injury in his shoulder, his body wouldn't listen to him as he wished.

Thus,

-Thud thud!

“Ugh!”

Elder Beom used his body as a shield to block the incoming objects with his back.

Judging from the burning sensation on his back, they were definitely hidden weapons.

However,

‘What’s wrong with my body?’

Although his right shoulder injury was severe, it shouldn’t have made his body this heavy and uncontrollable.

Come to think of it, the sensation in the shoulder that vicious fellow had lightly tapped was strange.

As if he had been poisoned by something...

Right at that moment,

-Startle! Thud!

The startled Elder Beom twisted his body with all his might.

However, a sharp sword pierced through his abdomen and protruded out.

-Stab!

Seeing this right in front of her, she was so shocked that she screamed.

“Aaaaargh!”

-Swish!

“Ah!”

Elder Beom urgently pushed her forward and turned his body to execute a claw technique.

-Bam bam!

“Ugh!”

-Whoosh!

Someone who was struck in the chest by Elder Beom’s claw technique was pushed back.

That someone was none other than one of the wanderers who had been watching the situation inside the inn.

But it wasn’t just one person.

The wanderers had already drawn their swords and surrounded Elder Beom.

‘...These, these people, how?’

Elder Beom's complexion rapidly darkened.

-Whoosh!

At the same time, outside the inn.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

"I casually mentioned to one of the wanderers there. I asked if that esteemed young lady would leave them alone after suffering such humiliation."

At these words, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak immediately clicked their tongues.

They understood the meaning of "killing with a borrowed knife" that Mok Gyeong-un had mentioned.

The inside of that inn would now become a bloody battlefield with their own fight.

"Shall we go now?"

Mok Gyeong-un turned his body as if he was no longer interested in this matter.

Seeing his back, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak genuinely felt fear towards Mok Gyeong-un.

He was completely manipulating the situation as he wished, like flipping the palm of his hand.

If such a person became an enemy, it would be truly terrifying.

Chapter 204 – Karma (1)

Whoosh!

Seop Chun, the Third Captain Commander of the Heaven and Earth Society's headquarters, clicked his tongue at the fierce downpour.

‘The rain seems to be getting heavier as we approach the riverside.’

He wasn't sure if crossing the river would be possible even with a large boat.

Upon climbing a high hill, he saw the river current that was practically a raging torrent, which was deeply worrying.

Just then, the only estate in the village came into view.

Compared to the magnificent estates in the inner city of the Heaven and Earth Society, it was utterly shabby, but it was evident that it was quite wealthy for a small riverside village.

Mong Mu-yak looked at the estate and said,

“There seem to be quite a few people inside.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un nodded.

That was because he could sense the presence of people inside the closed estate, and smoke was even rising from the tiled roofs.

“They must be employees. Let's go inside for now.”

Seop Chun took the lead and walked towards the main gate.

As he grabbed the door handle to knock, he noticed a plaque-like object attached next to the gate and spoke with a glint in his eyes,

“My Lord.”

“What is it?”

“It seems the boat owner is not an ordinary village tycoon.”

“If not ordinary, then extraordinary?”

“Look at this.”

The plaque that Seop Chun pointed to read:

[Meritorious Retainer of Quelling Turmoil, Fourth Rank]

“Meritorious Retainer of Quelling Turmoil?”

As Mok Gyeong-un read it, Mong Mu-yak, who had approached closely, frowned and said,

“It seems the owner of this estate was a government official who had rendered meritorious service.”

“A government official?”

“Yes. Judging from the plaque being hung right next to the main gate, he might be a government official who retired to his hometown after rendering meritorious service.”

“Oh my. What a day it is!”

Seop Chun clicked his tongue.

At the inn, they had already encountered individuals who might be related to the government or the imperial palace.

If the owner of this estate was also a former government official, it would be truly ironic.

Of course, unlike the reactions of these two, Mok Gyeong-un seemed utterly unconcerned as he said,

“Does it matter whether he was a government official or not? We just need to borrow a boat and cross the river.”

“Well... that’s true.”

He was right about that.

It was just an ironic situation.

Seop Chun then grabbed the door handle and knocked on the gate.

-Knock! Knock!

Perhaps due to the heavy rain, there was no response from inside.

So Seop Chun shouted and knocked on the door.

“Is anyone inside?”

-Knock! Knock!

After knocking a few times like that, the gate opened soon after.

-Creak!

As the gate opened, a woman in her mid-twenties wearing a paper umbrella appeared, accompanied by two sturdy-looking men.

Seeing them, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes flashed with interest.

‘Hmm.’

She didn’t seem to be the boat owner he had heard about from the innkeeper.

But she appeared to be related.

Both the innkeeper and the old man named Elder Beom had mentioned that the boat owner was on the verge of death.

Judging from the woman’s haggard face, dark complexion, and lack of energy, she might be the boat owner’s daughter.

“What brings you gentlemen here at this late hour?”

“Pardon us, but may we meet the owner of the estate?”

“.....”

The haggard-looking woman didn't answer Seop Chun's question.

Instead, she glanced at the military sabers hanging from Seop Chun's waist and asked,

"Forgive my presumption, but are you simply travelers seeking to cross the river? Or are you the ones who came after seeing the notice in front of the government office in the nearby county?"

At the woman's words, Seop Chun furrowed his brows.

They had said they came to see the owner of the estate, but the question she asked in return was strange.

He understood her asking if they were travelers trying to cross the river, but he couldn't comprehend what she meant by the notice in front of the government office.

A notice literally means a written request for help.

Puzzled by this, Seop Chun thought it had nothing to do with them and was about to answer that it was the former.

"We are just..."

"We came after seeing the notice."

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un abruptly interrupted Seop Chun.

'My Lord?'

Seop Chun looked at Mok Gyeong-un, startled.

Their purpose was simply to borrow a boat to cross the river.

But if they unnecessarily said they came after seeing a notice they didn't even know about and were asked about its content...

"Ah!"

Just then, the haggard-looking woman let out a gasp, and her eyes reddened.

'Huh?'

Seop Chun couldn't understand the woman's reaction.

Wasn't she suspicious?

Then the woman clasped her hands together, bowed her head, and spoke in a choked voice,

"Thank you. I sincerely thank you for coming, even in this manner."

'!?'

Her reaction was as if she was desperately clinging to a straw, willing to grasp at anything.

What on earth had happened for her to react like this?

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un casually asked her,

"We came because of the notice, but we would like to meet the master first. Is that possible?"

‘Ah!’

At these words, Seop Chun finally nodded in understanding.

The woman had a sharp edge to her when asked if they were simply travelers trying to cross the river.

So rather than directly stating their purpose, it was a way to indirectly approach and confirm whether the boat owner’s condition was truly suitable for sailing or not.

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, the woman raised her head, let out a deep sigh, and said,

“I can show you my father’s condition, but he hasn’t been in his right mind since a while ago. It seems to be the result of his past karma.”

‘Ah... so it was true?’

At her words, Seop Chun looked at Mong Mu-yak with troubled eyes.

Mong Mu-yak also couldn’t hide his difficulty.

If they couldn’t cross the river quickly, they might not be able to make it to the gathering point on time.

While they were worrying about this, Mok Gyeong-un showed interest in something else.

Mok Gyeong-un’s gaze was not on the woman but behind her, or more precisely, beyond the main gate.

‘It’s trembling.’

The energy of a vengeful spirit could be felt from inside the estate.

It was exceedingly chilling and ominous.

Moreover, it seemed to have been going on for quite some time, as the entire interior of the estate was heavily stagnant, as if sinking like a boat, being engulfed by this ominous energy.

[That master is possessed by a water demon.]

‘So this is what it meant.’

It seemed the words of the old woman, the innkeeper, were not mere rumors after all.

However, what was peculiar was that such ominous energy was only felt when the gate was opened.

As if someone had artificially blocked it, like at the Corpse Blood Valley cliff...

‘Oh. Is it this?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s gaze turned to the six talismans meticulously attached between the cracks of the gate.

Upon seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un immediately recognized what it was.

‘Six Talismans Four Directions Technique.’

Whoever did it seemed to be a fairly skilled exorcist.

Considerable spell power could be felt from the talismans.

‘They were attached not long ago.’

After absorbing the power of the beast inside the scroll and Third-Eyed, Mok Gyeong-un’s spell power had also reached a level nearly on par with Sun-level diviner. He could vaguely estimate when this talisman technique was formed just by sensing the energy flowing from the talismans.

Thus,

“It seems a skilled exorcist recently visited?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the woman replied with wide eyes,

“How did you know that?”

“The person seems to be proficient in talisman techniques. In addition to the cracks of the main gate, they must have attached them to the back gate and the walls on the east and west sides, right?”

“Yes! Yes! I didn’t know because it was hidden by the bamboo fence, but are you perhaps an exorcist?”

The reason she asked this was that Mok Gyeong-un wasn’t wearing the Taoist robe that exorcists usually wore.

At her question, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and replied,

“My skills are insignificant, but I learned techniques from a renowned exorcist.”

‘Insignificant?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak inwardly clicked their tongues.

He possessed such miraculous exorcism skills that he could even reattach a severed arm, so how could he describe it as insignificant?

It was unnecessary modesty.

Of course, the woman, unaware of this, shook her head and said gratefully,

“It’s no small feat to come here through the heavy rain on this dark night. I sincerely thank you.”

“Not at all. But do we have to stay here?”

“Oh my, what am I thinking? I left the guests standing in the rain. Please come inside.”

The woman led Mok Gyeong-un’s group into the estate.

As they entered, she introduced herself.

Her name was Woo Hyang, and she was the eldest daughter of the estate owner.

Perhaps because Mok Gyeong-un and his group had said they came after seeing the notice, her attitude remained friendly throughout.

However, the two men guarding her were different.

They kept glancing at them with dissatisfied eyes as they guided them.

So, Cheong-ryeong said,

The two men were walking side by side, and their steps were in unison as they moved forward.

It couldn't be considered a mere coincidence, as their walking postures were also quite similar.

Mok Gyeong-un also nodded in agreement.

Come to think of it, the "Meritorious Retainer of Quelling Turmoil" on the plaque next to the main gate could also mean a meritorious retainer who suppressed a rebellion.

Considering this and the fact that he had individuals presumed to be government soldiers as guards, as Cheong-ryeong said, there was a high probability that the estate owner was a retired military official.

Then Seop Chun approached Mok Gyeong-un and whispered,

"My Lord, I apologize, but do you intend to help the estate owner?"

"We need to take the boat."

If he were in a normal state, they could threaten him to sail the boat, but it was the opposite situation.

"I understand that, but..."

"Let's see first. Whether something ominous is attached to him or not."

"What?"

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Seop Chun was puzzled.

He thought Mok Gyeong-un might be trying to help the estate owner, who was said to be on the verge of death, with miraculous exorcism techniques like when he reattached Mong Mu-yak's severed arm.

But he suddenly mentioned checking if something ominous was attached, so he couldn't understand what he meant.

So he cautiously asked,

“What do you mean by that ominous thing?”

“Something like a vengeful spirit or a malevolent ghost.”

“.....”

He became even more confused.

Weren't vengeful spirits and malevolent ghosts closer to superstition and strangeness?

He couldn't understand why his master was saying such things, but Woo Hyang, the estate owner's daughter who was leading the way, said,

“The benefactors who arrived earlier after seeing the notice are guarding the main hall where my father is.”

“The main hall?”

“Yes, the exorcist named Yi Mun-hae said tonight would be the critical moment...”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un nodded.

That was because as they approached the main hall, the ominous energy became more turbulent and stronger.

