

Mayhem 221

Chapter 221 – Mixed-blooded (2)

Song-ah, the real daughter of the Hong Bong Meat craftsman, who had fallen over after being pushed by the masked Embroidered Uniform Guards, widened her eyes.

It was because of the face that was revealed when the mask cracked.

Although it was only half, from the blue eyes to the high nose bridge and that exotic face, anyone could see that he resembled a person from the Western Regions rather than the Central Plains.

“My lord...”

Without realizing it, she called out to the masked Embroidered Uniform Guards, no, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard.

The man, covering his face with his hand, scolded her.

“Don’t look at me!”

Instantly, she lowered her head without realizing it.

Even if he had just shouted, she would have been startled, but when an expert of that level yelled with killing intent, it was only natural for an ordinary person like her to feel her heart skip a beat.

-Gnash!

However, even at her reaction, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard became even more agitated.

He was extremely wary of his face being exposed.

[Blue eyes?]

[Why is a bastard who should be in the Western Regions here?]

[Filthy foreigner's child!]

These were the words he had heard even before he could walk.

The countless acts of discrimination he had faced simply for being different had tormented him and made him emotionally closed off.

If he hadn't met his master, his life might have taken a turn for the worst.

However, he still didn't want to show his face to anyone.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, covering the exposed area with his hand, glared at Mok Gyeong-un, who had shattered his mask like this.

But then...

"Why are you so embarrassed?"

"What?"

"There's no particular flaw on your face, so why are you covering it like that?"

At these words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's expression distorted terribly.

Was this guy mocking him now?

He was already sensitive about his face being exposed, and now his blood was boiling.

‘At least this bastard!’

-Papak!

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard stomped the ground twice.

Along with that, his figure dispersed like an afterimage, split into two, and simultaneously charged toward Mok Gyeong-un.

The two split figures executed stances simultaneously.

‘Cloud-Sending Palm Technique, 6th Stance, Secret Softness Rush!’

‘Terrain Fist Technique, 4th Stance, Rock-Shattering Form!’

The left figure charged softly at an angle that was difficult to gauge the distance, while the right figure unleashed a heavy, destructive fist technique.

‘Soft palm and heavy fist?’

-Papak!

In response, Mok Gyeong-un also stomped the ground twice.

Then, just like the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, his figure split into two along with afterimages.

Seeing this, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's eyes sharpened.

'It's certain.'

It was absurd.

He had a feeling it might be the case, but this fellow was utilizing the same footwork of the lightness skill as him.

Just what was going on?

In the first place, the footwork of a lightness skill wasn't something that could be imitated simply by watching.

One needed to know the exact breathing technique and hand seals to execute it.

However, the important thing now wasn't that.

'I need to stay calm.'

Even if this fellow had superficially imitated his lightness skill, he thought he wouldn't be able to fathom its depth.

Thus, the two figures split from the two individuals clashed.

-Papapapapak!

The afterimages intertwined, and a bizarre confrontation unfolded.

Certainly, the movements of the two afterimages performed by the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, who could be considered the original, were incomparably more natural.

However, Mok Gyeong-un countered this by executing different stances with both hands.

‘Again?’

Executing different stances with both hands was even more troublesome to deal with than the split body technique.

That was because, although he didn’t know how it was possible, the stances executed independently by both hands retained their full power.

-Papapapak!

‘Kuk!’

As a result, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard had no choice but to be pushed back.

He couldn’t fathom this fellow’s true identity.

From the moment he split his figure into two using the lightness skill, it was equivalent to splitting his thoughts into two, but on top of that, he executed different stances with both hands.

‘He’s a monster.’

Excluding his master and those two in the imperial palace, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard was confident that no one within Gaebong could match him in pure martial arts.

However, he had never imagined that he would be pushed back in a stance battle.

-Papapapapak!

In the end, unable to withstand the technique battle, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard was the first to distance himself.

-Pat!

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un wouldn't let him go.

He tried to follow immediately.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, glaring at Mok Gyeong-un, had a solemn look in his eyes.

At this rate, he couldn't defeat this person.

In that case, he had to unleash his secret technique, which could be considered his full power.

[You, who haven't fully mastered the essence of this martial art, can only handle up to the second class at best. However, if you truly encounter an unexpected situation, I will pass on the secret technique so that you can execute the fourth class for a single stance.]

This was his ultimate secret technique that he had learned from his master.

He was confident that even this monstrous fellow wouldn't be able to defend against it.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, who was propelling his body backward to create distance, placed his foot on the ground and bent his knee.

Along with that...

-Bang!

He fiercely kicked the ground...

-Swoosh!

A whirlwind and fierce wind surged, and a bizarre event occurred.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's figure split into four.

'Four?'

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes sparkled with interest.

He thought splitting afterimages into two was the limit, but he never expected it to split into four.

However, the breathing method was completely different from before, and this wasn't a stance that could be replicated instantly just by watching.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, split into four, charged toward Mok Gyeong-un.

"Haap!"

Stances executed with a strong shout.

-Papapapapapapa!

They consisted of four entirely different schools of martial arts: fist, palm, leg, and claw.

However, these martial arts were linked in an extremely clever manner.

Therefore, their power was on a different level compared to when the afterimages were split into two.

The momentum was truly like a storm.

-Pat!

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been following the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, distanced himself by propelling his body backward.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard shouted at him.

“Do you think you can dodge it?”

-Papapapapak!

If a monstrous fellow like him retreated, it meant he couldn’t find a way to break through his secret technique.

He couldn’t miss this golden opportunity.

Right at that moment...

“If it’s at this level, even if it’s not fully complete, it’s worth testing out.”

-Sreung!

Mok Gyeong-un drew the Evil Commandment Sword from the scabbard on his back.

The Evil Commandment Sword, revealed from its scabbard, emitted a strong killing intent along with its sword aura.

‘It’s not an ordinary sword.’

Although it was a precious sword, it felt somewhat ominous.

However, the sword wasn’t the issue.

The moment Mok Gyeong-un held the sword and assumed a stance, the atmosphere changed.

As if a volcano about to erupt, a sense of discomfort greatly intensified.

‘What is it?’

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard was confident of his victory from the moment he executed his secret technique.

However, for some reason, the intensifying discomfort from Mok Gyeong-un didn’t boost his fighting spirit but rather made him feel cautious.

Right at that moment...

-Pat!

Mok Gyeong-un, who had assumed a stance, swung his sword towards him.

The first sword technique wasn’t very powerful.

It was utterly ordinary, but...

‘Was I overthinking?’

If it was at this level, perhaps he had been unnecessarily cautious.

Did he think he could counter the fourth-class secret technique with a stance composed of such ordinary sword techniques?

-Papak!

Thus, the fourth class and Mok Gyeong-un’s sword technique clashed.

The momentum of the fourth class, surging like a storm as if four experts were attacking together, was truly unstoppable.

‘I’ll settle this decisively.’

Although the killing intent was sufficient to protect his hands and feet, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard further concentrated his martial power and transformed it into strong qi.

His two hands and two feet shimmered with a blue light.

However...

-Clang!

It was when about three techniques clashed.

Mok Gyeong-un's Evil Commandment Sword turned black at one point.

'What in the world?'

The moment the strong qi clashed, blue sparks flew, and a strong pain surged through his palms.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard inwardly questioned this.

He didn't know what this black, ominous energy on the sword was, but it was distorting his strong qi with each clash.

However, that wasn't the only problem.

-Cha cha cha cha chang!

'The sword techniques in a single stance exceed six?'

The sword techniques contained in Mok Gyeong-un's sword stance went beyond common sense.

Instead of transitioning to the next stance, the sword techniques continued to unfold, creating trajectories that were completely unexpected.

And as the trajectories increased...

-Cha cha cha cha chang!

'No way!'

The power of the stance was rising.

Clearly, at the moment of clashing with the stance, there were several flaws visible.

However, as the trajectories increased, let alone flaws in the sword technique, it was difficult to find even a gap.

A sword technique that grew stronger and more perfect with each clash, just what kind of swordsmanship was this?

-Cha cha cha cha chang!

It was the moment when the sword techniques exceeded seventeen.

Three of the afterimages executing the fourth-class stance dispersed, and only one figure intensified.

In that instant, Mok Gyeong-un's sword thrust towards the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's brow.

His pupils trembled wildly at this.

'I can't block it.'

The sword aimed to pierce his brow without giving him a chance to react.

Numerous memories flashed through the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's mind like a kaleidoscope in the face of death.

Was this how he was going to die?

Right at that moment...

-Pak!

The sword, thrusting towards his brow with tremendous momentum, suddenly stopped.

Just before it touched his forehead.

-Drip!

However, as if it couldn't completely extinguish the momentum, blood flowed from a scratch on the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's brow.

-Gulp!

As the sword stopped right before his death, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard unknowingly swallowed his saliva.

Why did it stop?

He couldn't understand it at all.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard finally asked.

"...Why did you stop?"

To his question, Mok Gyeong-un smiled nonchalantly and replied.

"I almost left a scar on your face."

“Scar?”

“Yes. I thought your face needed to be as intact as possible if I were to skin it. But unfortunately, a scratch appeared. Well, I guess this much is fine.”

-Shudder!

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard felt a chill run down his spine, finding it absurd.

The reason he stopped the sword was to avoid leaving a scar on his face?

Was he really planning to skin his face?

“Are you out of your mind...”

-Swish!

At that moment, the Evil Commandment Sword’s blade moved towards the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard’s neck.

The black, ominous killing intent seemed ready to sever his neck at any moment.

“I said your face needs to be intact, but I never said I wouldn’t kill you. So calm down.”

“...”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s threat, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard was at a loss for words.

It was a complete defeat.

He was no match for this monstrous fellow.

Even with the secret technique he had learned from his master, he couldn't possibly win against this opponent. Perhaps the outcome had been determined from the beginning.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, looking down at the Evil Commandment Sword touching his neck, asked.

"...Since I'm going to die anyway, tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"That sword technique that broke the fourth class... What is its name?"

"Ah, this sword technique?"

"Yes."

He wanted to know at least this one thing.

Since it surpassed the secret technique his master had taught him, it must be a renowned sword technique.

However, unexpected words came out of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth.

"Hmm. What should I do about this?"

"What do you mean? What are you saying?"

“I’ve only created one stance so far, so I haven’t named the sword technique yet.”

“Wh-What did you say?”

Upon hearing those words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard’s mind momentarily went blank.

What did he just hear?

He thought this exquisite and peerless sword technique must be a renowned and extraordinary swordsmanship.

But this fellow said he had personally created it?

‘Ha...’

It was even absurd.

Just what kind of being had he faced?

How could he claim to have created such an incredible sword technique himself?

“...I can’t believe it. You created this peerless sword technique?”

“Do I have a reason to lie to someone I’m about to kill?”

‘!!!!!’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard was rendered speechless.

If what this fellow said was true, it was even more terrifying.

It meant he had not only faced a monster with innate martial talent but one with the qualifications of a Grand Master and had been defeated.

‘Does such a person really exist?’

He was genuinely astonished.

To think he would face a monster capable of creating martial arts himself.

The face of the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, who had been in despair and felt a sense of futility due to his defeat, gradually relaxed.

He even felt somewhat fortunate.

Perhaps this was the best situation a martial artist could face in death.

When and how would he ever encounter such a worthy opponent?

‘Yes, this might be for the best.’

In any case, his life had been manipulated by that fellow.

It might not be bad to die now without causing trouble for his master.

Was it because his mind was settled?

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard spoke to Mok Gyeong-un with a serene face.

"I have no more regrets. Kill me."

'Hoho.'

At his words, interest flashed in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

He had met countless people, but he had never encountered someone who truly settled everything and accepted death in the face of it.

Yet, this person was genuinely accepting his death with a clear mind.

He was truly a unique individual.

"Hurry up and kill me."

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard spoke again.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been staring intently at him, opened his mouth.

"It's nice that you're being clean about it, but can I ask you one thing before I kill you?"

To this question, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard replied firmly.

"Just because I've cleanly accepted my defeat doesn't mean I have an obligation to tell you everything about myself. So kill me."

This was his last shred of dignity.

And in any case, he knew what the fellow would ask.

It would be something like why he, a Thousand-men Commander of the imperial palace, was a blue-eyed person from the Western Regions.

He didn't want to argue about such things until the moment of his death.

However, contrary to his expectations, completely different words came out of Mok Gyeong-un's mouth.

"Is that so? That's quite a shame. I was curious as to why you have something like a bug in your stomach."

'!!!!'

The moment he heard those words, the eyes of the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, who had been prepared for death, widened.

Just what was this fellow?

Chapter 222 – Mixed-blooded (3)

"Just because I've cleanly accepted my defeat doesn't mean I have an obligation to tell you everything about myself. So kill me."

"Is that so? That's quite a shame. I was curious as to why you have something like a bug in your stomach."

'!?'

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's eyes widened.

'How does he know about that?'

This was something even his master didn't know.

How much had he been manipulated by that fellow because of this, unable to say anything even to his master?

Even if he wanted to speak, he couldn't do anything because of the thing in his stomach.

That was because there was a prohibition that prevented him from even mentioning it.

'How did he find out?'

Even if he wanted to tell someone about this fact, he couldn't do anything due to the prohibition.

The moment he mentioned it even slightly with his own mouth, the thing in his stomach would destroy his danjeon, and on top of that, it would drive him to his death.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been observing him intently, spoke.

"It seems I'm right."

"..."

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard couldn't give any answer to Mok Gyeong-un's words.

He didn't know if saying yes or no would be a problem, but even a slight mistake could lead to his danjeon being destroyed, so he had to be cautious.

He hoped this person would dig deeper into this matter.

“Hmm.”

“...”

“Your expression looks like you’re desperate to say something but forcibly holding back.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard’s face brightened.

“It seems I’m right?”

He was truly a clever fellow.

Although he despised showing his face to others, at this moment, it seemed he needed to make the most of his expressions.

-Judging by his reaction, it really seems to be the case.

Cheong-ryeong said to Mok Gyeong-un.

Mok Gyeong-un nodded and replied through voice transmission.

-It appears so.

-To think there’s a bug inside his body...

-It seems to be a real Poison Gu.

-A real Poison Gu?

The method of creating a Poison Gu is extremely vicious.

Dozens or hundreds of poisonous creatures are put into a jar, and the lid is not opened until only one survives.

The worst one that survives is called a Poison Gu.

When Mok Gyeong-un said it was a real Poison Gu, he meant a proper venomous insect, similar to Gyuso Hwa, born by trapping the vengeful spirits of Corpse Blood Valley and having them devour each other, rather than a methodical issue.

Of course, Cheong-ryeong also understood Mok Gyeong-un's words correctly.

-Then, is there really a Poison Gu inside this Western Region fellow's stomach?

-Yes. It's definitely there.

It was clearly visible to Mok Gyeong-un's right eye, which had opened the power of the Third Eye.

Of course, he hadn't realized this from the beginning.

He had opened the power of the Third Eye to observe the breathing technique of the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's lightness skill, but he discovered another qi condensed in his stomach.

A Poison Gu, which feeds on blood and qi within the body, was a living being, so it possessed a distinctly different qi compared to ordinary insects.

-It's surprising. To think there was someone who could actually handle a Poison Gu.

-That's right. I've heard from Grandfather and read about it in the Southern Barbarian Poison Book, but this is my first time seeing one actually inside a person's body.

Interest flashed in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

His interest was exceptional when it came to poisons and medicinal ingredients, as he was knowledgeable about them.

Especially if it was a poison he had only read about in books and had never seen in person, his interest was even greater.

-Should a Poison Gu, which is a type of poison, be considered an addiction?

-It can be considered an addiction. However, I've heard that a Poison Gu is closer to a means of restraining others rather than just serving as a poison.

-A means of restraint?

-Yes. This type of Poison Gu implanted inside the body doesn't come as a single one but as a pair.

-A pair?

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un spoke to the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard.

"Even if you're under a prohibition, nodding or shaking your head won't cause a major problem, so stop making expressions."

"..."

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard frowned, feeling embarrassed.

Paying no heed to his reaction, Mok Gyeong-un continued.

"Is it a Poison Gu?"

'Ah!'

At that question, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard nodded with trembling eyes.

He had never been able to tell anyone, but he never dreamed that someone would appear who could accurately identify the existence of this Poison Gu inside his body.

Seeing his brightened expression, Mok Gyeong-un continued.

"It's unlikely that you would put something like this inside your body voluntarily, so someone must have forcibly inserted it, right?"

"..."

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard nodded at that question.

"Then, regardless of your own will, you're following the orders of the one who put the Poison Gu inside you?"

"..."

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard nodded.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been staring intently at him, became lost in thought for a moment and then asked.

“Is it someone inside the imperial palace?”

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard nodded.

It was like playing twenty questions, but so far, there were no “no” answers.

“Is it someone in a high position?”

The Embroidered Uniform Guards nodded at that question.

“I see. Well, to be honest, I’m not particularly interested in who did it, so let’s end it at this point. Rather, this question would be better.”

“...”

“Do you want to get rid of the Poison Gu?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard nodded without a moment’s hesitation.

It went without saying that he wanted to get rid of it.

Could it be that this person knew a way?

He stared intently at Mok Gyeong-un with desperate eyes, and Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said.

“That’s good.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un untied the black cloth covering his face.

Surprised by his sudden action, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard couldn't help but be inwardly astonished.

'What?'

Although his voice sounded somewhat young, he thought that someone with the martial prowess to create a peerless sword technique would have a certain age.

However, this face didn't look like he had even reached his twenties.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard asked with an absurd expression.

"You... don't tell me you're not even in your twenties?"

"No. I'll be eighteen soon, but for now, I'm still seventeen."

"Ha!"

It was unbelievable.

He was only seventeen years old?

Was he saying that he had been overwhelmed in martial arts by such a young fellow?

He was at a loss for words.

As he looked at Mok Gyeong-un, who was younger than he expected, with bewilderment, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard suddenly had a question.

Why did this fellow reveal his face?

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un spoke.

“I’ll give you a choice.”

“A choice?”

“Yes. Even if you die here, you probably won’t feel particularly wronged since you’ve already accepted death, but should I say I’m giving you an opportunity?”

“Giving me an opportunity? What on earth are you talking about?”

“It’s simple. If you help me with what I’m trying to do, I’ll help you remove the Poison Gu from your body.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard momentarily hesitated.

This fellow was literally proposing a deal to him.

‘He said he would help me remove the Poison Gu?’

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard’s mind became complicated in an instant.

He couldn’t do anything, not even tell his master the truth because of the Poison Gu.

However, if he could just remove this, the situation would change.

Wasn't this the moment he had longed for?

However...

'What if it's a lie?'

In the first place, this proposal itself was no different from blackmailing him by holding his weakness.

Moreover, what if this fellow's words were false?

Could he really remove the Poison Gu?

'...That fellow said even Hwata or Pyeonjak couldn't remove the Poison Gu.'

So how could this fellow eliminate it?

His mind gradually filled with doubts.

Mok Gyeong-un then spoke to him.

"You're suspicious, aren't you?"

"...Do you think I can trust your words as they are?"

“The Poison Gu attached inside the body isn’t a single one but a pair. There’s a parasitic type in the host’s body and a commanding type that controls it. The parasitic type is thoroughly controlled by this commanding type, and if it tries to cause harm, it will harm the host itself. Am I wrong?”

At these words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard’s eyes trembled.

It was too accurate to deny.

It was almost the same as what that fellow had said.

[Don’t act rashly. I’m warning you in advance, as long as the commanding type is with the headquarters, you must faithfully follow the headquarters’ orders.]

-Gnash!

Just recalling it made his teeth grind.

But what was this fellow’s true identity?

Not only did he possess monstrous martial talent befitting a Grand Master despite not even being in his twenties, but he was also quite knowledgeable about poisons?

“You...”

“You’re willing to die anyway, so it’s ridiculous to hesitate when given such an opportunity. Let me help you make that choice quickly.”

“What?”

“Count to five precisely.”

-Grip!

With those words, the blade of the Evil Commandment Sword pressed against the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's neck.

With an ordinary sword, it wouldn't cut or slice unless it was drawn, but just by touching the blade, it stung, and blood flowed.

It didn't seem like an ordinary sword.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un began counting.

"One."

"Wait a moment!"

"Two."

He had no intention of listening.

Moreover, he was counting at an extremely fast pace.

"Three."

In an instant, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard became even more conflicted.

If he didn't accept this fellow's proposal, he would lose his life here.

No, come to think of it, he was already in danger of dying at this fellow's hands.

It was just that one more path had opened up.

"Four."

Now there was only one number left.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, grasping his head that felt like it would explode, spoke to Mok Gyeong-un, who was about to open his mouth.

"I'll do it."

-Swish! Sreung!

As soon as he finished speaking, Mok Gyeong-un removed the sword from his neck and sheathed it into the scabbard.

Cold sweat beaded on the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's forehead.

In a brief moment, he had been consumed by countless worries as if time had stopped.

However, he concluded that if he was going to die anyway, he might as well take a risk.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said to him.

"It was much easier to choose, wasn't it?"

'Ha! Easy?'

It was unbelievable.

What was easy about putting his life on the line?

The young fellow was more vicious than he looked. However, there was no point in arguing about it.

Taking a deep breath, he asked.

“...So what is this task?”

At this question, Mok Gyeong-un approached Song-ah, the daughter of the Hong Bong Meat craftsman, who had been watching them with a confused expression.

Startled by Mok Gyeong-un suddenly approaching her, she asked.

“Wh-Why are you doing this?”

“Just close your ears for a moment.”

“Pardon?”

-Tatatap!

Mok Gyeong-un quickly pressed her acupuncture points.

However, she didn't particularly faint or anything.

Mok Gyeong-un said something to her.

“Huh? The s-sound?”

But she couldn't hear Mok Gyeong-un's voice.

Seeing her bewildered expression, Mok Gyeong-un smiled brightly, gestured for her to wait a moment, and approached the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, saying.

“As a Thousand-men Commander, you hold a senior 5th-rank official position, so you must have a fairly high rank within the Embroidered Uniform Guards, right?”

“It's a mid-level executive position. It's not a position with decision-making authority over anything.”

“You shouldn't try to downplay it from the start. I haven't even properly made the proposal yet.”

“...”

As he fell silent, Mok Gyeong-un continued.

“Then, let's start with the most difficult proposal first.”

“The most difficult?”

“Yes. I'd like you to help someone escape from the underground Golden Jade of the imperial palace. Is that possible?”

‘!?’

As soon as he finished speaking, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard's eyes widened.

He had expected a troublesome proposal, but something entirely unexpected had come out.

“What are you saying...”

“It’s exactly as you heard. I asked if you could bring out the person I want from the underground Golden Jade of the imperial palace.”

Mok Gyeong-un smirked at him.

Come to think of it, there might be no need for him to go in personally.

If he could manipulate a Embroidered Uniform Guards of the Thousand-men Commander rank, which was a senior 5th-rank position, wouldn’t it suffice to have him go in and bring the person out?

-Not a bad idea.

Cheong-ryeong also agreed with Mok Gyeong-un’s thought.

If there were other options, there was no need to take unnecessary risks.

However...

“Regardless of being accused of treason or whatnot, I cannot fulfill that request.”

“You can’t fulfill it?”

“I don’t know exactly who you’re trying to help escape, but even as an Embroidered Uniform Guard, we don’t handle all affairs within the imperial palace.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“The Embroidered Uniform Guards is divided into six departments, and the tasks vary accordingly.”

“Six departments? Then, what is your task?”

“I belong to the investigation department as part of the Military Selections Department. If someone like me interferes or meddles in the affairs of other departments, I’ll be arrested for overstepping my authority.”

“...That’s quite a troublesome rule.”

Mok Gyeong-un scratched his head.

He thought it would be possible with an Embroidered Uniform Guard of the Thousand-men Commander rank, but it wasn’t going to be resolved easily.

Mok Gyeong-un then said.

“Then, can’t you do it secretly, even if it means overstepping your authority?”

At this question, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard let out a hollow laugh and said.

“Does the imperial palace seem that lax to you? Not only are there experts from the Embroidered Uniform Guards but also from the Eastern Depot and Western Depot. The underground Golden Jade of the imperial palace is guarded by the Golden Jade Horse Troops in addition to the Embroidered Uniform Guards. It’s virtually impossible for me alone to secretly infiltrate such a place and help someone escape.”

It was quite complicated.

Come to think of it, if this could be easily resolved, they would have taken the approach of bribing someone from the Embroidered Uniform Guards in charge of managing the Golden Jade to help with the escape in the first place.

‘Hmm.’

He considered forcing the issue by holding his life as collateral, but if a situation arose where the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard failed the task, it would become even more difficult to carry out the escape.

In that case, his usefulness would be diminished.

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders and said.

“Then, there’s no other way. It’s of no help to me at all...”

“If you really intend to enter the underground Golden Jade of the imperial palace, there is one method.”

Before Mok Gyeong-un could finish his sentence, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard spoke.

Mok Gyeong-un asked with a puzzled expression.

“What’s the other method?”

“Entering through the Guard Trials.”

Mok Gyeong-un showed no particular reaction to his words.

That was because it was already part of their plan.

Their primary objective was to infiltrate the underground Golden Jade by becoming a Embroidered Uniform Guards through the Guard Trials.

“That’s already...”

“After completing the Guard Trials, there’s a month-long Embroidered Uniform Guards apprenticeship for the final selection.”

“An Embroidered Uniform Guard apprenticeship?”

This was the first time he heard about it.

Their plan was to carry it out in a completely different way.

That’s why Noble Imperial Concubine Seo’s help was crucial.

At that moment, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard answered Mok Gyeong-un’s question.

“It’s a new addition based on the commander’s opinion. The selected recruits will apprentice at each department of the Six Departments on a five-day rotation for a month.”

“So it’s to gain experience beforehand?”

“Something like that. Here, the Four Departments, which manages the Golden Jade, will also have an apprenticeship.”

“Oh, is that so? Then there will be an opportunity to enter the Golden Jade.”

“No. That’s not the case.”

“What do you mean?”

“The underground Golden Jade of the imperial palace has mechanical traps, and its structure is highly complex and dangerous. Only trained Embroidered Uniform Guards who have memorized the entire Golden Jade Battle Map can enter. Therefore, as far as I know, the plan is to have the apprentices only manage the general Golden Jade in the outer city.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head and said.

“That means the information you’ve provided won’t be of much help.”

“Listen until the end. Originally, that’s how it was supposed to proceed, but there’s still a short period left until the trials. Within that time, I can help by slightly changing the regulations.”

“Slightly changing the regulations? What do you mean...”

“I’ll try to make it so that the Embroidered Uniform Guards apprentices can also be deployed to the underground Golden Jade.”

Chapter 223 – Mixed-blooded (4)

“I’ll try to make it so that the Embroidered Uniform Guards apprentices can also be deployed to the underground Golden Jade.”

“Hoho.”

At the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard’s words, Mok Gyeong-un stroked his chin.

It was a better proposal than he had thought.

Infiltrating as an Embroidered Uniform Guard was a prerequisite, and the next most necessary requirement was a justification to enter the underground Golden Jade.

The plan devised by the advance team was to go through Noble Imperial Concubine Seo.

Noble Imperial Concubine Seo had an elder brother.

Seo Geum, the elder brother of Noble Imperial Concubine Seo, who was originally a common soldier from a small county, had risen to the position of commander thanks to the emperor's favor during her time as a Noble Consort before her child became the crown prince.

However, it was impossible for everything to go smoothly.

Assigned to the northern Ningxia region, he was merely a former common soldier, so his commanding experience was inevitably lacking. He failed to stop the Great Xiongnu, losing thirty thousand soldiers and even the territory.

[Strip Commander Seo Geum of his position and execute him.]

Naturally, countless impeachment memorials poured in.

However, the emperor, who cherished Noble Consort Seo, couldn't bring himself to kill her elder brother.

As a result, he was stripped of his position as commander and exiled to a remote island.

A few years later, when the child born to Noble Consort Seo ascended as the crown prince, he was moved to the underground Golden Jade of the imperial palace under the pretext of being the maternal uncle of the next emperor.

[Your Majesty, my elder brother is also deeply repenting for his sins.]

[Your Majesty, my elder brother no longer has any ambition for official positions.]

Noble Imperial Concubine Seo had been working tirelessly to pardon her elder brother Seo Geum, but due to the severity of his crime, her efforts were repeatedly thwarted by opposition from other factions.

It was a regrettable situation for her, but it naturally served as a suitable justification to enter the underground Golden Jade.