With this level of energy, it was definitely not low-grade.

“Ah! There’s someone over there.”

Woo Hyang pointed to the front of the main hall building visible beyond the pavilion.

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes flashed with interest upon seeing this.

‘Huh?’

Under the eaves of the main hall’s roof, a man was leaning against the wall, drinking from a gourd.

This man was not very tall, but his muscles were so brawny and developed that he was twice the size of an ordinary person.

But what was more noticeable than this was his nearly bald head with short hair and the prayer beads filled with broken eggs hanging around his neck.

‘A monk?’

His attire and appearance certainly seemed like that of a monk.

In a way, he even gave off a similar feeling to Horse Monk.

Then Seop Chun spoke,

“Oh my. What is he doing here?”

“Do you know him?”

Instead of Seop Chun, Mong Mu-yak intervened and replied,

“Demon-Subduing Fist Warrior, Ja Geum-jeong.”

“Demon-Subduing Fist Warrior?”

It was a unique title.

Demon-subduing literally meant subjugating demons.

There was actually an organization that used this title, and it was none other than Shaolin Temple, known as the birthplace and center of the righteous martial arts world.

Shaolin Temple had monks with various precepts and titles, and the title “demon-subduing” was usually given to martial monks who cultivated both Buddhism and martial arts.

Unlike the title “demon-subduing” that would be fitting for martial monks who practice Buddhism, the aura emanating from that man was rather crude and exuded a rough scent of blood.

Mok Gyeong-un’s question was quickly resolved.

“That man is an expelled monk from Shaolin.”

“An expelled monk?”

“Yes.”

An expelled monk.

Literally, a monk who was excommunicated for violating the precepts.

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un nodded as if he understood.

“Ah. It must be because of the precept against killing.”

The precept against killing.

A monk who practices Buddhism must not kill any living being.

That was no different even for a monk from Shaolin Temple, known as the center of martial arts.

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Mong Mu-yak shook his head and replied,

“No. He was expelled for indulging too much in alcohol.”

‘!?’

Chapter 205 – Karma (2)

“...He was expelled for indulging too much in alcohol?”

Mok Gyeong-un asked in response.

The reason was that it deviated from his expectations.

“It may be hard to believe, but that’s the official reason Shaolin Temple used to expel him.”

At Mong Mu-yak’s words, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes glimmered with interest.

The expelled monk's name was Ja Geum-jeong, wasn't it?

For a monk, he had a rough appearance that exuded a wild aura, but even if that wasn't the case, that man had stained his hands with a lot of blood.

Mok Gyeong-un, sensitive to blood, could instinctively sense this.

"There seems to be more to it than that."

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, this time Seop Chun clicked his tongue and said,

"We're in trouble, My Lord. That bald monk is one of the Three Madmen of the Central Plains."

"Three Madmen?"

"He's one of the three people currently known as the most insane in the martial arts world."

"Insane, you say?"

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, Mong Mu-yak, the deputy chief of the sect leader's direct information department, said,

"Although he's been quiet recently, there was a time when Shaolin was in an uproar because they released a madman due to his incomprehensible eccentric behavior."

"A madman..."

"Shaolin, like other sects, severs the meridians or destroys the danjeon of martial monks they expel, reclaiming their sect's martial arts. But that man still possesses the martial arts he learned from Shaolin. That's why many people in the martial arts world protested to Shaolin."

"Telling them to solve the problem they created?"

Solve the problem you created.

It means the one who caused the problem should solve it.

Mong Mu-yak nodded and said,

"Yes."

"For someone like that, he seems unscathed."

"Indeed. I don't know why, but as the leader of the Nine Great Sects and the center of righteous martial arts, Shaolin should be able to subdue him, but they're simply turning a blind eye."

"Hmm. Interesting."

To the smiling Mok Gyeong-un, Seop Chun said with a worried tone,

"My Lord. I don't know why that man is here, but getting involved with him could be troublesome."

"Is he that unruly?"

"He's someone who has committed eccentric acts regardless of whether they're righteous or evil sects, earning him the nickname of a madman. Moreover, I heard his martial arts are in a league of their own."

“In a league of their own?”

“Yes. Although it seems like he only cultivated external energy, there are rumors that he’s the only one who mastered the Supreme Power, which is said to have been lost hundreds of years ago even in Shaolin.”

“.....”

Shaolin has numerous supreme cultivation methods.

Most of the mind methods they possess are called top-grade methods in the martial arts world.

However, when the worst catastrophe that divided the old and current martial arts world occurred, half of them were lost.

Fortunately, the genuine versions of methods like the Great Vehicle Prajna Zen, Muscle Change Classic, and Marrow Washing Classic were hidden in Buddhist scriptures, allowing their lineage to be fully preserved, and other mind methods could be restored to some extent over time.

However, the only thing that Shaolin couldn’t restore was the Supreme Power and the Great Zen of Bodhidharma.

There was a lack of remaining materials, and it was said to be extremely difficult to learn.

If he had restored it at a young age to that extent, it was no different from possessing the talent of a grandmaster-level genius.

“My Lord. There’s nothing good that can come from getting involved with that man...”

“Why are you all like this?”

At that moment, Woo Hyang, the estate owner's daughter who was guiding the way, stopped and looked at them, puzzled.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

"It's nothing."

Then he spoke softly to Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak.

"Just ignore it."

"What?"

"Didn't you say we need to cross the river quickly, whether he mastered the Supreme Power or not, or whether he's a madman or not?"

"That's true, but..."

"Then does it matter who he is?"

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un walked past the pavilion as if he didn't care at all.

Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders with a resigned expression, and followed behind Mok Gyeong-un.

As they passed the pavilion, the Demon-Subduing Fist Warrior Ja Geum-jeong, who was drinking from a gourd under the eaves of the roof, frantically waved his hand at the empty air.

Seeing this, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak frowned and clicked their tongues inwardly.

‘He’s indeed a madman.’

That’s all it seemed to them.

However, Woo Hyang, the estate owner’s daughter, seemed accustomed to it and called out without paying any attention.

“Sir.”

“.....”

“Sir, these gentlemen are...”

-Swish swish!

At her call, the Demon-Subduing Fist Warrior Ja Geum-jeong waved his hand holding the gourd as if telling her not to disturb him.

Then he continued his incomprehensible actions.

He wildly swung his other hand in the air, which looked bizarre to anyone.

However,

Mok Gyeong-un nodded slightly as if agreeing with Cheong-ryeong’s words.

As they entered the pavilion, the ominous energy was surging even more, and perhaps due to this influence, low-grade miscellaneous spirits that couldn’t even take form were gathering from all directions.

They seemed to be gathering through the earth veins and the falling rain, and although the exorcist had blocked the energy with talismans, it didn't seem to completely stop it.

-Woo woo woo!

-Huu huu huu!

Whimpering sounds could be heard from here and there.

This would only get worse.

“Damn it.”

-Bam bam!

The Demon-Subduing Fist Warrior Ja Geum-jeong drove away the miscellaneous spirits trying to enter the building with an annoyed expression.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes flashed with interest upon seeing this.

This was the reason why both Mok Gyeong-un and Cheong-ryeong were surprised.

In the case of exorcists, they could make contact with strange beings like vengeful spirits and malevolent ghosts through spell power or mediums imbued with it.

However, among ordinary people, although there were occasionally those whose spiritual power awakened and opened their eyes after death, there were hardly any who could make contact with them.

Mok Gyeong-un's ability to directly make contact with the dead or strange beings was closer to something innate.

It could be considered an extremely exceptional case, but that expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong was making contact in a slightly different manner.

The wooden puppet that Cheong-ryeong resided in had difficulty sensing the energy itself.

That's why she was asking Mok Gyeong-un, who could directly discern the energy with his eyes.

It was clearly visible to Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, which had already opened the energy of the Three Eyes in his right eye.

Although temporary, whenever the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong swung his hand at the miscellaneous spirits, the surrounding energy gathered in his hand.

That energy was completely different from what was refined through methods.

It was closer to a natural form.

Now Mok Gyeong-un could understand what she meant.

The natural principles seemed to mean harmonizing with the energy of all things.

However, this was very abstract, so it didn't seem to be a realm that could be achieved simply by recognizing and desiring it.

‘Hmm.’

In any case, if the Supreme Power had such a remarkable utility as Cheong-ryeong said, he couldn't help but be interested.

Just then, Seop Chun quietly spoke.

“My Lord... doesn’t something seem strange?”

“What is it?”

“That expelled monk may be a madman, but something feels eerily ominous as if unknown individuals are lying in ambush around us.”

“...You feel it too?”

Mong Mu-yak also frowned and agreed with this.

In fact, ever since entering the estate, they had been feeling a strange energy that they couldn’t quite put their finger on, but as they stood in front of the main hall building, it had become overwhelmingly strong.

At their reactions, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said,

“You both certainly have good perception.”

“Perception? What do you mean?”

“Considering you can sense the miscellaneous spirits around without spell power.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak’s expressions stiffened.

Was his lord saying this to tease them? But this ominous energy they kept feeling was extremely unpleasant.

They wanted to flee from this place right away.

Right at that moment,

“Ugh.”

Woo Hyang, the estate owner’s daughter, clutched her chest and staggered.

One of the men guarding her grabbed her as she was about to fall.

“Young Lady!”

“Ah...”

Her face, which was already haggard, turned even paler, and her body trembled.

Then,

“Damn it!”

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who had been driving away the miscellaneous spirits with a gourd in his hand, hurriedly approached her.

There was a reason for Woo Hyang’s condition.

That was because three formless miscellaneous spirits were clinging to her.

Her body and mind had already been weakened to the extreme from being enveloped in the ominous energy of the estate for a long time, and the miscellaneous spirits had targeted her.

“These damn things!”

Ja Geum-jeong tried to remove one of the miscellaneous spirits attached to her chest.

The guard holding her shouted,

“What are you trying to do? Get away from her immediately!”

“Get away? You bastard, are you looking down on someone trying to help? If you don’t move your hand, I’ll punch a hole in your face and send you to Buddha.”

His words were not only crude but also vicious.

Angered by this, one of the men intervened and said,

“If you lay a single finger on the Young Lady’s body...”

-Thud!

Before he could finish his sentence, the man collapsed, unconscious from Ja Geum-jeong’s punch.

“What will you do if I do?”

The man supporting Woo Hyang couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

He had thought the monk's physique was good and muscular, but he didn't expect him to be this strong.

"Hey. If you don't move right now, that young lady will become a corpse today!"

"D-don't come any closer..."

"Don't move! Today, this bald monk will open the precept against killing..."

"Threatening like that will naturally lead to misunderstandings."

At the mocking voice coming from behind, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong turned his head with a fierce expression.

"What? You bastard who looks like a long-lived courtesan. Do you think I'm desperate to touch this woman's chest right now?"

Seeing him getting angry, Mok Gyeong-un raised the corners of his mouth.

And he said,

"Interesting."

"What?"

"You're not a madman, just someone who doesn't care about others."

"You bastard, what nonsense are you spewing..."

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un suddenly stretched out his hand.

Thinking he was attacking, Ja Geum-jeong turned his body and tried to assume a fighting stance.

Right at that moment,

-Whoo whoo whoo!

With a howling sound, something hazy brushed past and was caught in Mok Gyeong-un's hand.

They were none other than the miscellaneous spirits clinging to Woo Hyang.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had sucked in the miscellaneous spirits with a technique, chuckled and,

-Sizzle!

He directly exterminated them with death energy.

Seeing the miscellaneous spirits disappear in an instant, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong opened his mouth with surprised eyes.