‘Attempt to visit the underground Golden Jade accompanied by Noble Imperial Concubine Seo and rescue the imprisoned Guardian of the Fire Faith Order.’

That was the original plan and had the highest probability of success.

However, if another method of infiltration emerged here, there would be no need to persuade Noble Imperial Concubine Seo or fulfill her unnecessary demands.

‘It can avoid troublesome situations, but...’

At this point, Mok Gyeong-un had to take another step further.

It was because, in addition to the secret mission from the Society Leader, there was also a confidential order from the Shadow Clan Master.

[If the escape is successful, seize the Guardian again.]

As a member of the Fire Faith Order, the Shadow Clan Master had given Mok Gyeong-un a confidential order.

This was currently a very contradictory situation.

To become the fourth disciple of the Society Leader, he needed to safely rescue the Guardian, and through this, he could approach the Society Leader.

However, if he failed the mission, that opportunity would be lost.

‘Hmm.’

Mok Gyeong-un continued to ponder over this.

If he ignored the Shadow Clan Master’s confidential order without any countermeasures, he would surely become enemies with him.

That would lead to another troublesome situation.

‘What should I do?’

However, now that there were two routes to infiltrate the underground Golden Jade, there was room to devise something along the way.

After staring intently at the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, Mok Gyeong-un seemed to have sorted out his thoughts and spoke with a slight smile.

“Alright. Let’s accept that proposal.”

“Is this enough?”

“No. Of course, this alone is insufficient. In the end, I’ll be the one taking the risk of entering the underground Golden Jade.”

“...Then what do you want?”

“Naturally, you’ll have to cooperate with me until I accomplish that.”

“Cooperate with you?”

“Yes. That much should be done to balance the scales, don’t you think?”

“...”

Although he was inwardly dissatisfied with Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard had no choice but to silently accept them since he was not the one holding the reins.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard nodded and said.

“Fine. Then...”

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard silently glanced at his abdomen.

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said.

“If the task is completed without incident, I’ll remove the Poison Gu for you.”

“What?”

“Is this your first time making a deal? Have you ever seen someone pay the price before receiving the goods?”

“...”

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, who had been clenching his fists and trembling, finally let out a long sigh and replied.

“Understood.”

In any case, he had no other choice.

Although it was close to a gamble, he had to hope that the fellow would keep his promise.

“Well then, now that the deal is made...”

-Step step!

Mok Gyeong-un approached Song-ah, the daughter of the Hong Bong Meat craftsman, to release her acupuncture points.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard, watching Mok Gyeong-un, suddenly seemed to remember something and spoke.

“Can I ask you one thing?”

“Go ahead and ask.”

Mok Gyeong-un readily agreed as if it didn’t matter.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard then asked.

“Do you happen to have the surname Jin?”

“The surname Jin?”

“Yes.”

At his question, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

“No.”

“Then is it the surname So (肖) or...”

“All sorts of surnames are coming up. It’s the Mok family.”

“The Mok family?”

‘Ah...’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s answer, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard’s eyes trembled.

He had asked out of curiosity, but it wasn’t the case.

That meant he had truly learned it just by observing his martial arts. He was truly a monstrous fellow.

Well, one had to be at this level to be considered to have the talent of a True Grandmaster.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard clicked his tongue and said.

“You really stole and learned the lightness skill.”

“Ah, that lightness skill? It was quite useful. May I ask the name of the footwork?”

“You have no conscience after taking someone else’s technique.”

“I’m asking because you acknowledged it.”

At those words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard hesitated for a moment before speaking.

“...Wind Cloud, no... Wind God Step[1].”

“Wind God Step? The wind god... It’s an arrogant name, but it suits it in a way.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s evaluation, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard inwardly apologized to his master.

‘I’m sorry. I had no choice.’

Originally, the true name of the footwork was Wind Cloud Step.

However, he couldn’t accurately reveal the details of the lightness skill, so he changed the name.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un said.

“Since we’ve already exchanged one thing, can I ask one more question?”

“What is it?”

“I heard that people from the Western Regions have brown or blonde hair. But your hair is black. Did you dye it with ink or something?”

‘As expected.’

At this question, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard’s eyes sharpened.

As expected, this fellow was no different from others.

Judging by how he suddenly showed interest in his unique appearance, which differed from others.

However...

‘!?’

When he unintentionally looked at Mok Gyeong-un with disappointment, contrary to the question he had asked, he had a dry and indifferent expression, as if he had no particular feelings.

‘What?’

Was it truly a question out of pure curiosity?

Looking at the look in Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes, it was neither more nor less than that.

It seemed quite different from other people.

He even remembered the look in his master’s eyes when he first saw him.

Come to think of it, that fellow had shown no particular reaction upon seeing his face. It was no different from how ordinary people looked at him.

Because of that, he felt strange.

‘...’

He was truly a peculiar fellow.

In this case, he would have normally ignored it, but this time, he answered.

“...It’s because I’m mixed-blood.”

His mother was from the Central Plains, while his father was from the Western Regions.

As a result, he was born different from both the people of the Western Regions and the Central Plains, resenting his parents throughout his life.

“Mixed-blood? Ah, I see. So that’s why.”

However, that was all there was to Mok Gyeong-un’s reaction.

As soon as he heard the answer to his question, he turned his head as if his curiosity had been satisfied.

‘Is that all?’

The response was so underwhelming that he even wondered if he had been unnecessarily sensitive.

-Tatatap!

Mok Gyeong-un soon released Song-ah’s acupuncture points.

As the acupuncture points were released and she could hear sounds again, she distanced herself from Mok Gyeong-un with a disgusted face.

This was why she didn't want to get close to martial artists.

Regardless of her attitude, Mok Gyeong-un paid no heed to it and reached out his hand somewhere.

Then...

-Swish!

The leather pouch on the ground flew into Mok Gyeong-un's hand.

Seeing this, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard spoke in a startled manner.

"Wait. I need to take that."

"I said it was not possible. I also need to take the craftsman's severed hands."

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard pointed to Song-ah and said.

"Those aren't the craftsman's hands."

"What? What do you mean?"

"Exactly as I said. They used a fake instead of the real craftsman."

"A fake?"

At this, Mok Gyeong-un looked at Song-ah.

Song-ah nodded and replied.

“...The Embroidered Uniform Guard mister is correct. The master whose arms were severed is just an ordinary butcher.”

“An ordinary butcher? Then, could it be that you’re also a fake?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard said.

“That young lady is not a fake.”

“How do you know whether she’s a fake or not, Thousand-men Commander?”

“You can tell by looking at her hands.”

“Hands?”

At this, Mok Gyeong-un looked at Song-ah’s hands.

Every joint of her fingers was peeled to the point where fingerprints were not visible, and there was not a single intact spot.

Just by looking at this, one could tell that she was not an ordinary person.

“My father is the real craftsman.”

“So, in conclusion, I was deceived by the fake one.”

“...Yes.”

She replied in a groveling voice.

“Oh my.”

At this, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue lightly.

Then, there was no need to go through the trouble of finding the severed arms.

However, there was no need to blame this.

Thanks to being deceived like this, a new route to enter the underground Golden Jade had emerged.

You could say it was a blessing in disguise.

“Then, there’s no need to take these hands, right?”

“...Although it’s unfortunate for him, it seems this is the best way to prevent the situation from escalating.”

“That’s reasonable.”

At Song-ah’s words, Mok Gyeong-un threw the leather pouch he was holding to the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard.

The blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard sighed as he caught it.

If he didn't take this with him, things would get complicated, and that fellow would throw a fit.

-Tak!

"Eek! Wh-What are you doing?"

Song-ah, who was suddenly picked up and carried on Mok Gyeong-un's shoulder like a sack, was flustered and didn't know what to do.

Regardless, Mok Gyeong-un paid no attention to her.

"I can't match the young lady's walking pace. So let's head back quickly. Then, Thousand-men Commander, I'll see you later."

Mok Gyeong-un gave a light bow to the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard and was about to leave.

As he was about to take a step, Mok Gyeong-un paused for a moment and said.

"I almost forgot. I said I'd see you later, but I don't even know your name."

"..."

"My name is Mok Gyeong-un. What is your name, Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander?"

At his question, the blue-eyed Embroidered Uniform Guard briefly replied.

"Ma Ra-hyeon."

-Swish swish!

“Ugh.”

Song-ah closed her eyes tightly, feeling frightened by the movement that was so fast that her surroundings were not visible.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been using his lightness skill, suddenly stopped midway after a short distance.

She wondered why, but it was because he had encountered someone along the way.

It was none other than Seop Chun.

“My lord!”

Mok Gyeong-un asked him with a puzzled expression.

“I told you to wait, so why did you come all the way here?”

“There was something urgent to inform you about, and I thought I should come and assist you.”

“Something urgent to inform me about?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, Seop Chun glanced at Song-ah, who was being carried on his shoulder, and said.

“It’s about that young lady.”

“This person?”

“Yes. My lord, you may feel displeased, but the master whose arms were severed was not the real craftsman.”

“Ah, you mean that? I already know.”

“You already know?”

“Yes. As you can see. So, did you come to inform me about that?”

“Ah, yes. That’s one thing, but the real craftsman urgently requested me to save that young lady, his daughter.”

However, contrary to his concerns, seeing that Mok Gyeong-un had rescued her was a relief.

In fact, he had rushed over because he thought his lord might only bring back the severed hands.

Still, it was a good thing that he had saved the craftsman’s daughter.

Just then, Mok Gyeong-un asked.

“Well, since I ended up fulfilling the request, that’s fortunate. So, who did you say the real craftsman was?”

“Do you remember the man with a lot of hair who was guiding us?”

“Ah, that person?”

“Yes. He was the real craftsman.”

At Seop Chun’s words, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head and suddenly chuckled.

Puzzled by his laughter, Seop Chun asked.

“Why are you laughing?”

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un suddenly put down Song-ah, whom he had been carrying on his shoulder.

Song-ah also looked at Mok Gyeong-un, unable to understand the situation.

Mok Gyeong-un then said to her.

“Perhaps because your work is secretive, deceiving people seems to have become a daily occurrence for you.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I have an exceptionally good memory.”

“Having a good memory, what does that...”

“Among the hairy man and the butchers there, no one had the same palms as the young lady.”

‘!?’

At these words, Song-ah’s expression stiffened, seemingly startled.

Mok Gyeong-un then placed his hand on her shoulder, smiled brightly, and said.

“I thought the craftsman who made human skin masks would be a man with some age, but that wasn’t necessarily the case.”

Seop Chun’s eyes widened at those words as he looked at Song-ah.

“My lord... could it be?”

“Yes. It seems this young lady is the real craftsman.”

‘!!!!!!’

Chapter 224 – Lady Seo, the Imperial Noble Consort (1)

“Your Highness, surely not...?”

“Yes. It seems this young lady is the real master artisan.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s meaningful words, Song-ah, who had been introduced as the daughter of Master Hong Bong-yuk, stood with a stiff expression before sighing deeply.

“Whew. It doesn’t seem like you’ll believe me no matter what I say.”

“That’s right. I’m convinced that you’re the real master artisan.”

Mok Gyeong-un remembers everything he sees.

That's why he also remembers the palms of all the people at Hong Bong-yuk's slaughterhouse.

Most of them had calloused and rough hands, but anyone could tell it was from years of working in the slaughterhouse.

However, only Song-ah's palms were different.

Her unhealthy palms weren't the type that could be formed from slaughtering.

They were the kind of palms one could only get from doing delicate work or handling a lot of glue.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said to her,

"Is there any point in trying to deceive me further?"

At this, Song-ah shrugged her shoulders and replied,

"I suppose not. No one has ever observed my palms this intently before, so I've been properly caught."

Seop Chun asked in amazement at her unapologetic attitude,

"Are you truly the master artisan, young lady?"

"Why? Is it hard to believe that a young woman makes human skin masks?"

"That's not what I meant. It was simply unexpected."

"Unexpected, huh. Well, I suppose it could be. You might think this kind of work that earns one the title of master should be done by an older, experienced man, but unfortunately, I am that master artisan."

Now that she had been exposed anyway, she candidly revealed her true thoughts.

Then, looking at Mok Gyeong-un, she said,

“I didn’t intentionally deceive you. My life has been threatened more than once or twice while doing this work. There have also been many who coveted this technique and tried to forcefully recruit me into their organizations.”

“It was to protect yourself.”

“Yes. Then how else could I protect myself? I don’t know martial arts like all of you or have power like Sir Embroiden Uniform Guard.”

Hiding behind a fake identity was her way of safeguarding herself.

Understanding this, Seop Chun nodded and spoke.

“That’s perfectly understandable.”

“Then can you keep my secret?”

“Secret?”

“Yes, a secret. If my true identity is revealed, I’ll be subjected to threats once again.”

“Ah, of course we’ll keep it. Our purpose is simply to commission human skin masks, not to threaten or inconvenience you, young lady.”

“That’s a relief then. I trust you’ll also keep this secret, sir?”

Song-ah shifted her gaze to Mok Gyeong-un as she asked.

Mok Gyeong-un crossed his arms, smiled, and replied,

“That’s not difficult. However, such requests always come with a price, don’t they?”

“A price? The price is that I’ll take on your commission...”

“Something you were going to do originally can’t be considered a price.”

“Ha! Then what are you suggesting?”

“Personally, I have one favor to ask of you.”

“A favor?”

As she echoed back, Mok Gyeong-un approached and whispered quietly in her ear,

“I’d simply like to observe how you make the human skin masks, if that’s alright?”

“.....”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Song-ah scoffed inwardly.

She felt like she knew what this man’s ulterior motive was.

It seemed he wanted to know how she crafted the human skin masks.

However, unfortunately, this wasn't something one could imitate just by watching.

One had to be born with deft hands, and without knowing her secret methods for producing the necessary chemicals, it would be difficult to even preserve the human skin.

Thus, she readily agreed.

“Do as you please.”

Watch all you want.

As if that'll allow you to do anything.

But then Mok Gyeong-un said,

“Thank you for allowing it. And this is just out of simple curiosity, but may I ask you something?”

“What is it?”

“Is it possible to directly peel off a person's facial skin and use it as a human skin mask?”

“Excuse me?”

“Ah, I just thought that would be much more efficient.”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un smiling and nonchalantly saying something so revolting, a chill ran down her spine.