"You... what are you?"

What was this bastard's identity?

Based on his perception, he thought they were martial artists brought by Woo Hyang, the estate owner's daughter.

In fact, he had sensed energy at the peak level.

But what was that just now?

Not only did he pull the miscellaneous spirits with some strange technique like a vacuum, but he also exterminated them.

Of course, he had to be surprised.

However,

-Whoo whoo whoo!

-Woo woo woo!

Even more miscellaneous spirits began to swarm from all directions.

Their number was countless.

But as the number of miscellaneous spirits increased exponentially like this, even those who weren't exorcists or had their spiritual eyes opened could sense them.

-Startle!

“What is this?”

“Everywhere is...”

Mong Mu-yak and Seop Chun looked around with puzzled expressions.

Although they couldn't see anything, the surroundings were being engulfed by some ominous energy.

"Damn it! There are so many. They said the talismans would block the evil spirits from entering, but nonsense!"

The expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong hurriedly assumed a fighting stance.

The surrounding energy began to gather towards him.

It seemed he was about to confront the miscellaneous spirits trying to enter the main hall in earnest.

At that moment,

"It would be a waste of time."

"A waste of time?"

"Yes. It doesn't seem like a problem that can be solved by catching them one by one."

"No. Then do you have some brilliant idea, you bastard who looks like a long-lived courtesan?"

"Your way of speaking isn't very pleasant."

"What?"

"Let's put out the urgent fire first and fix that later."

As soon as he finished speaking,

-Clasp! Clasp! Clasp!

Mok Gyeong-un formed simplified hand seals with his left hand.

Soldier! Fight! Tear! Array!

They were the hand seals of the Nine Character Vitality Method.

Then, in an instant, an immense spell power filled the surroundings.

-Rumble!

And then,

-Boom!

Four huge pillars shot up from the corners around the main hall.

These were created by Mok Gyeong-un's spell power and technique.

The only one who could see this with the naked eye was the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who had opened his spiritual eyes.

“This is...”

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un placed a talisman on his lips and muttered softly,

“Four Peaks Linking Technique.”

-Whoosh!

At that moment, the four pillars connected, creating a massive surface.

And that surface instantly blocked the surroundings of the main hall building with spell power.

In that state, Mok Gyeong-un raised his hand upward, then opened and closed his palm.

Then,

-Boom boom boom boom boom!

The numerous miscellaneous spirits that had swarmed around the main hall couldn't withstand the vast spell power and instantly exploded.

‘!!!!!!’

Witnessing this scene, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong was momentarily at a loss for words.

Chapter 206 – Karma (3)

During the time when the exiled monk Deok-mun[1] of the Shaolin Temple was still a monk, his Dharma name was Ja Geum-jeong. He was taken in by the current Sutra Pavilion Master, Grand Monk Gong-jeon, who was one of the top five martial arts masters in Shaolin.

Grand Monk Gong-jeon, who took in Ja Geum-jeong after he lost his parents to ongoing famine and bandit attacks, highly regarded Ja Geum-jeong's martial arts talent among the children he had taken in at Shaolin and personally taught him martial arts as his direct disciple.

Living up to these expectations, Ja Geum-jeong's outstanding martial prowess was recognized to the extent that he was even mentioned as a candidate for the next Ten Precepts Monk after just ten years.

However, despite this recognition and Grand Monk Gong-jeon's repeated recommendations, Ja Geum-jeong was repeatedly excluded from the list of Ten Precepts Monk candidates.

Grand Monk Gong-jeon, who considered this unfair, raised the issue during a Dharma Council meeting.

"Amitabha. I would like to ask the Abbot and all of you. Why do you keep excluding Deok-mun from the list of candidates whenever selecting the Ten Precepts Monk?"

It was the Precepts Hall Master, Grand Monk Dae-deok, who answered Grand Monk Gong-jeon's question.

"Amitabha. As the Sutra Pavilion Master is well aware, one must not only excel in martial arts to become a Ten Precepts Monk, correct?"

"Of course. However, in my judgment as the one who directly taught that child, no one has a gentler heart than him."

At these words, Grand Monk Dae-deok, the Precepts Hall Master, let out a sigh and opened his mouth.

"Sutra Pavilion Master."

"Amitabha. Please speak."

"There is a difference between having an upright heart and a gentle one."

“...Precepts Hall Master. You know better than anyone the unfortunate circumstances behind Deok-mun being called to the Precepts Hall several times, don’t you?”

“And that is precisely why that child is not suitable to become a Ten Precepts Monk who will represent Shaolin.”

“How can you say that?”

“Do you want me to directly mention this matter?”

At those words, Grand Monk Gong-jeon suddenly realized his mistake.

He only wanted to give his disciple, Ja Geum-jeong, a chance.

However, because of this, the fact that only he, the Precepts Hall Master, and the Abbot knew within Shaolin was about to be revealed.

“I can understand that seeing things one shouldn’t see when the Spiritual Gate opens is that child’s karma given by Buddha. However, Deok-mun tries to endure it not through the practice of the Buddha’s teachings, but with the alcohol offered in the Dharma Hall.”

Murmuring

At the Precepts Hall Master’s words, the senior monks began to stir.

Grand Monk Gong-jeon tried to settle this.

“Precepts Hall Master, but that’s...”

“Yes. The world that child sees is different from ordinary people. How can living in a world where he sees dead spirits not be painful?”

“You know that, yet...”

“And that is precisely why it cannot be allowed. He has to endure pain and suffering for a lifetime, but he has already succumbed to alcohol several times, unable to control himself, and is locked up in the Seclusion Hall. How can we give the position of Ten Precepts Monk, which requires being a role model to other monks, to someone like that? We should no longer discuss this issue.”

At the Precepts Hall Master’s words, all the monks in the council hall nodded their heads.

Seeing them, Grand Monk Gong-jeon lowered his head with a regretful expression and pressed his palms together.

He wanted to give that child a chance.

However, while everyone said they understood, they looked at the child’s suffering with a distorted view and simply believed it should be overcome through the Buddha’s teachings.

“Amitabha.”

But Grand Monk Gong-jeon thought differently.

How can one overcome everything just by practicing the Buddha’s teachings?

He saw no big difference in telling someone whose leg was cut off to diligently practice the Buddha’s way and that they would be able to walk someday.

“Everyone only sees one side of that child.”

Grand Monk Gong-jeon was truly regretful.

Because Deok-mun could see what others couldn't, he was able to realize even what Shaolin had lost.

However, everyone focused on his faults rather than his merits.

This was the nature of the Buddha's teachings.

This would remain unchanged even as time passed.

"Perhaps it would be right to let that child go, for his own sake."

Papapapapapapang!

Countless evil spirits instantly burst and vanished.

"Ha!"

At this sight, the exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong couldn't hide his surprise, his mouth agape.

After leaving Shaolin, he had been drowning in alcohol to forget the "visible suffering" even a little.

As he sank into alcohol, naturally he couldn't control himself, and thanks to that, he committed numerous eccentric acts and was even called a madman.

It was none other than Monk Imun-hae who pulled him out of this mire.

"You have lived a truly painful life."

Imun-hae was the first to understand these cursed eyes of his and drove away the evil spirits with talisman techniques, allowing him to sleep peacefully for the first time without alcohol.

Taking this as a bond, he had been following Monk Imun-hae and living with him.

However, he couldn't help but click his tongue.

"What kind of fellow is this?"

Monk Imun-hae had said something like this while drinking together.

"I told you your skills are good, so why are you conscious of the sect?"

"Yeah. With your level of skill as a monk, you could receive better treatment wherever you go, couldn't you?"

"Haha. Ja-hyung, I feel good hearing you say that. But just as there are countless masters in the martial world, as you said, the same goes for the world of monks. There are monks far more outstanding and great than me."

"To this drunkard, you're the best."

"I'm grateful for your words, but if a mere itinerant monk like me goes around claiming to be the best, the monks of the world will laugh at me."

"Hmph. Stop pretending to be humble."

At that time, he thought that even if a monk's skills were outstanding, they would all be similar.

He considered them all to be the same.

But when he actually witnessed Mok Gyeong-un's monastic technique of slaughtering countless evil spirits by forming hand seals without even using talismans, he was dumbfounded.

Monk Imun-hae really couldn't compare to him.

"What the hell is this guy's true identity?"

Judging by the energy felt from the outside, he was clearly a martial artist.

But how did he master monastic techniques to this level?

Then,

"Haa... haa..."

"Young lady? Are you coming to your senses?"

Woo-hyang, the daughter of the estate owner who had been suffering from an evil spirit's possession, regained consciousness.

She looked around in a daze.

"What happened?"

Ever since her father became like that, every single day had been so painful that even breathing was difficult.

But now, it wasn't like that at all.

She felt as if her whole body had become light, as if she had returned to the past.

“Young lady, your complexion?”

“My body feels at ease. What happened?”

At this question, the man supporting her hesitated for a moment, then pointed to the exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong and Mok Gyeong-un with a nod.

“I think those guests did something.”

“Those people?”

“Yes.”

He couldn’t say exactly what they did.

However, after Mok Gyeong-un did something, her heavy body suddenly became much lighter.

Even the eerie phenomenon of occasional chills running down her spine disappeared.

Then, Woo-hyang clasped her hands together and bowed her head to them, refusing the help of the man supporting her.

“Thank you. Thanks to you two heroes, my body has become much lighter.”

At her gratitude, the exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong snorted and said,

“This drunkard didn’t do anything. If you want to thank someone, thank that fellow who looks like a long-time courtesan...”

Smack!

“Ugh!”

Before he could finish speaking, Ja Geum-jeong grabbed his nose in pain.

Drip drip

“!?”

Feeling the warm wetness on his hand, Ja Geum-jeong’s eyes widened.

His nose was bleeding.

The blood dripping onto his palm was quickly washed away by the heavy rain, but that wasn’t the issue.

“What the?”

He didn’t even see it coming.

He only realized it after feeling the pain upon impact.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“If you don’t know my name, just call me ‘sir.’ I don’t particularly like being called a long-time courtesan.”

“You... what the hell are you?”

Papak!

The exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong removed his hand from his nose and assumed a martial arts stance.

He had thought that while he didn't know about his monastic techniques, his martial arts skill was only at the Peak (絶頂) level of mastery.

But just now, he couldn't even detect the blow to his nose.

This aroused his fighting spirit.

However,

Pat!

Seop Chun stepped between them, gripping the handle of his Wind Demon Blade, and said,

“Exiled monk. Do not be rude to my lord.”

Of course, he wasn't the only one.

Mong Mu-yak also stood beside Seop Chun and half-drew his sword.

Shing!

Seeing them, Ja Geum-jeong frowned.

The exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong knew from the moment he saw them that these two were Transcendent Realm masters.

Yet, men with such martial talent were pledging allegiance to that fellow who resembled a long-time courtesan.

That made him even more curious about that guy's true identity.

Whoosh!

Energy gathered in Ja Geum-jeong's fists.

Then, a blue light flickered from his fists, forming a strength of fist.

Seeing this, admiration flashed in the eyes of Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak.

“Fist strength?”

“His qi circulation is fast.”

They knew he wasn't an ordinary master, but they didn't know he could circulate qi so quickly to form fist strength.

Unlike their surprise, Mok Gyeong-un was focusing on a different aspect.

This time too, Ja Geum-jeong gathered the surrounding energy to form fist strength.

“Interesting.”

Although he was watching it with his own eyes, it was difficult to understand the principle.

The movement of internal energy through acupoints could be understood as a kind of qi circulation principle, but this transcended the realm of understanding, just like the Art of Sword Control shown by the Society Leader.