As the sun set,

Mok Gyeong-un and his group, having successfully completed the commission for human skin masks and taken a brief rest in the afternoon, were following Gan-yang, the leader of the advance party, to a certain location.

It was a restaurant located not far from the outer palace of the imperial court.

Known for its famous fried duck dishes, this large-scale restaurant with a lavish exterior was a high-end establishment frequented by nobles and even imperial family members.

Pointing to the restaurant's wall in the distance with numerous lanterns lit, Gan-yang said,

“Yoo-bong has likely reserved the entire place.”

“Reserved the entire restaurant?”

“Yes. Her Majesty the Imperial Noble Consort dislikes having her meals interrupted. And the conversation today isn't something that should reach the ears of others.”

Reserving the entire restaurant meant renting out the whole establishment.

As it was such a famous place, it must have cost a pretty penny.

Mok Gyeong-un looked at the several dozens of armored soldiers guarding the vicinity of the restaurant's walls and remarked,

“There are a lot of guards.”

“This is actually quite normal. If we move just a bit further from the palace, hundreds of guards will accompany her.”

“His Majesty the Emperor’s favor is no joke.”

“Yes, there’s that. And given Her Majesty the Imperial Noble Consort’s status as the mother of the Crown Prince, that level of precaution is taken.”

“That makes sense. Shall we go then?”

“Ah! Before that, there’s one more thing I must tell you.”

At Gan-yang’s words, Mok Gyeong-un stopped and turned his head.

Gan-yang then lowered his voice and said,

“This matter is extremely important. No matter what Her Majesty the Imperial Noble Consort says, you must not get agitated or respond emotionally.”

This was why the excommunicated monk Ja Geum-jeong had been left to stay at the inn.

In fact, Ja Geum-jeong was so notorious as one of the Three Mad Ones that he had been separated just in case trouble occurred.

However, the one Gan-yang was truly worried about was Mok Gyeong-un.

‘I’m worried.’

He considered the real uncontrollable one to be Mok Gyeong-un rather than Ja Geum-jeong.

Unlike Mong Mu-yak or Seop Chun from the rear party, he had a tendency to act according to his own will, so Gan-yang was concerned he might accidentally provoke Lady Seo.

That's why he was reminding him once more.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled at him as if telling him not to worry and said,

“As Gan-yang said he'd handle it, I'll simply observe.”

“...I understand.”

If he could really do that, Gan-yang would be truly grateful.

With that, they headed towards the restaurant.

Upon arriving at the restaurant's main gate, the soldiers guarding it blocked their path.

“The entire restaurant has been reserved today, so no meals can be served. Please leave.”

Gan-yang then took out a tile he had prepared from his bosom and showed it to them.

The soldiers then bowed their heads as if they had been waiting for it.

However, they couldn't pass through just like that.

“We will hold onto your weapons for now.”

“Our weapons?”

At his words, Gan-yang and Ok-gi from the advance party handed over their weapons as if they had anticipated it to some degree.

On the other hand, Seop Chun, Mong Mu-yak, and the others seemed displeased at having to relinquish their unique weapons, their expressions not very good.

However, as they couldn't provoke the Imperial Noble Consort's temper, they had no choice but to hand over all their unique weapons and armaments.

“You there, hand over your sword as well.”

The soldier pointed to Mok Gyeong-un's Evil Commandment Sword and spoke.

Mok Gyeong-un handed the sword's scabbard to the soldier and warned,

“I'm telling you this just in case, but don't draw the sword from the scabbard.”

“What nonsense are you spouting?”

“I'm just telling you out of concern.”

The soldier who received the Evil Commandment Sword's scabbard snorted as if it was absurd.

Mok Gyeong-un then whispered in the soldier's ear,

“It's a cursed sword, so if you carelessly draw it, you'll regret it.”

“What are you..?”

“If you’re really curious, you can draw it. But you’ll have to deal with the consequences yourself.”

“.....”

At the ominous words that seemed to be a threat, the soldier frowned.

However, knowing they were Lady Seo’s guests, the soldier no longer showed any reaction and stepped aside.

Thus, the group who had handed over their weapons entered through the main gate.

Inside, the smell of fried duck that had been wafting out from the start, along with various spices, stimulated their appetite even more.

“You’ve arrived.”

A familiar face was waiting in the front garden of the restaurant.

It was Yoo-bong, one of the advance party members.

He greeted the group, wearing even more makeup than when they parted during the day, appearing like a eunuch.

“Her Majesty the Imperial Noble Consort is waiting.”

At his words, Gan-yang carefully asked,

“How is Her Majesty the Imperial Noble Consort’s mood?”

“Hohoho. Fortunately, as this is a restaurant she greatly enjoys, she is in a good mood.”

“That’s a relief.”

This was extremely important as the request could go either way depending on the Imperial Noble Consort’s mood.

“Then please follow me this way.”

With quick steps, Yoo-bong led the group to the VIP room where the Imperial Noble Consort was.

In front was a small pond, and before that was a pavilion.

Thin ramie fabric curtains hung around the pavilion, and the silhouette of someone presumed to be Lady Seo could be seen inside, along with two shadows thought to be palace maids attending to her.

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un swept his eyes around.

There was a considerable number of hidden presences that couldn’t be seen.

‘Around thirty people.’

They all seemed to be first-rate masters who had cultivated martial arts, qualitatively on a different level from the soldiers outside.

And in front of the pavilion were two middle-aged men who appeared to be extraordinary.

One was a man wearing black official robes, clean-shaven and with a powdered face like Yoo-bong, seeming to be a eunuch.

The other middle-aged man was wearing neat gray official robes and had a willow leaf saber at his waist.

‘That eunuch must be Eastern Depot’s leader, So-gam.’

Mok Gyeong-un had heard from Gan-yang beforehand that there was a eunuch from Eastern Depot who guarded Lady Seo.

The head of the Eastern Depot eunuchs was called Palace Eunuch, Tae-gam.

Under this Tae-gam were two Junior Supervisor, So-gam.

Both of these So-gam were said to have mastered the secret martial arts passed down through generations in the imperial palace, and indeed, the aura they exuded was no ordinary matter.

However, the other person standing on the left side in a gray official robe was unknown.

‘Who is that?’

Gan-yang also seemed to be unaware of his identity.

At that moment, Yoo-bong announced,

“Your Majesty, the guests have arrived.”

With those words, Yoo-bong sent a signal with his eyes to Gan-yang and Mok Gyeong-un.

Led by Gan-yang, they joined their hands and bowed their heads in a formal greeting.

“We pay our respects to Her Majesty the Imperial Noble Consort.”

“.....”

As they offered their greetings, Lady Seo, reflected in the curtains, showed no reaction.

They had expected a light greeting in return, so this was unexpected.

Thus, they all had to remain with their heads bowed.

‘What’s going on?’

According to Yoo-bong, Lady Seo was supposedly in a good mood.

But what was the meaning of this?

As silence flowed, the atmosphere was quite peculiar.

At that moment, the leader of Eastern Depot standing on the right side of the pavilion opened his mouth.

“How impudent. What kind of lowly servants greet Her Majesty in such a manner? Immediately kneel and pay proper respects.”

‘!?’

At these words, Gan-yang, who had been bowing his head, frowned.

He hadn't expected them to nitpick about etiquette right from the start like this.

‘They’re trying to gain the upper hand.’

Gan-yang clicked his tongue inwardly as if troubled.

He had anticipated to some degree that Lady Seo wanted to change this relationship that had lasted long since her days as a noble consort, but it was a rough start right off the bat.

Chapter 225 – Lady Seo, the Imperial Noble Consort (2)

The leader of Eastern Depot raised his voice.

“Oh my, how impudent not to kneel even then.”

At his shout, Gan-yang, the leader of the advance party, calmly steadied his breathing.

This was undoubtedly an attempt to gain the upper hand.

Getting agitated here would only ruin matters.

‘No choice.’

Right now, the side in the disadvantageous position wasn't Lady Seo, but themselves.

Thus, Gan-yang knelt on one knee, bowed his head, and greeted with even more decorum.

“We pay our respects to Her Majesty the Imperial Noble Consort.”

The other members then surreptitiously glanced at Mok Gyeong-un to gauge his reaction.

Mok Gyeong-un slightly raised the corners of his mouth, then knelt on one knee like Gan-yang and joined his hands in a formal greeting.

Seeing this, the others followed suit and paid their respects.

“We pay our respects to Her Majesty the Imperial Noble Consort.”

At their deferential greetings, the leader of Eastern Depot turned his head to look at Lady Seo sitting beyond the curtains.

He was seeking her opinion on how to proceed.

They could make them fully prostrate to show even more respect, but these were people from the martial world.

If they kept provoking them unnecessarily, it could lead to trouble, so they needed to moderate the pressure they applied.

Lady Seo lightly raised her hand.

The leader then spoke to the kneeling group.

“Her Majesty has accepted your greetings, so rise.”

‘...This is different from what I heard.’

Gan-yang clicked his tongue inwardly.

According to Yoo-bong, who had infiltrated as a Eastern Depot eunuch, it was true that Lady Seo had gained absolute power after becoming the Imperial Noble Consort. However, she hadn't forgotten the support from the Heaven and Earth Society all this time, so she would maintain a certain level of propriety.

But the current atmosphere was not like that at all.

Rather, she seemed intent on thoroughly establishing the hierarchy from the start.

As they were currently in the disadvantageous position of needing to make a request, they had no choice but to go along with it for now, but it was increasingly worrying.

"The guests shall sit at the tables prepared on either side."

The leader gestured to the neatly arranged dining tables on both sides.

The pavilion could be considered the seat of honor, with the area in front being the lower seats.

-This is why you don't deal with imperial family members or palace people. Those bastards think they're the center of the world.

Cheong-ryeong spoke in an irritated voice.

She had experienced a time when the government and martial world were strictly separate, so she didn't like this situation very much.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un didn't seem to mind at all as he quietly went and sat in an empty seat.

Once everyone was seated, a voice came from inside the pavilion.

"Raise the curtains."

“Your Majesty, how could...”

“I said to raise them.”

“As you command.”

The palace maids inside then lifted the curtains that had been obscuring the interior of the pavilion.

This revealed an exquisite feast that made the tables groan under its weight and a beautiful woman wearing red, splendid clothes that exuded dignity and allure.

Seop Chun almost let out an exclamation without realizing it.

Seeing her breathtaking beauty even though she was over thirty, he could understand why the Emperor favored her so much.

Moreover, as one of the Four Great Evils who held sway over the power of this nation, there was something overwhelming about her presence that seemed to suck you in, along with her beauty.

She opened her mouth.

“You must be tired from the long journey.”

Gan-yang bowed his head and replied.

“Not at all, Your Majesty. Rather, we are ashamed to have you meet us in such a humble place.”

He tried his best to ingratiate himself with her.

However, Lady Seo snorted at his words and said,

“Enough, this isn’t the palace, so there’s no need to flatter me with such empty words.”

“...My apologies.”

How troublesome.

He didn’t know which tune to dance to.

If he didn’t flatter her, he would be called impudent, and if he did, it would be considered insincerity.

He couldn’t understand why she was being so sharp from the very beginning when they hadn’t even properly brought up the main topic yet.

‘There is one contingency plan, but...’

He hoped it wouldn’t come to the point of using that.

Because if they used that plan, it would mean losing Lady Seo as a card along with this current matter.

However, the Society had told them to complete the mission by any means necessary.

That implied they were prepared to discard this card as well.

‘But I won’t let it go that far.’

Gan-yang opened his mouth, trying his best to put on a smiling face to lighten the mood.

“Your Majesty, the duck meat at this Hwa-yang Pavilion is unparalleled...”

“I told you there’s no need for flattery.”

“.....”

At her words, not only Gan-yang but all the members of the Heaven and Earth Society had stiff expressions.

Anyone could tell Lady Seo’s tone was sharp.

She still didn’t know their true purpose.

She only thought they wanted her authority to allow them to participate in the Imperial Guard’s martial arts competition.

The cunning woman had counter-demanded they send late-stage disciples from the Society’s main branch in response to this request.

The reason was that even in the orthodox martial world, it would lack justification to send late-stage disciples from the Old Demons Sect or renowned martial families to the Imperial Guard’s martial arts competition.

‘We agreed to this, so why is she being so sharp?’

It didn’t make sense.

However, as he had resolved to endure any humiliation, Gan-yang spoke without revealing much.

“I was trying to lighten the mood with some casual conversation, but it seems I’ve unintentionally displeased Your Majesty. Please be magnanimous...”

“Enough, let’s cut to the chase and get to the main point.”

“Pardon?”

“Didn’t you hear me? I said let’s get to the main point.”

Gan-yang frowned at Lady Seo’s words.

He had prepared gifts and planned to bring up the main issue when the mood mellowed over dinner.

But he was baffled by her abruptly bringing it up like this.

“Your Majesty.”

“Why do you look so surprised? We’re just going to discuss what has already been communicated between us.”

“That’s true, but for you to bring it up so quickly is truly...”

“Disconcerting?”

“.....”

“You planned to wait until the mood was right before bringing up the real matter, but I’ve thoughtlessly disrupted that flow, haven’t I?”

Gan-yang’s eyes narrowed at her words.

Until a moment ago, he had simply thought it was an issue with Lady Seo's mood.

But it seemed that wasn't the case.

‘Surely not...’

-Swish!

Gan-yang's gaze then shifted to Yoo-bong, who was standing next to the leader of Eastern Depot.

As if by chance, Yoo-bong's eyes met his, and he covered his mouth with his sleeve, showing a smiling expression towards Gan-yang.

It looked almost like a sneer.

‘!?’

Seeing this, Gan-yang's eyes trembled.

He had a suspicion, but it seemed his unfounded worries had come to pass.

‘You bastard...’

As Gan-yang glared at him, Yoo-bong's lips moved slightly.

Judging by the shape of his mouth,

‘My apologies?’

Just a few hours ago.

The leader of Eastern Depot patted Yoo-bong's shoulder as he exited West Benevolence Palace[1] and spoke.

-Pat pat!

[Good work. Have you finished your report?]

[Yes, sir.]

[Hohoho. With this, Her Majesty will trust you even more, Eunuch Yoo...no, Inspector Yoo.]

[Inspector? What do you...]

Among the eunuch ranks, the highest first-grade eunuch was called Tae-gam.

Below that were So-gam Inspector, Attendant, and ordinary eunuchs without specific positions.

Originally, Yoo-bong was just an ordinary eunuch.

The leader spoke to him with a satisfied expression.

[Her Majesty has ordered your promotion and salary increase for this matter.]

At the leader's words, Yoo-bong bowed with a flushed face to express his gratitude.

[Aaaah. I am simply grateful.]

He was truly delighted to become an Inspector with the 5th-grade court rank.

He had thought he would spend his life as a Society agent after being castrated, becoming neither man nor woman.

But the leader had pulled him out of that pit.

Just because one was a eunuch didn't mean they couldn't advance in the world.

They could climb even higher.

‘I'm not who I used to be.’

The leader had corrected his misguided thoughts.

He couldn't end his life as a mere agent or low-ranking eunuch, could he?

Yoo-bong cautiously said to the leader,

[Leader...will you also teach me new techniques as promised?]

[New techniques? Of course! How could that be difficult for someone who will become the right-hand man of Jang Oh-taek? Hohohoho.]

At his words, Yoo-bong was overjoyed inwardly.

He had only learned inner energy cultivation and four techniques, but in just one year, they had made him stronger than Gan-yang or Ok-gi – the Rising Phoenix Imperial Secret Art.

What would happen if he mastered it completely?

The leader tightly grasped his trembling shoulder, likely from excitement, and spoke with a sharp smile.

[There is much to be done for Her Majesty and His Highness the Crown Prince. Continue to do as you have.]

[I shall keep that in mind. I shall surely keep it in mind.]

Seeing the shape of Yoo-bong's mouth, Gan-yang inwardly realized.

He had betrayed the Society.

Most of the agents sent undergo a thorough loyalty test.

Because if even one agent turns their back or acts as a double agent, it could lead to a major incident that blows back on them.

Thus, most of the agents deployed in the field not only go through loyalty tests but also have restrictions or various sanctions placed on them. However, Yoo-bong seemed to be free from that, though he didn't know what method he used.

‘This is the worst.’

He hadn't anticipated a traitor emerging in this situation of all times.

He didn't know what Yoo-bong had told Lady Seo, but it was clear their request had hit a snag.

At this rate, he would have no choice but to pull out his final card.

Just then, Lady Seo opened her mouth.

“How bold. No matter how favorably I view you all, to think you would dare try to break out a criminal imprisoned in the underground palace prison...”

“Your Majesty, that’s...”

“That is committing treason.”

“.....”

Gan-yang’s mind grew complicated at her accusation.

Her words were very different from before.

It seemed Yoo-bong had thoroughly informed her of their objectives.

Gan-yang calmly opened his mouth again.

“Your Majesty. How could we...”

“Shut that mouth.”

“.....”

“You dare try to involve me in an act of treason and still have the gall to prattle on with that loose tongue of yours.”

“.....”

“You all should be grateful you aren’t immediately executed.”

-Swish!

As she raised her hand, the hidden experts revealed themselves.

As they already knew they had been concealing their presence, neither the advance party nor the rear party was surprised by this.

The problem was that the situation had become complicated.

Lady Seo’s lips twitched at their disconcerted appearance.

She recalled the conversation she had a few hours ago with the leader of Eastern Depot and the middle-aged man in gray official robes on the left side.

[Your Majesty. Why don’t you try using this against them?]

[Leader. What do you mean by that?]

[If you agree to their demands, it could bring great harm to both you and His Highness the Crown Prince.]

[Who doesn't know that? But they have supported me since my days as a noble consort, so they may hold even the tiniest weakness against me.]

[That is why you must take advantage of this situation.]

Lady Seo asked in puzzlement at his words.

[What do you mean?]

[You must cut ties with such thuggish people for the sake of His Highness the Crown Prince's future anyway. This will provide sufficient justification.]

[Justification?]

[Yes. First, you must overwhelm them and break their spirit.]

[Overwhelm them?]

[They also know how much this request will harm Your Majesty, so they will approach cautiously. However, if Your Majesty takes the initiative, they will have no choice but to be put in a difficult position.]

[Even so, do you think they will give up easily?]

[Of course not.]

[Then what do you suggest next?]

[After overwhelming them, once it is clearly imprinted that their demands are unreasonable, make a counter-demand.]

[Make a demand?]

[Yes, that is correct. According to Eunuch Yoo...no, Inspector Yoo, they will have to agree to any demand in order to fulfill their mission.]

[Oh? Do go on.]

[Then Your Majesty should demand this of the pressured group – to take the life of either Prince Jong or Consort Ho.]

Prince Jong.

He was the second prince and originally the most likely candidate for Crown Prince.

Although Lady Seo's son had been appointed as Crown Prince, there were still many ministers who followed Prince Jong, making him a thorn in her side.

And Consort Ho.

She hadn't entered the palace that long ago.

She was just a young girl who used to be a palace maid, but without any backing, she had bewitched the Emperor with her beauty alone and risen to the rank of Consort in just three years.

Although the Emperor's favor was still focused more on herself, that wench was still only twenty-two years old while she was approaching her mid-thirties.

As this balance could collapse at any time, Consort Ho was the one she most wanted to kill.

However, despite making several attempts to eliminate these two, she had failed each time.

In Prince Jong's case, it was unavoidable as he had many followers, but Consort Ho was utterly incomprehensible.

[Have them take the life of either Prince Jong or Consort Ho?]

[That is correct.]

[What if they refuse?]

Would the Heaven and Earth Society really take on such a risk?

This was an extremely dangerous matter for them as well.

[You needed a justification to end your relationship with them anyway, so you can use this as an excuse.]

[Oh? If they agree, that would be beneficial in its own way.]

[Indeed.]

[But if that happens, I will also have to aid them. What if that ends up holding me back?]

[You need not worry about that.]

[Don't worry, you say?]

[If they succeed in taking the life of Consort Ho or Prince Jong in response to the demand, we can definitively deal with them by linking it to the crime of helping a prisoner escape.]

At the leader's words, the middle-aged man in gray official robes who had been listening silently opened his mouth.

[If that happens, we shall protect Your Majesty and His Highness the Crown Prince from the evil bunch of the unorthodox faction, the Heaven and Earth Society.]

Lady Seo, the corners of her mouth slightly curling up.

Everything was perfect.

She was grateful to the Heaven and Earth Society for supporting her both materially and spiritually in her rise to this position.

But this was as far as it went.

She knew they had supported her like this to use the Crown Prince and herself as puppets from behind the scenes.

Therefore, she would properly make use of them one last time before discarding them.

To that end, she had demanded they send proper late-stage disciples so they couldn't back out even after causing trouble.

‘No matter what, you will all dance in the palm of my hand.’

Lady Seo sent a meaningful look to the leader of Eastern Depot on her right. It meant to definitively suppress them. The leader slightly nodded his head and likewise signaled with his eyes to the middle-aged man in gray official robes on the left side. The one his eyes pointed to was none other than Mok Gyeong-un. The middle-aged man nodded his head and half-drew his willow leaf saber from his waist.

-Shing!

The middle-aged man remembered what Yoo-bong, now Inspector Yoo, had said.

[There are no major problematic individuals in the advance party. However, among those who came with the rear party, two are the biggest issues.]

[Who are they?]

[Someone named Mok Gyeong-un and Mad Monk Ja Geum-jeong.]

[Mad Monk?]

At those words, the middle-aged man couldn't hide his shock. Mad Monk Ja Geum-jeong was known as one of the Three Madmen, with a notorious reputation. Even for someone like himself, if they fought, it might take several hundred moves before a victor was decided.

[Hohoho. Don't worry. We'll make sure Mad Monk Ja Geum-jeong can't come. But Sir Peng, you must definitely suppress the one named Mok Gyeong-un.]

[Is he that formidable?]

[Seeing as Mad Monk Ja Geum-jeong follows him, he must be at least a step above him.]

[Hmm. That's surprising. To think he's a step above that crazy excommunicated monk...]

However, based on the energy he sensed, Mok Gyeong-un was at most only at the pinnacle-stage of Peak Realm. He had heard this man could conceal his martial prowess, but he was a young lad not even in his prime yet, so he doubted if that was true. It was hard to believe a youngling like that was a step above the Mad Monk.

‘But it doesn’t hurt to be careful.’

Even in the orthodox martial world, there were geniuses called late-stage disciples who boasted tremendous martial arts. He just needed to think of it as fighting against such individuals. No matter how outstanding Mok Gyeong-un was, he had experience and years on his side. As long as he wasn’t careless, he believed he could sufficiently suppress him.

Moreover,

‘If worse comes to worst, I can call for reinforcements.’

His younger brother was waiting outside as support. Although younger than him and somewhat frivolous in conduct, his brother’s martial arts were a step above his own, even though he had taken the path of officialdom.

-Swish!

Then shall we begin seizing the upper hand?

The middle-aged man in gray official robes was about to fully draw the half-drawn willow leaf saber. At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled, picked up a piece of fried duck meat from the table with his chopsticks, and put it in his mouth. He then chewed it thoroughly, swallowed with a gulp, and said,

“Delicious.”

Everyone’s attention was now focused on Mok Gyeong-un. In a situation where things could erupt at any moment, even Lady Seo snorted in disbelief at his nonchalant attitude, as if he was utterly carefree. Was this young man of outstanding appearance the top expert among the late-stage disciples sent by the Heaven and Earth Society that Eastern Depot’s Inspector Yoo mentioned? The young lad seemed bold, but he didn’t seem to grasp the situation.

-Swish!

Lady Seo nodded her head at the middle-aged man in gray official robes. He then fully drew his willow leaf saber and approached Mok Gyeong-un while emanating a powerful aura.

“How impudent of you when Her Majesty is pressing you.”

“It felt like the conversation was dragging on too long with delicious food in front of me.”

“Disrespectful brat.”

“I didn’t express any particular complaints. Is simply tasting the food such a great disrespect?”

“...Put down those chopsticks at once and kneel.”

“I only picked up and ate a single piece, yet you’re being so petty.”

“Ha!”

He seems quite confident in his own martial prowess, doesn’t he? In that case, let’s see how impressive he is. The middle-aged man in gray official robes took a deep breath, then raised his inner energy to the 8th level and swung his saber towards Mok Gyeong-un’s neck with a tyrannical momentum.

-Swoosh!

The middle-aged man naturally assumed Mok Gyeong-un would leap back to avoid this. However,

-Clang!

‘!?’

In that instant, the middle-aged man couldn't hide his shock. That was because Mok Gyeong-un had caught the blade of his willow leaf saber with mere chopsticks.

‘T-This bastard, who the hell...?’

As he was taken aback, Mok Gyeong-un looked not at him but at Gan-yang, the leader of the advance party sitting across from him, and spoke with a sharp smile on his lips.

“It seems wrong to just sit still. Don't you agree?”

Chapter 226 – Lady Seo, the Imperial Noble Consort (3)

In the orthodox martial world, there are several renowned martial families.

Among them, the seven most prestigious martial arts clans are called the Seven Great Families.

Of these Seven Great Families, there was a renowned clan in Hebei that was famous for their saber techniques. The martial artists referred to this clan as the Hebei Peng Family.

The current head of the Hebei Peng Family, who held the real power, was Peng Il-hyeon, a genius of the saber art known as the Hegemon Saber of Hebei.

In Hebei Province, no one could match him in terms of saber techniques.

Peng Il-hyeon, the clan head, had two younger brothers with formidable martial prowess.

One of them, the second brother Peng Yi-mun, had set his sights on power early on and entered officialdom.

Thanks to Peng Yi-mun's government position, the Hebei Peng Family could enjoy various benefits.

And then there was the youngest brother, Peng Seok-im, whose character was the worst among the siblings.

He was so fond of wine and women that he had been the subject of gossip several times, and despite being born into a renowned saber clan, he insisted on using the sword, earning the ire of the clan elders.

However, despite this, the reason the Hebei Peng Family still valued him was because his martial talent was so outstanding that he was almost on par with the clan head, Peng Il-hyeon.

-Swish swish!

Peng Seok-im, the youngest brother of Clan Head Peng, looked at the wall of the restaurant illuminated by lanterns and diligently wiped his sword blade with a cloth.

Seeing this, a warrior beside him asked,

"Senior Brother, why are you paying so much attention to the sword blade?"

"I have to. I might have a chance to show off impressively in front of Her Majesty later."

"No. Do you really like the Imperial Noble Consort that much?"

"How can you call yourself a man if you don't feel stirred by such a peerless beauty?"

"Oh my. Watch your words. She is a woman who has an owner."

And that owner was none other than the Emperor who ruled this nation.

Despite the warrior's words, Peng Seok-im snorted.

"Hmph. You can curse even the king if he's not in front of you."

"Senior Brother!"

"Alright, alright. Why are you making such a fuss? Anyway, you're really peculiar. But no matter how I think about it, doesn't she seem wasted on that old man?"

The warrior clicked his tongue inwardly as he watched Peng Seok-im mutter to himself.

He was a man with unparalleled martial talent, but whenever wine and women were involved, he lost his senses.

After coming to the capital, he seemed to have regained his sanity by keeping his distance from such things, but now he was eyeing a tree he couldn't climb.

'...She is indeed that beautiful, though.'

The warrior also couldn't help but admire Lady Seo's face when he first saw her.

There were reasons why the aging Emperor couldn't let her go.

So he could understand Peng Seok-im's behavior.

However, no matter how much Peng Seok-im was fond of wine and women, he would never dare to lay a hand on the Emperor's woman.

Unless he had multiple lives to spare, that is.

Just then, Peng Seok-im suddenly shifted his gaze somewhere.

“Senior Brother?”

He was looking at a spot in front of the wall where several soldiers were stationed.

They were examining and admiring the weapons they had confiscated from the martial artists of the Heaven and Earth Society who had entered the restaurant earlier.

Among them, they were swinging a saber with an exceptionally thin blade that fluttered in the wind.

“That saber is magnificent.”

“Magnificent, you say?”

“Yes. To have such a thin blade yet still maintain elasticity, it must have been crafted by a great master.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“It seems the Heaven and Earth Society has sent some fairly capable individuals.”

“Isn’t that a bad thing then?”

“What’s bad about it?”

“We might have to go and provide support, no?”

“Then that’s a good thing. That way, I can show off in front of Her Majesty, right?”

“You’re really something else.”

The warrior shook his head from side to side.

Just then, Peng Seok-im furrowed his brows.

“Senior Brother? Are you perhaps angry? If so, I apologize...”

“That sword... What the hell is it?”

“Pardon?”

The warrior turned his head in the direction Peng Seok-im was looking and spotted a soldier holding a sword with a strange pattern engraved on it.