It was a technique that couldn't be easily stolen without accompanying enlightenment.

That's why it piqued his interest even more.

“Both of you, stand back.”

Mok Gyeong-un gave an order to Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak.

“But My Lord...”

“It's alright, so please step aside.”

At this, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak simultaneously retreated to the left and right.

However, Ja Geum-jeong still maintained his martial arts stance without releasing it, showing the momentum of throwing a punch at any moment.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Is that fist technique a martial art of the Shaolin Temple?”

“Hmph. With what face would I use Shaolin's fist techniques after being excommunicated? This is the Demon Subduing Attacking Fist[2] created by this drunkard.”

At these words, Seop Chun snorted.

He said it wasn't Shaolin's fist technique, but no matter how you look at it, it resembles the Shaolin Demon Subduing Fist.

The Shaolin Demon Subduing Fist, one of the five fist techniques derived from the Divine White Technique[3], was famous for its fierce yet elegant fist sequence as an offensive martial art.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un, who didn't know this, didn't care at all which one was the original.

He just wanted to know how Ja Geum-jeong circulated his internal energy.

“Was it called the Unsurpassed Power[4]?”

Unsurpassed Power.

The legendary cultivation method that Bodhidharma supposedly created as his final enlightenment before becoming a celestial being.

If one could manipulate the surrounding energy without gathering internal energy inside the body, nothing could be more efficient.

That's why he wanted to grasp its principle even more.

So, Mok Gyeong-un provoked him.

“In the martial world, they say to yield three moves to a junior, right? Come at me.”

“What?”

Ja Geum-jeong scowled fiercely.

He knew from that one move earlier that this fellow wasn't ordinary, but still, he was someone who was known as one of the Three Madmen in the martial world and had a notorious reputation.

Yet, this young fellow was provoking him, saying he would yield three moves to him, so his anger rose.

“Alright. If you're that confident, let's have a go...”

Right then,

Boom!

Before Ja Geum-jeong's words could end, a huge roar erupted from the main hall.

At this, everyone's gaze simultaneously turned there.

Wondering what happened, the wall of the main hall had collapsed at some point, and a man in a gray monk's robe with a Yin-Yang symbol was staggering there.

Seeing this, the exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong cried out in surprise.

“Imun-hae!”

And he hurriedly tried to rush towards him,

Pak!

But Mok Gyeong-un blocked him and shook his head.

Because,

Bulge bulge

The condition of the man called Imun-hae, wearing a monk's robe, was unusual.

Black blood vessels were bulging all over his face, and his eyes were also rolled back, taking the form of white eyes.

“Kekekekek!”

The man laughed towards them in an eerie voice.

Both his appearance and laughter were extremely creepy.

The exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who thought his condition was unusual, shouted roughly.

“Get out of the way!”

Mok Gyeong-un snorted and said,

“What can you do even if I move?”

Gnash!

“Then are you telling me to just stand by and watch?”

“Yes.”

“What?”

Pat!

As soon as the retort ended, Mok Gyeong-un’s figure dispersed and suddenly appeared in front of the possessed Imun-hae.

Flinch!

The eerily laughing Imun-hae was startled by Mok Gyeong-un’s sudden appearance and tried to slash his neck with sharpened nails.

However,

Pak! Crack!

Mok Gyeong-un grabbed his wrist and twisted his arm at once.

He twisted it so hard that the bone protruded through the elbow.

Normally, this level of pain would make one scream, but Imun-hae laughed even more.

“Kekekekek! It’s useless. Do you think this body will feel pain from something like this?”

“Yes. I suppose so.”

“Are you also a monk? This fellow’s body is already mine...”

Slap!

Before he could finish speaking, Mok Gyeong-un slapped Imun-hae's cheek.

Imun-hae's head turned, his eyes wide open.

He felt no pain at all when his arm was broken, but that slap just now made his face burn as if it would char.

“I guess this hurts, huh?”

The startled entity possessing Imun-hae's body turned its head.

“You... who the hell are you?”

Thwack! Crack!

Right then, Mok Gyeong-un kicked Imun-hae's shin.

With his shin broken, Imun-hae was forced to kneel on one knee.

Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un then slapped Imun-hae's other cheek.

Slap!

“Ugh!”

A scream burst out from Imun-hae's mouth at the searing pain.

The entity possessing Imun-hae's body finally realized something was wrong.

This bastard could directly inflict pain on it.

Thus,

‘I need to get out.’

That entity tried to leave Imun-hae's body.

However,

Grab!

Mok Gyeong-un grabbed his shoulder,

Pak! Pak! Pak!

Struggle (鬪)! Rip (裂)! Spread (陳)!

He made a simplified hand seal.

Then the entity trying to escape from the monk Imun-hae was trapped inside the body as if it had become a prison and couldn't get out.

That entity cried out in a fluster,

“You... just what the hell are you doing...”

Slap!

“Ack!”

Before it could finish speaking, the entity's cheek turned to the side.

It was so painful that the entity possessing Imun-hae's body turned its head in disbelief.

But then, Mok Gyeong-un's face entered its white eyes.

Flinch!

‘He’s... smiling?’

This wasn’t the kind of expression someone trying to save the owner of this body from it would show.

Rather, this smile was filled with nothing but malice.

For a moment, the entity unconsciously swallowed its dry saliva.

Chapter 207 – Karma (4)

Flinch!

‘He’s... smiling?’

The entity possessing the monk Imun-hae's body couldn’t hide its bewilderment for a moment.

This wasn't the kind of expression someone trying to save the owner of this body from it would show.

Rather, it was filled with nothing but malice.

‘What the hell is this bastard?’

Slap!

“Ack!”

It was painful, the searing agony every time it was slapped.

It didn't know what technique he used, but because of the eerie energy felt from the fellow's hand, pain was being inflicted on both the physical body and the spiritual body simultaneously.

Thanks to that, screams burst out involuntarily.

Slap!

Imun-hae's cheek turned to the opposite side again.

It was in a state of confusion from the pain burning even the spiritual body.

‘Is, is this bastard going to keep doing this?’

Right then,

As Mok Gyeong-un tried to slap the monk Imun-hae's cheek again, the exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong shouted,

“Stop!”

At that cry, Mok Gyeong-un slowly turned his head.

Then Ja Geum-jeong scowled fiercely and pressed,

“What the hell are you doing, you long-time courtesan bastard?”

“What am I doing?”

“You were yapping as if you could handle it, so what the hell is this?”

Ja Geum-jeong was furious.

That was understandable because the monk Imun-hae was no less than a savior to him and his only friend.

So, he thought with Mok Gyeong-un’s monastic technique skills, he could surely save him, and quietly watched.

But this wasn’t saving; it was close to unilaterally tormenting him.

He stepped in, thinking that if left alone, Imun-hae might die at that fellow’s hands.

“If you don’t take your hands off him right now...”

“If you want, you can have him.”

“What?”

Pak! Whoosh!

Mok Gyeong-un, who was about to slap him, grabbed Imun-hae’s collar and threw him towards the exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong.

Surprised by the sudden action, Ja Geum-jeong hurriedly caught the flying Imun-hae.

Ja Geum-jeong, who set him upright with a gentle force, asked,

“Hey. Mun-hae? Are you alright?”

“Drunkard bastard. Your body seems quite useful.”

“What?”

Grab!

At that moment, Imun-hae, no, the possessed entity grabbed both of Ja Geum-jeong’s arms.

The moment Mok Gyeong-un removed his hand from the shoulder, the entity felt its spiritual body become free again and tried to take this opportunity to move into Ja Geum-jeong’s body.

However,

Whoosh!

The moment it tried to pass through the point of contact, Ja Geum-jeong used the Golden Silk Hand technique to reverse-twist the arms of the entity possessing Imun-hae.

Then he immediately headbutted its face.

Thwack!

“Ugh!”

The entity possessing Imun-hae’s body fell backwards from the headbutt.

Even if it didn’t feel pain, the physical body itself couldn’t withstand the impact imbued with martial power, causing this to happen.

“Damn it! Help me!”

Ja Geum-jeong looked at the fallen Imun-hae and then shouted at Mok Gyeong-un.

Then Mok Gyeong-un grinned and said,

“Didn’t you say you don’t need help?”

“Help me.”

“Well...”

“You bastard!”

Crack! Crack!

At that moment, the entity possessing Imun-hae's body, who had fallen to the ground, slowly got up with an even more grotesque face and charged at Ja Geum-jeong.

“Kieeeeek!”

Grip!

“Kuk!”

However, Ja Geum-jeong grabbed that bastard's neck with one hand.

The bastard possessing Imun-hae's body tried to break or shake off that hand.

Pak pak!

But Ja Geum-jeong didn't budge at all.

The wrist of Ja Geum-jeong, who had a physique nearly twice that of ordinary people and thick muscles, was like an old tree trunk.

Even when using the physical body to exert a strength nearly two to three times that of an adult man, it couldn't break his wrist and could only flail around while hanging.

“Stay still, you little shit.”

Squeeze!

Then Ja Geum-jeong put more strength into his hand and shook the body.

“Kuk kuk!”

From the perspective of the possessing entity, it was maddening.

It wasn't painful, but it didn't know what the hell this monster-like bastard was.

Are these things really human?

While it was bewildered, Ja Geum-jeong looked at Mok Gyeong-un and said,

“Hey! Please save this bastard.”

“I'm not particularly interested.”

“You bastard! Are you really going to be like this?”

“You were the one who refused first.”

“You son of a bitch!”

Ja Geum-jeong spat out rough words in disbelief, then took out a gourd bottle hanging from his waist and gulped it down.

Naturally, the gourd bottle contained liquor.

Although the situation had improved compared to before, he was someone who couldn't live without alcohol.

Gulp gulp!

After downing the liquor in the gourd bottle in one go, Ja Geum-jeong said to Mok Gyeong-un with a flushed face,

“I really don’t like it, but if you save this bastard, this drunkard will do anything he can for you.”

At his words, Seop Chun looked at him with a puzzled expression.

Ja Geum-jeong was famous for committing all sorts of eccentric acts like a madman, true to his nickname “Three Madmen.”

But he’s acting like this just to save one acquaintance?

It was truly unexpected, seeing a different side of him from the rumors.

Then Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth.

“Can you keep that promise to do anything you can?”

“Even if I lived as I pleased, I have never once broken my word.”

“Hmm.”

“You son of a bitch! As long as it’s not an absurd request like asking me to die, there’s absolutely no way I’ll break it.”

“I see. Then it piques my interest.”

“Interest?”

Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un reached out his hand towards Imun-hae, whose neck Ja Geum-jeong was grabbing.

Then a strong pulling force was felt.

This was one of the techniques of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques, the Art of Binding technique.

Of course, to Ja Geum-un who didn't know this, it seemed like a Void Grasping technique.

'He's truly a monster-like fellow. How can such a young lad who hasn't even reached his prime possess such profound internal energy?'

Ja Geum-jun, who had been clicking his tongue, soon removed his hand from Imun-hae's neck.

Whoosh!

At that moment, his body flew and was caught again by Mok Gyeong-un's hand.

'Th-this bastard is too dangerous.'

The entity possessing Imun-hae was startled with fear and hurriedly pleaded in a begging tone.

"Hey. Human. I'll leave this monk's body. So please, let's stop this."

"Who are you to decide?"

"Aren't you trying to save this bastard?"

It clearly heard that damn drunkard and this monster-like fellow negotiating with each other.

If that's the case, their goal should be to save this fellow in some way, so why are they being so aggressive?