However, the soldier was staring at the sword with a dazed expression.

Something about the atmosphere felt off.

“Why is he acting like that?”

“.....”

“Senior Brother?”

But Peng Seok-im was also transfixed on the sword, unable to take his eyes off it.

He had a gaze as if he had discovered a tremendous treasure.

At the same time.

-Clang!

‘Impossible!’

The leader of Eastern Depot’s eyes went wide.

That was because he never expected Peng Yi-mun’s tyrannical slash, delivered with the momentum of the renowned expert of the Hebei Peng Family, to be blocked by mere chopsticks.

To be precise, it wasn’t even blocked, but the saber blade was caught by the chopsticks.

‘How can this be?’

The leader was inwardly baffled.

Based on what Eunuch Yoo, now Inspector Yoo, had said, he knew that among the late-stage disciples sent by the Heaven and Earth Society, the young man with exceptional appearance had the most outstanding martial prowess.

However, he had assumed that no matter how skilled he was, he would still only be at the level of a late-stage disciple.

But to think he was a master capable of catching the saber of an expert from the Hebei Peng Family, one of the renowned martial clans of the orthodox world, in such a manner...

-Swish!

The leader glanced at Yoo-bong.

Yoo-bong was equally perplexed by the situation.

No matter how strong Mok Gyeong-un was, he had predicted that he would be no match for Peng Yi-mun, an expert of the Hebei Peng Family, but that prediction had been shattered.

Amidst this, Mok Gyeong-un spoke with a sharp smile on his lips.

“It seems wrong to just sit still. Don’t you agree?”

“.....”

Gan-yang couldn’t hide his awkwardness at Mok Gyeong-un’s words.

The original plan had already gone awry.

Lady Seo’s side trying to suppress them like this was likely to cut ties with the Heaven and Earth Society or to steer the situation in her desired direction.

Gan-yang was about to nod his head as if he had no choice, but...

-Clang!

At that moment, the middle-aged man in gray official robes, Peng Yi-mun, tried to extract his saber by rotating it while it was caught by the chopsticks.

However, his willow leaf saber, grabbed by the chopsticks, didn’t budge an inch.

-Tremble tremble tremble!

With this, Peng Yi-mun could clearly tell.

‘This bastard’s inner energy is stronger than mine.’

Even now, he was already using a force close to the 9th level, the highest inner energy, yet this meant he was inferior to this fellow even in terms of inner energy.

Peng Yi-mun’s complexion darkened for a moment.

‘...This is absurd.’

Peng Yi-mun was a master whose skills were not only perfected but also near the pinnacle-stage of Transcendent Realm.

To overwhelm someone like him in terms of inner energy, it was impossible with just reaching the pinnacle-stage of Transcendent Realm.

That meant this young lad had to have crossed the wall...

‘Impossible. How can a lad not even in his prime have reached the Transformation Realm?’

Even in the orthodox martial world, there weren’t many who had reached the Transformation Realm.

And among them, there was no one who had reached this realm in their teens.

It was a realm that required long years of cultivation and high enlightenment, so Peng Yi-mun found it hard to accept.

But the most certain thing was that he couldn't suppress this brat with his strength alone.

Thus,

‘No choice. Then!’

-Smack! Thud!

Peng Yi-mun released the hilt of the willow leaf saber and forcefully struck the end of the saber handle with his palm.

This was one of the secret techniques of the Five Tiger Saber Style, the Saber Breaking Technique.

It was a technique that shattered the saber blade by striking the handle with internal energy, sending the fragments imbued with energy flying towards the opponent.

-Clang clang clang clang!

The saber fragments, shattered by the internal energy, rushed towards Mok Gyeong-un.

Given the close distance and the fact that he was seated, Peng Yi-mun thought it would be impossible for him to dodge.

But the moment the saber fragments touched Mok Gyeong-un's skin with the momentum to pierce through him,

-Poof poof poof poof poof!

Along with that, the saber fragments failed to penetrate Mok Gyeong-un's body and instead slid off their trajectory, embedding themselves in various other places.

‘What the hell is this?’

Surprised by this, Peng Yi-mun hurriedly kicked the ground to create distance.

Mok Gyeong-un spoke to him as if intrigued.

“An interesting technique. To shatter your own saber and launch it like hidden weapons.”

“What the hell are you?”

“My identity?”

“Even if the Heaven and Earth Society's executive, the Shadow Clan Master, personally made a move, he wouldn't be able to block this technique so easily.”

If it were an executive of the Heaven and Earth Society at the level of the Five Kings, it would be somewhat understandable.

Among them, there were monsters who had received the title of Eight Stars.

But for a disciple of an executive at the Clan Master level of the Heaven and Earth Society to be this strong, not just them, was incomprehensible.

It was truly a case of the student surpassing the teacher, wasn't it?

“You underestimate my master too much.”

“It’s not that I’m underestimating him...”

“More importantly, since you aimed for my life, you’ll have to pay the price accordingly.”

“What?”

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un plucked one of the embedded saber fragments with his index and middle fingers.

Then he immediately launched it towards Peng Yi-mun like a hidden weapon.

Peng Yi-mun hurriedly twisted his body sideways to dodge the incoming saber fragment.

But that wasn’t the end.

-Thud!

The moment he twisted his body, Mok Gyeong-un swiftly launched another saber fragment.

The saber fragment flew accurately towards Peng Yi-mun’s neck.

It was a situation impossible to evade, but...

-Clang!

At that instant, someone deflected it with a flexible sword.

That someone was none other than the leader of Eastern Depot.

“Leader!”

Peng Yi-mun, who had narrowly avoided having his neck pierced, sent a grateful look towards him.

The leader then spoke urgently.

“Sir, it seems we’ll have to collaborate in attacking this time.”

“I agree.”

-Wheeeeeee!

With those words, Peng Yi-mun blew a whistle by sending inner energy through his mouth.

This was a signal requesting assistance.

Realizing that Mok Gyeong-un was no ordinary expert, he judged that unless his younger brother waiting outside joined forces with him, they might suffer a defeat.

The leader shouted at Yoo-bong.

“Inspector Yoo, lead the rest and deal with them.”

“Y-Yes, sir.”

Although Yoo-bong replied hastily, he was inwardly perplexed.

His original plan was to have Peng Yi-mun face Mok Gyeong-un while he and the leader joined forces to suppress the rest.

However, even with the support of first-rate warriors, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak, who had come with the rear party, were experts who had reached the transcendent realm.

Gan-yang and Ok-gi were also no ordinary individuals, so could they really hold them off?

‘No. Don’t show weakness. We just need to hold out until the Peng Family’s reinforcements arrive.’

They were already waiting outside anyway, so they would arrive soon.

No matter how strong these people were, the tide of battle wouldn’t turn in an instant.

“No choice.”

“To think it would get complicated like this.”

Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak stood up from their seats and assumed the starting posture of their fist techniques, facing the warriors surrounding them.

It seemed it was already too late to turn the situation around.

Gan-yang and Ok-gi also seemed to think they had ruined the matter, as they took a fighting stance while glaring at Yoo-bong with resentful eyes.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un, the only one still seated, opened his mouth.

“Your Majesty, the Imperial Noble Consort.”

‘!?’

As the situation was on the brink of erupting, Mok Gyeong-un suddenly addressing Lady Seo drew everyone’s attention to him.

Of course, Lady Seo herself was no exception.

She had been quite surprised by Mok Gyeong-un’s martial prowess, which was more outstanding than expected.

Although she wasn’t well-versed in martial arts, it was clear that his skills were no ordinary matter if the leader and Peng Yi-mun, experts highly regarded even in the imperial palace, were attempting to collaborate in attacking him.

“Why have you addressed me?”

Lady Seo asked, puzzled.

Mok Gyeong-un then replied with a smile.

“I want to briefly tell you what will happen from now on.”

“What will happen?”

“Yes.”

Lady Seo furrowed her brows.

What the hell was this bastard talking about?

At that moment, the leader, who had been about to collaborate with Peng Yi-mun, raised his voice and pressed.

“How impudent! How dare you to Her Majesty...”

“Hold on.”

“Your Majesty?”

Lady Seo, who had stopped the leader, raised one eyebrow and spoke.

“You’re quite a brazen one. So, what do you think will happen?”

“Everyone except you will die here.”

‘!?’

For a moment, she doubted her own ears.

She had wondered what he was going to say, but was this scoundrel daring to intimidate her?

However, Mok Gyeong-un’s words didn’t end there.

“I heard you have many enemies, right?”

“What?”

“Since you want to let go of our hand anyway, it seems you have no more use for us. So how about we negotiate with them, using your life as collateral? What do you think?”

‘!!!!!!’

Chapter 227 – Lady Seo, the Imperial Noble Consort (4)

For a moment, the entire rear garden was dyed in hostility.

Mok Gyeong-un’s words were shocking enough to stun not only Lady Seo but everyone present.

This was also true for the Heaven and Earth Society’s advance party, who could be considered to be on the same side.

Gan-yang, the leader of the advance party, couldn’t hide his bafflement, his eyes going wide.

‘What the hell is he trying to do?’

He had thought Mok Gyeong-un had some sort of plan when he said he had something to say to Lady Seo.

But he never imagined that plan would be a threat that was beyond his own comprehension.

And to none other than Lady Seo, one of the Four Great Evils who held sway over the power in this nation and the mother of the Crown Prince.

‘...He’s lost his mind.’

A threat needs to have some degree of plausibility.

Only then can you induce the other party to act according to your intentions. But if you suddenly escalate the scale like this, the consequences will also become unmanageable.

How did he intend to handle the situation after making such a threat?

‘In the past, it might have been different, but provoking the current Lady Seo like this is dangerous.’

She wasn’t just called the center of power in name only.

If she set her mind to it, she could move the Emperor.

If that happened, the enraged Emperor could mobilize the imperial army or the orthodox faction to pressure the Heaven and Earth Society.

Thus, Gan-yang was concerned that the situation would take a turn for the worst.

As expected, Lady Seo seemed greatly angered, her beautiful brows twisting fiercely.

It would be strange not to be angry after being blatantly threatened.

At that moment, the leader of Eastern Depot shouted in anger.

“You bastard! How dare a lowly servant like you spout such nonsense? If you don’t immediately kowtow and beg Her Majesty for forgiveness, I’ll exterminate you and your entire clan...”

“Leader.”

Lady Seo cut off his pressing.

“Your Majesty! But...”

“Leader!”

As her voice rose, the leader immediately shut his mouth.

‘Oh?’

Interest flashed in Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes.

He had naturally assumed she would find it hard to contain her anger or be thrown into confusion by his direct threat. But unexpectedly, despite her anger, she didn’t lose her composure.

It seemed she hadn’t risen to that position with just her beauty alone.

After stopping the leader, Lady Seo opened her mouth.

“What is your name?”

At her question, Mok Gyeong-un replied nonchalantly.

“It’s Mok Gyeong-un.”

“Mok Gyeong-un... I see, Mok Gyeong-un. Are you not afraid of the consequences after daring to threaten me like this?”

“Consequences?”

“I don’t know how outstanding your martial arts are, but the leader here and Magistrate Peng are also formidable experts. And it’s not just them. Outside, there are experts from the renowned martial clan of the orthodox faction, the Hebei Peng Family, along with hundreds of soldiers.”

‘Experts from the Hebei Peng Family have also come to provide support?’

At these words, it was Gan-yang who swallowed dryly instead.

It seemed Lady Seo was determined to sever ties with them today.

Judging by how thoroughly she had prepared.

If they made even a small misstep, this place could very well become their grave today.

Yet, Mok Gyeong-un replied indifferently.

“You’ve prepared quite diligently.”

At this reaction, one of her eyebrows twitched.

“You’re quite an arrogant and presumptuous fellow. I don’t know if you have guts of steel or if you’re that confident in your own abilities, but let me tell you what will happen from now on.”

“And what would that be?”

“Make sure to keep your word about killing everyone.”

“Pardon?”

“If you happen to fail at that, the consequences won’t end with just your head.”

“.....”

“Not only you but all your related clan members will be exterminated. Furthermore, we will hold the Heaven and Earth Society, where you belong, responsible for this incident.”

‘Oh no!’

At Lady Seo’s words, the expressions of Gan-yang and the others from the Heaven and Earth Society darkened.

They had thought she would at least waver a bit in the face of the threat, but instead, she launched a cold counterattack.

‘Holding the Heaven and Earth Society responsible?’

If everything she said actually came to pass and they failed to kill everyone here, they would face the worst-case scenario.

This made all of them worried.

No matter how outstanding Mok Gyeong-un’s martial prowess was, the forces Lady Seo had prepared also seemed formidable.

-Swish!

Watching their reactions, Lady Seo poured herself a cup of alcohol and spoke.

“Do you now grasp the reality before your eyes?”

“.....”

“So, I shall bestow mercy and give you one last chance.”

“A chance?”

“Yes. Whether you seize this chance or not will determine if my wrath extends to the Heaven and Earth Society or not.”

“I’m quite curious about that.”

“You’re curious? Then I’ll tell you. You dared to utter disrespectful words that should never be spoken to me, so I cannot overlook that sin. Thus, first cut out that presumptuous tongue of yours.”

‘!?’

“And then take your own life. If you do so, I will not hold your companions or your family and the Heaven and Earth Society responsible.”

With those words, Lady Seo raised the corners of her mouth sharply and downed the cup in one go.

-Gulp!

A mere thug from the martial world dared to threaten her?

Since the time you started crawling, she had been surviving in this cruel and cold imperial palace, eliminating countless enemies and rivals.

Did they think someone like her would lose her reason and be swayed by such a threat?

If so, they were mistaken.

‘I am the one who survived on the thin ice of the imperial palace, where I could lose my life at any moment, and reached this position. If you try to provoke me half-heartedly, I’ll show you what price you’ll pay.’

It was at that very moment.

“Heh.”

Lady Seo’s right eyebrow shot up.

‘Laughing?’

It was absurd.

She had tried to make him realize how precariously he was walking on a tightrope, but he was laughing in this situation.

Moreover, that laughter was clearly closer to a sneer.

“You dare...”

“Ah, my apologies. Your Majesty’s begging was so amusing.”

“What? Begging?”

“It’s quite interesting to see you go on and on, pleading with the very enemy you’ve turned against to take his own life.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un’s face split into a grin that seemed to reach his ears.

That expression, filled with malice, sent a chill down Lady Seo's spine for a moment.

She wasn't the only one who felt this sensation.

‘...This bastard is dangerous.’

They had simply thought of him as an impudent fellow.

The leader of Eastern Depot instinctively felt an eerie sense of danger from Mok Gyeong-un.

So much so that he resolved not to simply subdue him, but to kill him no matter what through a collaborative attack.

Thus, the leader signaled Peng Yi-mun beside him with his eyes.

To attack immediately.

It was at that very moment.

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been sitting in his seat and sneering, vanished as if scattering.

‘What?’

As he disappeared from their sight, everyone hurriedly scanned their surroundings.

This was true even for the leader and Peng Yi-mun, the most outstanding experts among Lady Seo's close associates.

They had already been fully prepared to fight Mok Gyeong-un from the start.

For him to disappear even from their view, just how fast was he?

It was at that instant.

-Startle!

Sensing a faint presence and unease behind him, the leader hurriedly launched a claw technique towards his back.

‘Sunflower Hanging Claw, 5th Technique, Dancing Lotus Swift!’

-Smack!

It was a technique that struck the opponent targeting one’s back with the elbow and launched a claw strike to the face.

But before he could even fully turn his body,

-Thud!

His elbow was blocked by something like a palm, making it impossible to turn his body.

He tried to launch his body forward to create distance, but...

-Thwack!

“Ugh!”

With the impact striking his waist, the leader let out a dying scream as he was sent flying forward, crashing into the rear garden’s wall.

-Boom! Rumble!

The impact was so strong that the wall crumbled and the roof tiles above collapsed.

“Leader! You bastard!”

Having pinpointed Mok Gyeong-un’s location thanks to the leader, Peng Yi-mun gathered inner energy in his hand and unleashed a saber technique.

It was the 4th technique of the Five Tiger Saber Style, the Saber Piercing Strongly.

The saber energy, split into five trajectories, targeted the top of the head, neck, both shoulders, and chest with unparalleled speed.

-Swish swish swish swish swish!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un also responded with a saber technique.

It was the 7th technique of the Flying Phantom Saber Art, the Flashing Shadow Swift Saber.

Originally, the Flashing Shadow Swift Saber was literally a swift saber strike that made the saber energy appear like flashing shadows. But the way it was unleashed by the Shadow Clan Master was quite different.

That was because...

-Clang clang clang clang!

Mok Gyeong-un's hand seemed to be motionless, yet Peng Yi-mun's saber energy, which had been rushing in five split trajectories, was simultaneously deflected.

‘W-What speed...’

The outcome of a swift saber duel depended on speed.

But Peng Yi-mun's saber technique couldn't even compare to Mok Gyeong-un's.

This went beyond the difference between walking and running.

Thanks to that, Peng Yi-mun's right hand was thrown upward. Mok Gyeong-un then penetrated the opening, grabbing his left arm with the Capturing Arhat Hand technique and twisting it behind his back while pressing down on his right shoulder.

-Thud!

“Aargh!”

-Thump!

As five fingers dug into the pressed right shoulder, Peng Yi-mun let out a groan of pain and fell to one knee.

Peng Yi-mun, who had been subdued with a single move after just one exchange, realized with certainty.

‘...It's futile.’

If this bastard seriously unleashed his abilities, not only himself and the leader but even if everyone joined forces, they wouldn't be able to sweep him away. He was a monster to that extent.

And this monstrous fellow was just a disciple of an executive at the Sect Master level of the Heaven and Earth Society?

It was unbelievable.

With this level of martial prowess, he wasn't at the late-stage disciple level but comparable to an executive at the Five Kings level of the Heaven and Earth Society or an elder of the Nine Sects and One Clan, the major factions of the orthodox martial world.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un said to Lady Seo,

“Your Majesty. It seems you had high expectations for them.”

-Tremble tremble!

At Mok Gyeong-un's provocation, the hand holding the alcohol cup trembled.

Even though she wasn't well-versed in martial arts, she could tell that the leader and Peng Yi-mun, her close associates, were no match for that fellow.

Lady Seo bit her lip hard and glared at the eunuch Yoo-bong.

[Don't worry. Although he's stronger than me, Sir Peng will easily subdue him.]

‘Easily subdue him?’

She hadn't completely trusted that eunuch's words.

But she had thought that since the people sent by the Heaven and Earth Society were just young late-stage disciples, they would be no match for an expert like Peng Yi-mun, who had years of experience and a reputation in the martial world.

However, her expectations had been completely overturned.

‘...Can the reinforcements really subdue that fellow even if they come?’

There was a saying that even the strongest couldn't win against numbers.

She had also thought so.

But strangely enough, she had a bad feeling.

Would that proverb really apply to an overwhelmingly powerful being like him?

‘It's still uncertain how things will turn out. But...’

Having fought and survived against numerous enemies in the imperial palace for a long time, her instincts had become much more sensitive than ordinary people's.

That sensitivity had given her deep insight, allowing her to survive and rise to the top.

‘At this rate, the loss may be even greater.’

Her instincts were strongly telling her to stop right now.

Thus,

“Enough!”

She raised her voice loudly for everyone to hear.

Then she gestured to the warriors surrounding the Heaven and Earth Society to back off.

The warriors, who had been hesitating on what to do, simultaneously retreated.

Lady Seo then spoke in a calm voice.

“You said your name was Mok Gyeong-un?”

“Yes.”

“Despite not even being in your prime, you have truly astonishing martial prowess.”

-Clap clap clap!

Lady Seo clapped her hands and continued speaking in a somewhat softened voice, as if admiring him.

“For even the leader and Magistrate Peng to be no match for you... It seems I underestimated you due to my lack of discernment.”

Her plan was simple.

After acknowledging him and praising him to a certain extent, she would naturally wrap up this escalated situation.

It was the only way to resolve the matter without losing face as the Imperial Noble Consort.

If she concluded things well here, regardless of the outcome, she could end it with an image of her conceding and showing magnanimity.

So, if she properly admonished him...

It was at that very moment.

-Crack!

“Aaaaargh!”

‘!!!!’

Lady Seo hurriedly turned her head away from the gruesome sight unfolding before her eyes.

That was because Mok Gyeong-un had torn off Peng Yi-mun’s right arm from the shoulder he had been pressing down on.

‘If this fellow isn’t crazy...’

For a moment, she was at a loss for words, finding it absurd.

She had tried to resolve the situation by conceding, but what the hell was this?

As she was baffled, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“It would be troublesome if you brushed it off like that.”

“What?”

“You didn’t have the naive idea of thinking you could handle the situation by praising me a bit and appeasing me, did you?”

“...Are you really going to see this through to the end?”

“I clearly told you. The moment you tried to sever ties with us, your usefulness ended.”

“You! You!”

“Come to think of it, I suddenly wonder. Will the young Crown Prince be able to survive safely after losing you?”

‘!!!!!!’

At these words, Lady Seo’s pupils trembled as if an earthquake had struck.

Although she had turned her head away, the smell of blood vibrating in all directions and the sound of blood drops falling were suffocating her.

She had simply thought they were being a bit forceful to get what they wanted.

But that wasn’t the case.

This bastard was truly driving her into a corner.

-Thump! Thump! Thump!

Once engulfed by fear, even her heart was beating like crazy and wouldn't calm down.

As if enjoying her terror, Mok Gyeong-un grinned and said,

“All of this is of your own making.”

“.....”

“Then watch as they die one by one.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un wrapped his arm around the neck of Peng Yi-mun, who was suffering from his torn-off arm.

-Grip!

“Ack!”

And he tried to twist his neck right then and there.

At that moment, Lady Seo screamed in a voice close to a shriek,

“Stooooop!”

Chapter 228 – Desire (1)

Mok Gyeong-un wrapped his arm around the neck of Peng Yi-mun, a close associate of Lady Seo.

“Ack!”

And he tried to twist his neck right then and there.

At that moment, Lady Seo, who had been confused and unsure of what to do, screamed in a voice close to a shriek,

“Stooooop!”

At this, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been about to break his neck without hesitation, stopped at the last moment.

“Ah... Sir Peng.”

Just then, the leader of Eastern Depot, who had crashed into the wall from Mok Gyeong-un’s attack, staggered out, unable to hide his shock.

Although he had dramatically prevented Peng Yi-mun from losing his life, he knew better than anyone what this outcry meant.

‘How could this happen...’

For Lady Seo to show weakness first.

At this rate, they would have no choice but to be dragged into the situation the bastard wanted.

As expected, Lady Seo, with tears welling up in her eyes, spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

“I... I have lost. So please, stop.”

‘!!!!!’

At her words, the warriors were in an uproar.

It was unthinkable for Lady Seo, the mother of the Crown Prince and one of the Four Great Evils who held sway over the power in this nation, to admit defeat to a mere martial artist.

In the end, those with deep loyalty who couldn't just stand by and watch this tried to dissuade her weakened state.

“Your Majesty!”

“This cannot be!”

“Please take back your words!”

They cried out “Your Majesty” almost to the point of wailing.

How could she submit to such a thug-like fellow?

It was absolutely unacceptable.

Thus, despite not receiving any orders, several warriors launched themselves towards Mok Gyeong-un.

“How dare you threaten Her Majesty!”

“Die!”

At that moment, two people blocked the path of the charging warriors.

They were none other than Seop Chun, the Third Guard Captain of the Heaven and Earth Society's main sect, and Mong Mu-yak, the son of the Vice-Leader.

-Clang clang clang clang!

“Ah, what?”

“The weapons?”

Seop Chun instantly broke or deflected the weapons of the three attacking warriors with his inner energy-imbued hand blade.

Mong Mu-yak easily dodged the swords of two people with his excellent lightness skill, then sealed their acupoints, rendering them unable to move.

-Thud thud thud!

No matter how outstanding they were, they were only at the first-rate level.

There was no way they could handle two individuals who had reached the transcendent realm and were called the Five Tigers, the pinnacle of the Heaven and Earth Society's late-stage disciples.

Seop Chun raised his voice and issued a chilling warning to the warriors whose weapons he had broken.

“If you target my lord, next time I'll sever your necks, not your weapons!”

“D-Damn it!”

Overwhelmed by Seop Chun's aura, they took involuntary steps back, trembling.

Thanks to that, the observing warriors could tell.

Not only Mok Gyeong-un but each and every one of the late-stage disciples sent by the Heaven and Earth Society was an overwhelmingly powerful expert they couldn't handle.

‘No. The warriors are losing morale.’

The leader of Eastern Depot, who had been regaining his strength through breath control, was in a difficult position.

Although he and Peng Yi-mun were no match for the fellow, the situation would change once the experts and soldiers from the Peng Family arrived.

It was too early to give up...

‘...Wait. What's this?’

The leader frowned and looked outside the rear garden.

Suddenly, something felt off.

It seemed quite some time had passed since Peng Yi-mun blew the whistle to signal for help, so why hadn't the reinforcements arrived yet?

If the distance was far, it would be understandable, but at most, they should have been on standby right outside the restaurant.

But it was taking too long for that.

‘Could it be?’

The leader glanced at the Heaven and Earth Society side with trembling eyes.

Just then, Lady Seo, whose trembling had somewhat subsided, pressed the warriors.

“Everyone, stop! No one is to act until I give the order!”

Having admonished them, Lady Seo spoke to Mok Gyeong-un.

“What they did just now stemmed from their loyalty. So please understand.”

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

“I’m not so lacking in understanding.”

-Grip!

Biting her lip hard, she suppressed her turbulent emotions to the point where her hands and feet trembled, and spoke again.

“I will grant all of your requests, so let’s end this here.”

“Y-Your Majesty! You mustn’t!”

At her words, someone opposed vehemently.

It was Peng Yi-mun, whose neck was being held by Mok Gyeong-un’s arm.

Despite being on the verge of death, he couldn’t just stand by and watch this situation.

“Your Majesty! The Peng Family and the Righteous Alliance will protect you from this wicked Heaven and Earth Society no matter what! You must never give in to their demands...”

-Crack!

“Ack!”

Before he could even finish speaking, Peng Yi-mun’s neck was twisted, and his body went limp with a dying scream.

Anyone could tell his breath had ceased.

‘!!!!!!’

In an instant, the rear garden was engulfed in silence.

Everyone had thought that since Lady Seo had admitted defeat and submitted first, at least no one else would die.

But Peng Yi-mun, who could be considered Lady Seo’s left arm, had absurdly lost his life.

This was a shock in itself.

‘What?’

‘Why? Lady Seo’s close associate?’

Even the Heaven and Earth Society side, who could be considered to be on the same side, was surprised.

Although it was a somewhat extreme method, they thought there was no need for further sacrifices since Lady Seo's side had surrendered first.

But they couldn't understand why he was escalating the situation further.

At that moment, Lady Seo, who had been speechless with shock at Peng Yi-mun's death, screamed with bulging veins in her neck.

"Y-You, how dare you!"

"It's not about daring."

"What?"

-Grip!

At that instant, Lady Seo's eyes widened like crazy.

It was because of what was unfolding before her eyes.

-Crunch! Crack!

The sound of bones being crushed and flesh being torn tortured her eardrums, and her eyes witnessed Peng Yi-mun's head being ripped from his body.

The anger that had gripped her vanished without a trace at the sight of such a cruel scene.

'This... This fellow isn't in his right mind...'

-Crunch! Squish!

Mok Gyeong-un threw Peng Yi-mun's head, which he had completely separated from the body, onto the table in the pavilion where Lady Seo was.

-Thud! Roll roll!

‘!!!!!!!’

“Aaaaaaaah!”

The palace maids beside Lady Seo screamed at the horrific sight.

Amidst the screaming and trembling maids, Lady Seo staggered and was about to collapse.

She had already lost her mind at the sight of Peng Yi-mun's head rolling on the table.

“Ugh...”

“Your Majesty!”

-Pat!

The eunuch Yoo-bong, who was right in front of the pavilion, hurriedly leaped up to support her as she was about to collapse.

Along with that, Yoo-bong kicked Peng Yi-mun's head, which was on the table, into the pond near the pavilion with a bitter expression.

‘Sir Peng. My apologies.’

-Splash!

Peng Yi-mun's head sank into the pond like that.

The eyes of all those watching were filled with shock and fear.

The warriors, who had been enraged when Peng Yi-mun died, were now gripped by fear and a sense of overwhelming pressure, not knowing what to do.

‘He... He's crazy.’

To rip off the head of someone who was already dead.

It was unspeakably cruel.