To the puzzled entity, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Your rank is low.”

“What?”

“You're just a mere Yellow Spirit rank, but seeing you enter a monk's body, you must have received help from another being, right?”

‘!?’

The entity was quite surprised by Mok Gyeong-un's words accurately grasping its rank.

Regardless, Mok Gyeong-un continued speaking.

“Well, each one isn't much, but to be able to move this many evil spirits and low-ranked resentful souls like you, the one behind it doesn't seem to be an ordinary monster.”

“...You're no ordinary human.”

The resentful soul possessing Imun-hae clicked its tongue and said.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

“I don't think we need to argue about that, and I'm quite busy, you see.”

“Then just go. Why are you trying to help them? This is something these family members brought upon themselves.”

‘Brought upon themselves?’

Mok Gyeong-un was puzzled by the resentful soul’s words.

He thought there must be some reason, but did they really do something to provoke the resentful souls?

Come to think of it, the old woman who owned the inn said something similar.

[That boatman living over there... In other words, the elder of that household committed evil deeds and is dying from heavenly punishment.]

Heavenly punishment.

Usually, such words don’t come out well without some kind of cause and effect.

Isn’t it no different from saying that they provided a bad cause and are paying the price for it?

“What did they bring upon themselves?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s direct question, the resentful soul possessing Imun-hae’s body glared at Woo-hyang, the estate owner’s daughter, who was trembling in fear with a pale face.

“That wench knows very well.”

“You’re saying she knows well?”

“Yes. This is the punishment and karma they must receive.”

“Hmm.”

Mok Gyeong-un looked at Woo-hyang.

She was trembling in fear with a pale face.

What on earth did they do to gather this many resentful souls and evil spirits around here?

While he was puzzled, the resentful soul said in a loud voice,

“Leave, guests. We do not resent you.”

“Get out of that bastard’s body!”

Ja Geum-jeong lashed out with a lion’s roar in an angry voice.

It was so resounding that it pierced through the heavy rain and made the surroundings echo.

The resentful soul clicked its tongue and said,

“I can see that you are no ordinary humans. But when he arrives soon, even you will not be able to save your lives.”

“He?”

“Yes. So leave. Then you can live.”

Rumble rumble crash!

Right then, thunder roared in the sky.

Along with it, even blue lightning flashed.

It was as if the sky was angry and expressing its rage.

The resentful soul revealed its yellow teeth and said in a crazed voice,

“Hehehe. He is enraged. When he comes, that rage will reach even you. Right now...”

Slap!

“Ack!”

Before it could finish speaking, the resentful soul’s head turned.

The resentful soul quickly turned its head, glared at Mok Gyeong-un, and shouted,

“This has nothing to do with you, so I’m graciously showing mercy...”

“Let me say the opposite.”

“What?”

“I need the owner of this estate. So if you and the ‘he’ you speak of quietly leave, I’ll spare your souls.”

“You really...”

“I don’t care about what happened. Count to five.”

“Five?”

“If you don’t get lost within five counts, I’ll indiscriminately exorcise all the resentful souls in this area that I see. Just a warning in case, but threatening me with the lives of the estate owner and the villagers will be meaningless to me.”

“What?”

“If it becomes a hindrance to me, I’ll kill everything alive and dead in this area.”

‘!!!!!!’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the resentful soul’s white eyes trembled.

What kind of bastard is this?

It was going to possess all the people in this estate and curse them if things went wrong.

But this bastard was threatening it in reverse.

Killing everything alive and dead?

‘Empty threat?... No.’

This bastard was definitely not like that.

Seeing him filled with nothing but malice, it was hard to find such extremely biased emotions even among resentful souls.

That's why it didn't seem human.

“…Are you really in your right mind?”

“I’m not particularly interested in things that aren’t mine.”

“What?”

Right then,

“There’s no time, so shall we begin? Five.”

“What?”

“Four.”

No, is he really going to do it?

It was utterly bewildering.

In front of the baffled resentful soul, Mok Gyeong-un counted the numbers with an expressionless face.

“Three.”

Rumble rumble crash!

The thunder became even more intense.

At this, the resentful soul possessing Imun-hae's body clicked its tongue and said,

“This is something you brought upon yourself. If you had just left, it would have ended with their karma, but you...”

“Two.”

“...”

“One...”

It was right after those words ended.

Flash! Boom!

At that moment, lightning struck from the sky and precisely hit the main hall building.

Then, despite the heavy rain, the main hall building burst into blue flames and was engulfed in fire in an instant.

Whoosh! Crackle!

Everyone couldn't hide their surprise at the extremely bizarre sight.

How can a building burn like this when it's raining so heavily?

But then, a human figure was seen from the burning main hall building.

Someone who saw this shouted,

“Father!”

The one who cried out was none other than Woo-hyang, the estate owner’s daughter.

‘Father?’

Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak frowned and looked at the person who came out of the burning building.

He appeared to be a middle-aged man in his late fifties.

Unlike his haggard face that looked almost emaciated, his skin was filled with bulging black blood vessels, and his eyes were dyed blue.

‘Is that person also possessed by something?’

No matter how you look at it, it seemed that way.

But the emanating atmosphere was clearly different from that monk named Imun-hae.

It was spine-chilling enough to overwhelm everyone present.

Right then,

The resentful soul possessing the monk Imun-hae’s body shouted in a crazed voice,

“Guests who have lost fear. All of this is something you brought upon yourselves. His wrath has reached the heavens, so all living things tonight...”

“I thought it would be quite impressive with all that buildup, but it’s just this level, huh.”

‘!?’

For a moment, the resentful soul glared at Mok Gyeong-un with a dumbfounded expression.

He’s saying it’s just this level after seeing a resentful soul that has reached a tremendous rank capable of dyeing this village area with blood?

It had reached the rank of Blue Spirit[1].

To say he has lost fear while facing a resentful soul that can only be reached after its resentment surpasses a hundred years and can be compared to a dreadful evil spirit?

It seemed Mok Gyeong-un’s words angered not only this resentful soul.

Swish!

The Blue Spirit-ranked resentful soul dwelling in the estate owner’s body pointed a finger at Mok Gyeong-un.

Foolish human. Die.

Then, the raindrops from all directions turned into sharp thorns and rushed to pierce Mok Gyeong-un’s entire body.

But right at that moment,

The thorn-turned raindrops stopped as if blocked by something.

Then they turned back into rainwater and fell to the ground.

Swish!

The Blue Spirit-ranked resentful soul dwelling in the estate owner raised an eyebrow upon seeing this.

What just happened wasn't done by that living being.

A high spiritual power had blocked its power.

What on earth is going on...

Whoosh!

Right then,

The color of the pouring rain suddenly changed.

The normal rainwater had turned crimson at some point, dyeing everything in blood.

“Eek! Wh-what the hell is this?”

“Blood... Blood?”

Everyone in the main courtyard couldn't hide their horror at this spine-chilling situation.

‘!?’

At this, the resentful soul possessing Imun-hae looked at the higher-ranked resentful soul dwelling in the estate owner.

In response to that gaze, the higher-ranked resentful soul shook its head with narrowed eyes.

This wasn't something it had done.

Then,

Slither!

From the ground where the blood began to pool, a dignified woman wearing a crown and holding a long pipe slowly started to rise.

‘!!!!!!’

Even among resentful souls, there exists a rank.

And the older the resentful souls, the more clearly they could recognize that rank.

In... Indigo Spirit[2].

It was a rank that one dared not encroach upon.

The Blue Spirit-ranked resentful soul dwelling in the estate owner was so startled that it unconsciously took a step back for a moment.

Indigo Spirit.

According to the Classic of Mountains and Seas, its roots of resentment are close to unforgettable wails, and its existence spans over three hundred years as an old resentful soul.

From the moment it reaches the Indigo Spirit level, it is evaluated to be extremely dangerous, surpassing the spiritual realm and comparable to high-level evil spirits like demonic beasts or diabolic beasts in rank.

It is said to be nearly impossible to exorcise because it is a moving small-scale disaster in itself.

Whoosh!

The pouring rain has completely turned to blood, filling the world with a crimson hue.

Along with the pungent smell of blood, the churning blood brought a spine-chilling fear to everyone present.

Even those who could be called masters, like Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak, were no exception.

They were at a loss for words at the reality unfolding before their eyes.

Is this an illusion? Or reality?

It couldn't be called an illusion because all five senses were telling them it was real.

“Hueuk.”

Splash.

“M-Miss!”

If even they were this startled, there was no way Woo-hyang, the ordinary human daughter of the estate owner, could bear to see this.

The man hurriedly supporting her as she collapsed also had a terrified expression.

He couldn't even look up, not knowing where to fix his eyes.

‘What the hell is this?’

The exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong had his spiritual eyes opened and could directly see the dead and monsters with his own eyes.

But even he had never seen a sight like this before.

The world being dyed in blood seemed to be not just an illusion, but the resentful soul's spiritual power seizing this space itself.

‘This can't be dismissed as a simple resentful soul...’

Just looking at the power encompassing the entire space, it had gone beyond the line of being dangerous.

For a moment, without realizing it himself, the words “Amitabha” almost came out for the first time since his excommunication.

Hoo.

Cheong-ryeong, who had fully manifested from the blood pooled on the ground, removed the long pipe from its mouth and exhaled thick smoke.

Then she said with a sardonic smile,

“How refreshing.”

It had been a long time since she had released all her spiritual power and revealed herself.

She had suppressed her spiritual power as much as possible and hidden herself within the Heaven and Earth Society, but there was no need to do so here.

So it felt like she had been freed from all shackles.

To her, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smile,

“It should be fine to leave it to Cheong-ryeong, right?”

“Isn’t that why you called me? Hohoho.”

Cheong-ryeong laughed leisurely and looked at the resentful soul possessing the estate owner standing in front of the main hall where the blood rain had somehow extinguished the fire.

When the resentful soul’s eyes met hers, it flinched involuntarily.

That’s how clear the difference in rank was between the two resentful souls.

One was an Indigo Spirit rank with a resentment spanning over three hundred years, and the other was a Blue Spirit rank resentful soul whose resentment had reached a hundred years.

‘How can such an existence...’

The Blue Spirit rank resentful soul dwelling in the estate owner inwardly found it ridiculous.

It hadn’t even noticed the fact that such an existence had entered its territory.

It was a truly bewildering situation.

The Blue Spirit rank resentful soul struggled to open its mouth.

“How has an existence like you descended to a place like this with mere humans?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“...”

At Cheong-ryeong’s words, the Blue Spirit rank resentful soul couldn’t easily express its emotions.

Because it was aware that hastily dealing with her when the difference in rank was clear could lead to trouble.

Splash!

Right then, the resentful soul possessing the monk Imun-hae knelt on the blood-pooled ground and said,

“High-ranked resentful soul. Though we may be resentful souls remaining in this world due to resentment, we do not invade each other’s territories and grudges.”

“Invade?”

“This place has been Lord Ha-yoon’s territory for over a hundred years. Please respect his grudge...”

“A child is interrupting while adults are talking.”

Swish!

With those words, Cheong-ryeong lightly waved her hand.

At that moment, hands made of blood erupted from the blood pooled on the ground.

Papapapapak!

Then the blood-stained hands grabbed the arms and legs of the resentful soul possessing the monk Imun-hae.

“Wh-what!”

“Kid, get lost.”

As Cheong-ryeong made a gesture of clenching her fist,

Whoosh!

“Ah, no!!!”

The resentful soul possessing Imun-hae, grabbed by the blood-stained hands, was sucked into the blood on the ground along with the body.

As if the depth was an unfathomable abyss, not even a sound could be heard.

‘!?’

Seeing a Yellow Spirit rank existence being treated like this in an instant, the expression of the Blue Spirit rank resentful soul, no, the resentful soul called Ha-yoon dwelling in the estate owner's body, stiffened.

Even among resentful souls, a respect forms between them as they become older.

That's because as their rank rises, they go beyond being swayed by resentment and instincts, and their reason and self become distinct.

This was even more so for high-ranking resentful souls that had reached the realm of evil spirits.

But the existence before his eyes that had reached the Indigo Spirit rank was not like that.

Rather, it had entered his territory and was openly showing hostility.

“High-ranked resentful soul. You and I have no animosity, so why have you entered my territory and are showing such hostility?”

“Hostility? Do you think this is hostility?”

“If not hostility, then why are you interfering with this? This is something that happened due to the karma created by the Woo family.”

“I suppose so. There's no way an existence like you would move without a reason, right?”

Ha-yoon was an old resentful soul that had reached a high Blue Spirit rank.

For such an existence to try to destroy a household with a curse even though it's not directly entangled with resentment, it wouldn't do so unless something considerable had happened.

However, if they took that into consideration one by one, they would have to back down.

Therefore,

“But this side also has its own reasons.”

“Reasons?”

“Yes. Even for the sake of your face as the master of this area, I advise you. End it at this point. Come out of that person's body right now.”

At Cheong-ryeong's words that seemed to bestow mercy, the eyes of the resentful soul Ha-yoon turned cold.

That's because this place was its territory.

The numerous resentful souls in this area were angry due to what the Woo family had done, and it was the embodiment of their collective anger.

But it couldn't help but be enraged at her casually trying to interfere with their grudge.

“High-ranked resentful soul.”

“...”

“Can you give up the grudge you hold because someone is suppressing you?”

Grudge.

That was the reason for the existence of resentful souls.

Telling a resentful soul trying to resolve its grudge to give it up was no different from telling it to erase its own reason for existence.

At Ha-yoon's words, Cheong-ryeong let out a faint sigh.

Low-ranked resentful souls sometimes yield their will under the pressure of power, but a resentful soul with a deep grudge enough to reach the Blue Spirit rank was different.

Even if they knew the gap in power, they didn't easily bend.

Moreover, it was a resentful soul that had taken root and had its own territory in the form of a earth-bound spirit.

“No choice then. I'll have to subdue you with power.”

At Cheong-ryeong's words, the resentful soul Ha-yoon glared and said,

“I acknowledge that your rank is higher and stronger than me. But this entire area is my and our territory. No matter how much you increase your spiritual power, do you think that territory created by your spiritual power can reach me?”

It was right after those words ended.

Rumble rumble crash!

Along with the sound of thunder, the rain intensified.

Lightning flashed from all directions that had been dyed red with blood.

Then, as if a crack occurred, the space shimmered and shook.

“What is it?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, Cheong-ryeong answered nonchalantly.

“Territory invasion.”

“Territory invasion?”

“A resentful soul with a rank of Green Spirit or higher can create its own territory with spiritual power even outside the area where its grudge is embedded.”

“Ah... the Ghost Realm.”

He knew about this.

What was created by the strong obsession of a high-ranking resentful soul was none other than the Ghost Realm.

“This place is the bastard’s territory where his grudge is tied. It has begun to invade by colliding with this seat’s Ghost Realm.”

If Cheong-ryeong had created her own Ghost Realm with her spiritual power, the resentful soul Ha-yoon’s unique territory was this entire area where his grudge was embedded, not spiritual power.

A unique territory is a place where that resentful soul's grudge is embedded, so the spiritual power is maximized.

That's why the resentful soul Ha-yoon referred to this entire area as its territory.

Whoooooo!

Woooooo!

The cries of numerous resentful souls could be heard from all directions.

Looking around, countless resentful souls had gathered around this area to the point where it was difficult to count their number.

Even if their rank was low, this number was greater than the Corpse Blood Valley Cliff.

Just how many people had died here?

'Damn it. This is way too many.'

The exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who could directly see resentful souls, clicked his tongue.

It was filled with resentful souls in all directions to the point where it was impossible to tell if this was really a place where humans lived or hell.

The situation had become even more serious.

Can that bastard really solve this?

While he was puzzled,

“High-ranked resentful soul. I will return the words you said earlier. If you leave this area right now, nothing will happen.”

“You’ve gotten quite triumphant, huh?”

“I am advising you for the sake of your dignity. Now, back away. The Woo family must receive the karma they have created.”

Rumble rumble crash!

Thunder and lightning struck from all directions, and the surroundings dyed red with blood trembled.

The resentful souls filling the surroundings also seemed ready to push into this territory at any moment.

Right then, Cheong-ryeong raised the corner of her mouth.

Then she said with a sneer,

“Do you think this is all of my territory?”

“This entire area is my territory. No matter how much you further raise your spiritual power, in the end...”

It was before those words could even end.

At that moment, the dark clouds that had been darkening the sky turned crimson.

Then, the blood rain that had been limited to the surroundings of the main hall building spread to the entire village in an instant, and the nearby two hundred acres were completely dyed red.

‘Wh-what the hell is this...’

The resentful soul Ha-yoon couldn’t hide its bewilderment.

This area was a place where the grudges of itself and numerous resentful souls were embedded.

Completely ignoring such a unique territory, she had covered this entire area with her Ghost Realm.

But it didn’t end there.

Cheong-ryeong raised the long pipe she was holding.

Then,

Thud thud!

The heavy crimson raindrops suddenly stopped.

The sight of the dense crimson droplets suspended in the air was truly bizarre.

Right then, Cheong-ryeong smiled and waved the long pipe.

At that moment,

Whoosh!

The suspended blood droplets shot up in reverse.

The blood rain droplets that shot up in reverse flew towards the resentful souls surrounding the entire estate as if being fired.

Papapapapapapang!

As a result, the spiritual bodies of the resentful souls that had flocked were torn to shreds.

They couldn't withstand the overwhelming spiritual power.

Unable to endure the blood droplets spreading in all directions, the resentful souls eventually scattered in confusion.

!!!!!!

At this sight, the face of the resentful soul Ha-yoon distorted miserably.

‘…To the level of ignoring even the unique territory?’

This was a devastatingly overwhelming rank.

No matter how much the rank reached the Indigo Spirit level, this was way beyond imagination.

Cheong-ryeong said to the bewildered resentful soul Ha-yoon with a sneer,

“What to do? Now this entire area is all my territory.”

“…”

At her sarcastic words, the resentful soul Ha-yoon couldn't say anything.

That's how vast the gap between them was.

Right then, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“There’s no time, so let’s wrap it up now.”

“Indeed.”

The resentful soul Ha-yoon turned its trembling eyes to Mok Gyeong-un.

Just what is the identity of that human?

How can such a high-ranked resentful soul follow the orders of a mere human?

It was something utterly incomprehensible.

Chapter 209 – Karma (6)

The resentful soul Ha-yoon had already lost the will to fight against Cheong-ryeong’s Ghost Realm that ignored even his unique territory and covered it.

Although his rank had reached the Indigo Spirit level, he thought that since this was his territory, even if he couldn’t harm her, he might be able to drive her out.

However, that was nothing more than a faint hope.

Cheong-ryeong said to the resentful soul Ha-yoon, who had a dejected expression, with a sardonic smile,

“Foolish one. If the great me sets her mind to it, it’s nothing to drive out you and the evil spirits in this area.”

“…I suppose so.”

“So I’ll give you one last chance.”

“…”

“Return that body to its original owner and leave this area. Then, neither this seat nor these mortals will interfere any further and will leave.”

Cheong-ryeong bestowed her final mercy.

In any case, her goal wasn’t to destroy or drive out the resentful souls in this area.

Her purpose was simply to bring the estate owner, the boat owner, to his senses so that Mok Gyeong-un and his party could cross the river.

Right then, the resentful soul Ha-yoon opened his mouth.

“Why is a great resentful soul of your high rank following the orders of a mere human?”

“A mere human?”

“Yes. I’m curious about that.”

The resentful soul Ha-yoon had already realized that fighting Cheong-ryeong with power was futile.

So he decided to change his approach.

It seemed that this high-ranked Indigo Spirit level resentful soul was following that human bastard.

However, even after being a resentful soul for a long time, he had never seen a resentful soul of this high rank, let alone one filled with grudge, being tied to a human.

In the first place, it was because of that grudge that they maintained their spiritual body and remained in this world.

So the resentful soul Ha-yoon tried to somehow touch Cheong-ryeong's pride and create a rift in their relationship.

Cheong-ryeong took a puff from the long pipe and exhaled.

“Hoo.”

Then,

Bang!

She suddenly appeared in front of the resentful soul Ha-yoon, who was dwelling in the estate owner's body, grabbed his neck, and pushed him against a wooden pillar.

Thud!

“Ugh!”

“I tried to bestow mercy, but you're trying to scheme, huh.”

Squeak!

As Cheong-ryeong raised her spiritual power, the resentful soul Ha-yoon groaned in pain.

“Kuuk.”

“The reason this seat tried to show mercy to you was because I understood the deep grudge you held for staying in this world for such a long time. But if you’re going to pull this kind of nonsense, the story changes.”

“H-how...”

“Do you think destroying a bastard like you is a big deal for this seat?”

“Uuugh.”

“I’ll destroy you right now.”

A crimson haze flickered from Cheong-ryeong’s hand gripping the neck of the resentful soul Ha-yoon.

She was really trying to erase the resentful soul Ha-yoon with a strong spiritual power.

Then, feeling the crisis of destruction, the resentful soul Ha-yoon gritted his teeth and shouted,

“Fine. If you’re going to be like that, I will be with this person’s soul.”

“What?”

At those words, Cheong-ryeong frowned.

Mok Gyeong-un asked, puzzled,

“Why is he doing that?”

“He’s trying to perish together.”

Perishing together.

It means to walk the path of destruction together.

“Hmm. This is troublesome. Can’t we get rid of him before that?”

“If a resentful soul of this high rank earnestly tries to attach to the original owner’s soul of the body and cause harm, it will have an impact in some way.”

“For example?”

“Even if he avoids death, he may suffer damage to his soul and live as a vegetative person who only breathes for the rest of his life.”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue.

If he was going to be destroyed anyway, this meant that he would at least take the owner of the body with him.

Their goal from the beginning was the estate owner.

Since he was the owner of the large boat and the one who could control it, they were trying to save him somehow, but if he acted like this, it would become quite troublesome.

So Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue and then sent a telepathic message to Cheong-ryeong.

“Please stall for some time. Now that it’s come to this, I’ll have to bind his soul with monastic techniques so it can’t attach.”

If a resentful soul of this high rank forcibly possessed someone, it was difficult to forcibly separate them with monastic techniques.

However, temporarily binding them was a separate issue.

If they could just bind him for a while, Cheong-ryeong could destroy him.

Cheong-ryeong lowered her spiritual power without revealing Mok Gyeong-un’s telepathic message and said,

“Why are you so obsessed with them to the point of even accepting your own destruction?”

“...”

“It wouldn’t be related to your fundamental grudge, right?”

The fundamental grudge referred to the real reason this existence became a resentful soul.

At Cheong-ryeong’s words, the resentful soul Ha-yoon opened his mouth.

“You don’t know.”

“What do I not know?”

“You don’t know how great a karma they have committed.”

“You keep saying karma, karma, but did this Woo family do something hateful to you or the resentful souls?”

At Cheong-ryeong’s question, the resentful soul Ha-yoon pointed to the surroundings with his eyes and said,

“Why do you think this place is my territory?”

“…Isn’t this area related to your grudge or where you lost your body?”

“That’s right.”

“Wait, if this entire area is your territory, then not only the Woo family but also the people of the surrounding villages are equally invading your territory, aren’t they?”

“They are different.”

“What do you mean they are different?”

“The residents of this village have been managing my tomb and shrine, which had been neglected for generations, and they set up an altar here to commemorate the souls of the dead.”

“Oh? They are admirable people.”

Even those who become resentful souls due to deep grudges are comforted when someone honors their souls.

Being comforted means that even if the grudge is not fundamentally resolved, the grudge they held is gradually released through the holding of rituals.

“Then what exactly is the problem? What did they do to make you so angry to this extent?”

At that question, the resentful soul Ha-yoon said with fierce eyes, trembling,

“They demolished my shrine that had been on this hill for over a hundred years, dug up my grave, and built their own estate.”

“What?”

At these words, Cheong-ryeong frowned.

She had only asked to stall for time.

But the moment she heard these words, she found it ridiculous.

“Then are you saying that the location of this estate is where your shrine and tomb that people held rituals for you were?”

“That’s right.”

“Ha!”

Cheong-ryeong was astounded.

She now understood why the resentful soul Ha-yoon was trying to take revenge on this family even at the risk of his own destruction.

But that wasn't the end of it.

"That's not all."

"If that's not all, then what else is there?"

"Yes. The owner of this estate was a military officer in the Heavenly Defense Unit[1] belonging to the nearby Navy Regional Command."

At these words, the eyes of Mok Gyeong-un, who was inwardly chanting a spell, narrowed.

As Cheong-ryeong predicted, the estate owner was indeed a military officer.

Moreover, he was from the navy.

"Did you see the meritorious service plaque at the front gate?"

"Yes. Wasn't it written as Meritorious Retainer of Quelling Turmoil, Fourth Rank?"

"Do you think that merit was earned by suppressing rebels who started an uprising?"

"What do you mean by that?"

The resentful soul Ha-yoon pointed to himself and said to the puzzled Cheong-ryeong,

"A few years ago, due to the ongoing famine, people were starving to death throughout the country, and not long after, a plague began to spread."

"Plague?"

“Originally, there was a prefecture near here where over a thousand people lived.”

“And?”

“When the plague broke out among some people there, even the Heavenly Defense Unit of the nearby Navy Regional Command was mobilized to prevent it from spreading.”

“Don’t tell me being mobilized means...”

“It’s exactly what you think.”

“...”

“The mobilized government troops brutally slaughtered the villagers.”

“...”

“And Woo In-yeom, the owner of this body, drove thousands of innocent people fleeing here and drowned them all. Even though most of them were not infected with the plague.”

‘!!!!!!’

At the resentful soul Ha-yoon’s words, not only Cheong-ryeong but also Seop Chun, Mong Mu-yak, and even the exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who were listening, had dumbfounded expressions.

They had guessed that they must have done something to provoke the resentful souls, but it surpassed their expectations.

Right then,

“Th-that’s a lie! Lord Woo did not do such a thing!”

It was the young man who was supporting Woo-hyang, the unconscious daughter of the estate owner.

The young man shouted with a pale face,

“Do you believe the words of that evil spirit, dear guests? Lord Woo is a meritorious subject who killed rebels and prevented the plague! That evil spirit is slandering him to deceive you!”

It was right after those words ended.

The resentful soul Ha-yoon burst into mad laughter.

“Hahahahahaha! Not only did they commit an act that would anger both heaven and man, but they even destroyed the altar where the souls of the villagers who were unjustly drowned were commemorated and prevented them from doing so, and yet you say such things? Hahahahaha.”

He was laughing, but it wasn’t a genuine laughter.

It was anger bordering on lamentation.

As the laughter of the resentful soul Ha-yoon spread in all directions, before long, the cries of resentful souls were heard from the surroundings, sounding like wails.

“Woooooo!”

“Huuuuuuu!”

It was as if the resentful souls were responding to his anger.

Even though they were suppressed and driven away by Cheong-ryeong's tremendous spiritual power, they kept flocking.

As if they were prepared for destruction like the resentful soul Ha-yoon.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong sighed and glanced at Mok Gyeong-un.

She had engaged in conversation to buy time until he completed the spell, but she now understood why they called it karma and were trying to take revenge on the Woo family.

‘Haa.’

Honestly, she didn't want to interfere with what they were doing.

This was literally karmic retribution.

They had to bear the karma of what they had done.

However,

‘The boat...’

Right now, Mok Gyeong-un and his party needed to cross this river.

Although it was covered by the Ghost Realm, the river that was flooded and had heavy rain pouring down was close to being uncrossable for a while.

If they failed to meet the deadline and Mok Gyeong-un couldn't complete his secret mission, it might hinder her own resolution of grudges.

It was a moment of conflicting interests in many ways.

‘But will this guy be swayed by such things?’

Having been together for a long time, Cheong-ryeong knew Mok Gyeong-un better than anyone.

She didn’t know about others, but Mok Gyeong-un, who had a different line of thinking, never wavered for the sake of others’ stories or affection for the sake of his own purposes.

Even in this case, no matter how much she understood their grudge...

Right then,

“This is quite a tragic story.”

‘!?’

An unexpected remark came out of Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth.

Could it be that this emotionally numb guy sympathized with their grudge?

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the resentful soul Ha-yoon said in an earnest voice,

“Human who has a connection with a high-ranked resentful soul. If you truly understand even a little of the feelings of me and the resentful souls who died unjustly, can’t you just back off like this?”

“I’m sorry, but that seems a bit difficult.”

“What?”

“No matter how many died, that’s your circumstance.”

Pak! Pak! Pak!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un formed a hand seal and then, faster than the eye could see, placed a talisman on the forehead of Woo In-yeom, the estate owner possessed by the resentful soul Ha-yoon.

Then,

“Th-this is...”

“I’d appreciate it if you could stay in that state for a bit. It will be over soon.”

Mok Gyeong-un raised the corner of his mouth sardonically.

Seeing that, Cheong-ryeong said in a somewhat disapproving tone,

“Are you really going to destroy them?”

“Yes. Because this is their story, not something related to me.”

“...”

“We need to hurry and cross the river, and if there’s a setback in the task due to their story and I fail the mission, the position of being the fourth disciple will also be lost. Isn’t that right?”

“Hoo.”

At those words, Cheong-ryeong shook her head with a sigh.

As expected, this guy wasn't swayed by such things.

If there was a human who lacked compassion, it would probably be this guy.

There was no other way.

‘Resent me as well.’

Cheong-ryeong tried to raise her spiritual power.

Then, the young man who was supporting Woo-hyang, the daughter of Woo In-yeom, who had been watching with tension, let out a sigh of relief as if it was fortunate.

He was worried that they might side with the resentful souls.

‘No matter what, they are dead things. Does it make sense for Lord Woo and the young lady to die because of these things that were infected with the plague and caused harm to the country?’

Anything that threatened the living was an evil spirit, no matter what.

The young man expressed his gratitude to Mok Gyeong-un.

“I sincerely thank you. If you deal with all those damn evil spirits, Lord Woo will greatly reward you.”

“I'm not doing this for your sake, so there's no need to thank me. I'm just doing what aligns with my interests.”

“...”

At Mok Gyeong-un's curt words, the young man inwardly clicked his tongue.

In the end, he was being arrogant despite needing Lord Woo's help.

Then,

“Ah, Cheong-ryeong, wait a moment.”

“Why?”

Cheong-ryeong, who was about to raise her spiritual power to destroy the resentful soul Ha-yoon, paused for a moment.

Then Mok Gyeong-un said,

“On second thought, it doesn't seem necessary to do that.”

“What do you mean it's not necessary?”

“It was Ha-yoon, right?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, Ha-yoon glared at him without answering.

It was a natural reaction.

However, Mok Gyeong-un said without minding it,

“You should be able to read the memories of the possessed body, so can’t you control the boat with that body?”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the expression of Ha-yoon, who had been engulfed in anger, changed.

Because he immediately understood what this human meant by saying that.

But it wasn’t only the resentful soul Ha-yoon who understood this.

The young man, who had been relieved, shouted in a startled manner,

“H-hey. What are you saying? Don’t tell me you’re going to ask that evil spirit to control Lord Woo’s boat?”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and replied,

“You catch on quickly.”

The young man said in disbelief,

“No. How can you entrust a task that can be asked of a living human to such a wicked evil spirit...?”

“It’s possible.”

Right then, the resentful soul Ha-yoon spoke.

At these words, the anxious young man hurriedly tried to dissuade him somehow.

“Don’t fall for the evil spirit’s words! How can that evil spirit navigate Lord Woo’s boat? Please, dear guest, that evil spirit...”

“Can you make us cross the river right away?”

But Mok Gyeong-un was already not listening to the young man’s words.

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, the resentful soul Ha-yoon replied,

“Although the downpour is severe, if the resentful souls combine their strength, we can safely get the boat across.”

“Oho. Is that so?”

The young man, angered by Mok Gyeong-un ignoring his words and conversing with the resentful soul, shouted,

“How can you believe what such an evil spirit says? If you’re in your right mind, such...”

“Aah. So noisy. Seop Chun.”

“Yes. My lord.”

“Behead him.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the young man’s eyes widened.

What did this man just say?

Right then,

Shwing!

It was right after those words ended.

Shing!

Seop Chun's Wind Demon Blade was unsheathed, slicing through the pouring rain, and then,

Slice!

“Urk!”

It beheaded the young man in a single stroke.

As the severed head of the young man fell to the ground,

Splash!

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said to the resentful soul Ha-yoon,

“There was a brief friction between us due to differences in positions, but since we've reached an agreement, please accept this as a small token of sincerity from me.”

Chapter 210 – On the Boat (1)

Most of the able-bodied men at the estate were retired soldiers from the naval Heavenly Defense Unit.

They moved in unison, placing wooden pillars that would serve as rollers and moving the boat that had been anchored not far from the estate.

What was surprising here was that these dozen or so soldiers were possessed by resentful spirits.

Someone clicked their tongue while looking at them.

“In all my life, this is the first time I’ve seen something like this.”

It was the monk Imun-hae.

The original reason he had come here was to save Woo In-yeom, the owner of the estate.

However, with his skills that were merely at the Profound-level diviner, the lowest among the Four Arts of the Sun and Moon Monastery, he couldn’t suppress a high-ranking resentful spirit of the Blue Spirit level, and instead, he was even possessed by one of the resentful spirits.

But now, the resentful spirit had left his body, and through the exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong, Imun-hae heard about what had happened so far.

“The outcome is truly bitter. Indeed.”

“Tsk tsk. How could I have known? It’s all karma.”

With those words, the exiled monk Ja Geum-jeong gulped down the liquor contained in the gourd bottle.

At first, he had thought that the resentful spirits were the root of the problem.

But now that he knew the actual cause, he couldn't possibly defend the Woo family and their servants.

“Keu. The liquor tastes bitter today.”

“You always said it was sweet, but now it suddenly tastes bitter?”

“Look here, Mun-hae. No, Master monk. Do you know what this drunkard has been realizing these days?”

“What is it?”

“In the end, there is no true right or wrong in living.”

“Right or wrong... That's right. You're correct. Isn't that how all worldly matters are?”

“When I was in the mountain temple, I thought that only what was written in the scriptures was the absolute truth and that all people were in the process of realizing truth, goodness, and beauty.”

He really believed so.

However, Ja Geum-jeong, who had been excommunicated and entered the world, saw and experienced many things and realized that it wasn't the case.

The world was more complex than he thought and had many emotional factors.

Isn't it the same now?

It wasn't the living that were pitiable, but there was a heartbreak story behind the dead.

“Truth, goodness, and beauty, my ass.”

The world was no different from rough waves.

Everyone was just swept away by those waves.

[Look at the world and experience it directly. Listening through someone else's ears and reading books is no different from covering your eyes and plugging your ears.]

‘Your words are correct, Master.’

The words of the one he could no longer call his master came to mind.

Ja Geum-jeong, who had been shaking his head, took another swig of liquor and asked,

“By the way, are you alright?”

“I’m fine. But tell me. Was I really that badly injured?”

“...”

Ja Geum-jeong stared intently at Imun-hae, who asked back.

His body was truly fine.

Originally, the bone of his elbow had protruded, and even his shin bone was broken.

But before that long-time courtesan-like fellow made the possessing resentful spirit come out, he told it to heal the body, and the injured parts were really healed.

‘That bastard must have been rough knowing this.’

Otherwise, there was no way he would have been so brutal while claiming to save the possessed person.

Well, whatever the case, as long as Imun-hae wasn’t harmed, he had no intention of blaming him.

Imun-hae said to Ja Geum-jeong, who was clicking his tongue,

“But will you be alright?”

“What do you mean?”

“You said you would do anything that fellow asks of you because of me, right?”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“How can I not worry? If you get in trouble because of me...”

“Enough. I’m just repaying what I’ve received so far.”

“What have you received from me?”

At those words, Ja Geum-jeong smiled, revealing his yellow teeth with a fierce expression.

“I’ve received a lot. Yes. I’ve received a lot indeed.”

Ja Geum-jeong was always grateful to Imun-hae.

If it weren't for him, he might have really gone insane by now.

He believed that the reason he could still function as a human being was all because Imun-hae acknowledged these cursed eyes of his.

“Oh, you’re making me embarrassed for nothing.”

Pat pat!

Ja Geum-jeong patted his shoulder and said,

“That’s what I meant to say. Anyway, don’t worry. Do you think this drunkard can’t take care of himself?”

“You treat yourself too roughly, that’s why.”

“I told you not to worry. Hehehe. Anyway, I should go and pay off my debt to that long-time courtesan-like fellow.”

With those words, Ja Geum-jeong crossed his arms and walked towards Mok Gyeong-un, who was standing on the hill.

As he approached from behind, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth as if he had been waiting.

“Your close friend is alright, I presume?”

“Yeah. As you said, he’s perfectly fine.”

“He must have consumed some energy to recover, but he should be fine. Then, will you settle the agreed-upon price?”

“Of course. I’ll definitely do that. Tell me what you want.”

Now that he had confirmed that the monk Imun-hae, whom he considered his only friend, was fine, he was determined to keep the prior agreement no matter what.

Then Mok Gyeong-un turned his head and said,

“Then let me receive the formula of the Unsurpassed Power.”

“What?”

As soon as those words ended, Ja Geum-jeong’s expression hardened.

He had been worried about what Mok Gyeong-un would demand.

But he never expected the words Unsurpassed Power to come out of Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth of all things.

“You...”

“Didn’t you say you would do anything as long as I don’t ask for your life?”

“...”

Ja Geum-jeong was at a loss for words at Mok Gyeong-un’s remark.

Of course, he had said that.

But how could he have known that a request that was considered taboo in the martial arts world would come from the mouth of an expert who could use advanced techniques like void grasping?

The bewildered Ja Geum-jeong finally opened his mouth.

“…The Unsurpassed Power belongs to Shaolin.”

“But you learned it.”

“I am an exiled monk. You should know well what that means.”

“Yes. That’s why I’m asking you to teach me the Unsurpassed Power.”

“Haa…”

“You’re not going to break the agreement, are you?”

“I’m not saying I’ll break it. It’s just that it’s difficult.”

Ja Geum-jeong sighed.

Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head and asked,

“What’s difficult?”

“Two things are difficult.”

“Two things?”

“Yes.”

“What are they?”

“First, even if I’m an exiled monk, as a former disciple of Shaolin, I can’t release Shaolin’s secrets to the outside. That would be the case for most sects, not just Shaolin.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

Then he asked,

“Since you say that, I want to ask something I was curious about.”

“What is it?”

“Being an exiled monk means you were excommunicated from that sect, so why did they leave your martial arts intact?”

“That’s...”

There was a circumstance he couldn’t reveal.

It was also related to his master, Sutra Pavilion Master Gong-jeon.

Originally, as Mok Gyeong-un said, Shaolin also cuts off the energy meridians or destroys the danjeon of a monk who is excommunicated.

However, Grand Monk Gong-jeon had secretly sent him out of Shaolin five days before the originally scheduled excommunication ceremony.

As he sent him out, Grand Monk Gong-jeon strongly advised him.

[If someone asks about the breathing technique you learned, tell them it's the Unsurpassed Power.]

[What? This is just...]

[Yes. It's a coincidence I realized while looking at the traces on the wall during Bodhidharma's wall-facing meditation. But tell them it's the Unsurpassed Power.]

[Why is that?]

[So that you can preserve your body intact.]

'!?'

[If you say that you, Deok-mun, no, Geum-jeong, have mastered the Unsurpassed Power that hasn't even been restored yet, Shaolin won't be able to touch you easily. No, this poor monk will make it so.]

[...Master.]

Ja Geum-jeong had no great attachment to martial arts.

He was going to be excommunicated anyway, so what difference would it make if he lost it?

However, he couldn't help but be moved by his master's consideration.

[Don't be too distressed about having those eyes. There is a reason for everything. So live firmly and freely as much as you suffer.]

That was the last conversation he had with his master, Grand Monk Gong-jeon.

Since then, whenever someone questioned his martial arts as the Unsurpassed Power while Ja Geum-jeong roamed the martial arts world, he neither denied nor affirmed it.

It was because he wanted to keep his master's request while not telling a lie that would disgrace the sect.

‘I thought it would be enough even if I didn't explicitly say it.’

He never thought that someone unrelated to Shaolin would demand the Unsurpassed Power like this.

In fact, who would dare to covet the martial arts of Shaolin, which could be called the heart of the Central Plains?

It was a truly bold request.

Then Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Seeing that you're not answering, is the rumor true?”

“Rumor?”

“Yes. I heard that Shaolin can't touch you because they haven't been able to restore the Unsurpassed Power.”

“...”

Ja Geum-jeong didn't answer anything to this.

It was half-true and half-false, but he couldn't reveal it for the sake of his promise with his master.

“You’re not denying it. Then what’s the second difficulty?”

“That’s...”

“That is?”

“There is no such thing as a formula for the Unsurpassed Power.”

“What?”

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un frowned.

Does it make sense to say that he doesn’t know the formula of the cultivation method he learned?

However, this was the truth.

‘I realized this by looking at the traces on the cliff of the wall-facing hall in the Bodhidharma Cave. But no one except me could see those traces.’

It was a truly strange occurrence.

Even his master, Sutra Pavilion Master Gong-jeon, was the same.

To share this realization with Grand Monk Gong-jeon, he showed him the cliff of the wall-facing hall, but even he couldn’t see the traces.

[Can you really see the traces?]

[It's true.]

[Oh... Amitabha. It's a truly mysterious thing.]

Because of that, Ja Geum-jeong could know.

The fact that only he could see these traces.

‘Although I can’t reveal the fact that it’s not the Unsurpassed Power, if he finds out there’s no formula, he won’t be able to make this request anymore.’

It didn’t matter even if he didn’t believe it.

Because he definitely wasn’t lying.

As expected, Mok Gyeong-un looked at him with suspicious eyes.

Ja Geum-jeong didn’t avoid his gaze.

After staring for a while, Mok Gyeong-un finally said,

“How did you learn it if there’s no formula?”

“…I don’t know. I also suddenly realized it after seeing the traces left on the wall.”

“You suddenly realized it?”

“Yes.”

“Hmm.”

“Even if you can’t believe it, I can’t help it. This is the truth, I swear to the heavens.”

At his vow, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue softly.

In fact, Mok Gyeong-un didn’t believe in such words of swearing to the heavens.

However, looking at Ja Geum-jeong’s confident attitude of not avoiding his gaze at all, it seemed like it wasn’t a lie.

“Realizing a cultivation method without seeing the formula...”

“I can’t teach it not only because of the first difficulty but also because of the second reason. I hope you understand that.”

“Understand...”

“Yes.”

“What if I can’t understand?”

“What?”

“I really want to learn that from you.”

“...How can I teach something when I don’t even know the formula? And I already said I can’t give you Shaolin’s secrets.”

“Even if I kill that monk Imun-hae?”

‘This bastard!’

As soon as those words ended, Ja Geum-jeong’s expression distorted fiercely.

He may not care about others, but he absolutely couldn’t forgive anyone touching his master, Grand Monk Gong-jeon, and his only friend, the monk Imun-hae.

“Then one of us will have to die here today.”

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said,

“Will it really be me?”

Unlike his laughter, the thick murderous intent emanating from his eyes.

Feeling this, Ja Geum-jeong’s hands and feet trembled faintly.

How can a guy who hasn’t even reached his prime have such a strong oppressive aura?

“…Even if this drunkard dies, if you touch Imun-hae, I will never forgive you.”

He was fully prepared.

If he had cared about his life, he would have already told everything.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been closely observing Ja Geum-jeong's reaction, shrugged his shoulders and said,

“It seems to be true.”

‘Huh?’

Ja Geum-jeong, who had been gathering energy in his fists and was ready to fight at any moment, couldn't hide his bewilderment.

Mok Gyeong-un said to him,

“Seeing that someone who cherishes that monk's life so preciously only considers fighting with his life on the line as the answer, it doesn't seem like you're trying to deceive me.”

“Ha! Are you testing this drunkard now?”

“If it's a test, then it's a test. I don't believe in those lip service words of swearing to the heavens.”

“...”

So he was testing him?

Ja Geum-jeong clicked his tongue.

However, if he could make Mok Gyeong-un give up his request for the Unsurpassed Power even in this way, he didn't mind.

“It's unpleasant to be tested, but since the reason I couldn't accept your request was the cause, I won't blame you. Instead, tell me your other request.”

“If you’re going to make excuses one after another, there seems to be no point in even making a request.”

“Damn it! This isn’t because I’m deliberately trying to refuse, but because I really can’t help it.”

“Yes, yes. I’m sure that’s the case. So if you refuse the request again this time, I’m thinking of just putting the resentful spirit back into that person’s body.”

“What?”

“Wasn’t that the condition between us in the first place? If you can’t accept it, we just return to the original state.”

Gnash!

Ja Geum-jeong gritted his teeth at Mok Gyeong-un’s words.

It wasn’t wrong, but he couldn’t help but get angry at him threatening like this.

So Ja Geum-jeong struck his thick chest with his fist and said,

Thud thud!

“Fine. Then I’ll make a clear oath.”

“An oath?”

“Yes. As long as it’s not asking for my life, demanding the Unsurpassed Power, or harming Shaolin and Imun-hae, I will agree to anything. If I can’t keep this, I will end my own life right here.”

“Oho. Really?”

“A man does not speak with two mouths.”

At his strong pledge, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly said,

“Good. Then kneel right here and swear loyalty to me.”

‘!?’

Once again, at the unexpected request, Ja Geum-jeong was momentarily at a loss for words.

At his reaction, the corners of Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth curled up sardonically.

If he couldn’t have the formula, it would be enough to slowly examine it while keeping Ja Geum-jeong by his side.

As a bonus, he would also gain a useful slave.