Amidst this, Mok Gyeong-un licked the back of his blood-soaked hand with his tongue and raised the corners of his mouth sharply.

At that sight, everyone felt a chill run down their spine.

The sight of him tasting blood and laughing was truly like an evil demon.

-Step step!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un took a step.

It was in the direction of the pavilion where Lady Seo was.

Seeing this, Lady Seo, who had been on the verge of losing consciousness from shock, cried out in disgust.

“S-Stop him! Stop him!”

There were four warriors near the pavilion.

But none of them moved at Lady Seo’s command.

Already overcome by fear and terror, they couldn’t control their trembling bodies.

However, not everyone was like that.

“Don’t you dare touch Her Majesty!”

-Pat!

The leader of Eastern Depot, having somewhat recovered his strength through breath control, launched himself to block Mok Gyeong-un.

But Seop Chun intercepted him.

“Where do you think you’re going!”

“Get out of the way!”

-Thud thud thud thud!

The two exchanged about two moves’ worth of attacks and defenses on the spot in an instant.

Originally, if they were to properly fight, the leader would have the upper hand in terms of inner energy, but thanks to the injury he had suffered from Mok Gyeong-un, their exchange was neck and neck.

‘Damn it. To this young lad.’

His mind growing impatient, the leader’s hands became even more tangled, unable to break through.

Thus,

-Thud!

Lady Seo pushed away the eunuch Yoo-bong, who had been supporting her, and shouted,

“Stop him! I said stop him!”

Pushed forward as if by her command, Yoo-bong was at a loss inwardly.

He had already been defeated with a single move when he faced Mok Gyeong-un before, and he had witnessed with his own eyes that even Peng Yi-mun and the leader, who were better than him, were no match.

So how was he supposed to stop him?

‘Damn it.’

Yoo-bong’s eyes trembled like crazy as he looked at the approaching Mok Gyeong-un.

Just half an hour ago, it seemed like everything would go well.

But how could everything collapse like this?

-Step step!

Mok Gyeong-un approached right in front of him.

Yoo-bong repeated inwardly,

‘I have to stop him. I have to stop him.’

Even if he knew the outcome, Lady Seo had given the order, so he had to carry it out.

But his hands and feet wouldn't listen.

The moment his eyes met Mok Gyeong-un's, he was gripped by a sense of overwhelming pressure, and he unknowingly lowered his head.

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un simply passed by him as if no one was there.

This was truly humiliating.

Nevertheless, Yoo-bong felt miserable at the sight of himself feeling relieved for a moment.

-Tap!

Mok Gyeong-un stood in front of Lady Seo, leaving about three steps between them.

-Tremble tremble!

As Mok Gyeong-un finally stood before her, she felt the strength drain from her legs, as if she would collapse at any moment.

Seeing him up close, his appearance was exceptionally handsome, but that didn't register in her mind.

Only the blood staining Mok Gyeong-un's hands caught her eye.

‘Ugh.’

She felt like vomiting from the revulsion.

She felt like tears would come out, but she was barely holding them back.

To her, Mok Gyeong-un spoke,

“Those who are full tend to have their memories and emotions of hunger diluted.”

“...What are you saying?”

“Of course, that can happen. Humans are simpler than you think, so they easily forget such memories.”

“.....”

“So, I simply reminded you of those lacking emotions through a suitable example.”

As soon as he finished speaking, Mok Gyeong-un reached out his hand towards her.

“Eek!”

Lady Seo flinched and unknowingly closed her eyes tightly.

Was he going to harm her as well?

-Swish!

But Mok Gyeong-un brushed her disheveled hair to the side and spoke in a gentle voice,

“Your Majesty. Do you know what those lacking emotions are?”

“.....”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, she trembled and cautiously opened her eyes slightly.

As she opened her eyes, she saw Mok Gyeong-un’s face filled with nothing but malice.

Seeing this, she couldn’t control her trembling.

She had felt the emotions directed at her through the eyes of countless people.

But this was the first time she had experienced something like this.

How could a human being be filled with such malice?

Just looking at it was too frightening.

“P-Please spare me.”

Unable to overcome this fear, a plea finally spilled from her lips.

To her, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“Fear, desperation, earnestness... Good. It seems those lacking things have been filled now.”

‘!?’

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

The death of her close associate Peng Yi-mun, the cruelty of ripping off his head.

All these actions were to remind and imprint the emotion of fear in her, who had become arrogant after becoming the Imperial Noble Consort.

‘Just... Just for that reason...’

But even if she realized this, nothing would change.

This fear, once imprinted, wasn’t something that could be easily undone.

To be freed from this bondage, there were only two options.

Either kill this man who had imprinted this emotion on her, or die herself. It was one of the two.

‘But how can I kill this man?’

At that moment, something came to her mind.

It was,

[Your Majesty! The Peng Family and the Righteous Alliance will protect you from this wicked Heaven and Earth Society no matter what!]

The words Peng Yi-mun had spoken before he died.

That's right.

Peng Yi-mun was a member of the Hebei Peng Family and belonged to the Righteous Alliance.

She knew that the Righteous Alliance, formed by the warriors of the orthodox martial world, had a grudge against the wicked Heaven and Earth Society.

If they found out about Peng Yi-mun's death, they would never let it slide.

-Grip!

She clenched her teeth.

Just endure a little.

Endure this moment of fear and humiliation, and surely reven...

-Boom!

At that moment, the closed door of the rear garden was shattered by something and toppled forward.

Everyone's attention simultaneously turned towards it.

‘Perhaps?’

Had the long-awaited support from the Peng Family’s experts and soldiers finally arrived?

But the complexion of the leader of Eastern Depot, who was looking towards the main gate of the rear garden, wasn’t good.

That was because there was hardly any presence.

If hundreds of soldiers and experts from the Peng Family had arrived, many presences should have been felt, but something was off.

But someone revealed themselves through the toppled door.

It was none other than,

“Sir Peng!”

Peng Seok-im, Peng Yi-mun’s younger brother and an expert of the Hebei Peng Family.

At his appearance, the warriors’ expressions brightened, thinking that support had finally arrived.

But something was strange.

Peng Seok-im’s clothes were stained red, and in his hand was a sword with a strange pattern they had never seen before, soaked in blood.

-Drip drip!

Could it be that there was an ambush set by the Heaven and Earth Society outside?

Otherwise, how could he appear alone in such a state?

As they were puzzled, Peng Seok-im scanned his surroundings with crazed eyes, then soon discovered Lady Seo in the pavilion and raised the corners of his mouth sharply.

At this, the leader shouted,

“Sir Peng. What on earth happened outside...”

“Shut up! You castrated bastard.”

‘!?’

At his shout, the leader’s expression stiffened.

He had tried to ask what had happened outside, but he was suddenly cursed at.

As he was baffled, Peng Seok-im spat out unexpected words towards Lady Seo in the pavilion.

“Hehehe. Your Majesty. Are you prepared to moan in ecstasy in my arms tonight?”

‘!!!!!!’

Chapter 229 – Desire (2)

“Hehehe. Your Majesty. Are you prepared to moan in ecstasy in my arms tonight?”

‘!!!!!’

No one had anticipated this.

How could such brazen and vulgar words come out of Peng Seok-im, who could be considered Lady Seo’s closest confidant as the younger brother of Magistrate Peng Yi-mun, unless he had gone mad?

“Ha!”

Even Lady Seo was utterly dumbfounded by the shock.

She had high expectations for the Hebei Peng Family.

They were the escape route that would sever her ties with the Heaven and Earth Society, who had supported her but ultimately wanted to control her as they wished.

But a situation had unfolded that shattered those expectations.

-Thud thud thud thud!

The leader of Eastern Depot, who had been exchanging blows with Seop Chun, created some distance and then pressed, unable to contain his anger.

“Peng Seok-im! Have you truly gone insane? How dare you speak so disrespectfully to Her Majesty...”

Before he could even finish speaking,

Peng Seok-im walked towards the pavilion, letting out a madness-filled laugh.

“Hehehe.”

Just by looking at this, one could tell how out of his mind he was.

Thus, the warriors blocked him as he tried to approach the pavilion.

“Sir Peng. Stop right there!”

“If you try to come any closer, we’ll have no choice but to take action.”

-Shing!

Those who drew their weapons assumed a starting posture.

Seeing them like this, Peng Seok-im scoffed and spoke.

“Take action? Do you think the likes of you can stop me? Well, if you think you can, give it a try. But you’ll have to stake your lives.”

With those words, Peng Seok-im continued walking forward without stopping.

-Step!

He had only taken a single step, but the warriors flinched.

That was because the thick murderous intent and unknown ominous energy emanating from Peng Seok-im was pressuring them.

“S-Stop!”

“Make me stop.”

“Tsk! Attack!”

-Thud thud thud!

In the end, although somewhat intimidated by his aura, the warriors simultaneously launched themselves to stop Peng Seok-im, who wasn't halting.

Skilled in collaborative attacks, the three warriors each aimed for Peng Seok-im's vital points.

But at that very moment,

-Swish!

The instant they entered his range, Peng Seok-im's sword widely slashed the surrounding space and brushed past the warriors.

The three people who had been thrusting their swords towards Peng Seok-im simultaneously stopped in their tracks.

The warriors' faces were filled with shock and horror.

“Ah... Ah...”

“H-How...”

-Slice!

Soon, their bodies split apart, dividing into upper and lower halves.

-Thud!

The sight of them squirming on the ground was truly gruesome.

Blood gushed like a fountain from their severed lower bodies.

-Spurt!

As three warriors were halved in an instant, the warriors on Lady Seo's side couldn't hide their shock.

Peng Seok-im was the younger brother of Peng Yi-mun, a close associate of Lady Seo, so he was a reliable ally to them.

But in the end, he had cut them down.

As everyone was in an uproar, the eyes of a few turned not to the dead warriors but to the strange patterned sword Peng Seok-im was holding.

‘The Evil Commandment Sword?’

‘How does he have the lord's sword?’

It was Mong Mu-yak and Seop Chun.

They realized that the sword Peng Seok-im was holding was the Evil Commandment Sword.

The Evil Commandment Sword was a legendary demonic sword crafted by the great swordsmith Ou Yezi.

‘Ah!’

Come to think of it, before entering this rear garden, they had entrusted their weapons to the soldiers at the entrance of the restaurant.

It seemed he had touched the sword then.

‘Has he been possessed by the sword’s demonic energy?’

Otherwise, there was no way he would display such madness.

The Evil Commandment Sword was also a demonic sword, so they had expected it to be somewhat dangerous, but seeing even an expert near the pinnacle-stage of Transcendent Realm becoming possessed by its demonic energy, its evil nature seemed no ordinary matter.

‘It wasn’t a sword to be touched lightly.’

Mong Mu-yak, who had coveted the Evil Commandment Sword, inwardly recalled his time in the Heaven and Earth Society and felt relieved.

That sword wasn’t something unqualified individuals could recklessly desire.

Right at that moment,

-Pat!

The leader of Eastern Depot blocked the path of Peng Seok-im, who continued walking towards the pavilion without stopping even after cutting down the warriors.

The leader assumed the starting posture of his claw technique and glanced at the sword Peng Seok-im was holding.

As an expert of the transcendent realm, he could tell with a single glance that the sword wasn't ordinary.

‘I sense some demonic energy.’

It was detestable.

Thus, the leader spoke in a low voice.

“Sir Peng. Put down that sword at once and back away.”

However, there was no way Peng Seok-im would retreat in the face of such a warning.

He scoffed and continued walking forward.

At this, the leader shouted,

“Peng Seok-im. I told you to back away at once!”

In response to his shout, Peng Seok-im sneered and spoke.

“A castrated bastard dares to run his mouth.”

-Grit!

At those words, the leader's expression twisted fiercely.

The eunuchs who entered the palace were all castrated.

That was because the only men allowed inside the palace were members of the imperial family.

Thus, eunuchs became neither male nor female through castration.

However, it wasn't as if they simply liked or were satisfied with their reality.

Naturally, if mocked and provoked by being called a eunuch, they would get angry.

“You bastard!”

Unable to endure being called a eunuch twice, the leader launched himself first.

Knowing that Peng Seok-im's martial prowess was a step above his brother Peng Yi-mun, the leader unleashed his ultimate technique with full power from the start.

‘Sunflower Hanging Claw, 8th Technique, Bloody Waves and Corpses!’

It was a technique of certain death, an ultimate move meant to surely kill the opponent.

-Thud thud thud thud!

The leader's claw technique, rippling with blue true energy, created numerous claw shadows with a momentum like waves, engulfing Peng Seok-im.

The force was so strong that wind pressure arose in the surroundings.

“Not bad for a castrated bastard. But as long as I have this sword, you can't defeat me.”

-Grip!

Peng Seok-im tightly grasped the sword handle and concentrated his inner energy.

As energy gathered, a blue sword aura formed.

Along with this, Peng Seok-im unleashed his sword technique.

‘Chaotic Thunder Sword! Thunder Harmony!’

-Rumble boom!

With a sound like a thunderbolt striking, the single slash Peng Seok-im unleashed bent like blue lightning, clashing with the leader’s wave-like claw technique.

-Thud thud thud thud thud!

As the ultimate techniques of the two transcendent experts collided, the aftermath of the true energy scattered in all directions.

The ground where the true energy struck shattered, creating chaos.

-Crackle! Boom! Boom!

“Ugh!”

“B-Back away!”

Those nearby had to hurriedly create distance in a state of panic.

At a glance, they seemed evenly matched.

However, the leader's complexion wasn't good.

‘Is this truly a technique with the same roots?’

Originally, the Chaotic Thunder Sword was the saber art called Chaotic Thunder Saber.

But it was Peng Seok-im who had adapted it into a sword technique, and its power and variations surpassed even the Chaotic Thunder Saber, which could be considered the original.

The leader, who had experienced the techniques of the Chaotic Thunder Saber through sparring with Peng Yi-mun, could clearly feel this.

Moreover,

‘Even though I'm protecting myself with true energy, it feels like my hands will be torn off.’

He was enduring it with great effort, but the wounds on his hands were gradually increasing.

Although it was the same true energy, unlike him who unleashed the technique with bare hands, Peng Seok-im had the power of a famous sword added, further maximizing its sharpness.

-Swish swish swish!

The leader's figure was being pushed back more and more.

Seop Chun, who had been quietly observing this, had a glint in his eyes.

‘Now’s the chance.’

If he intervened now, it seemed he could retrieve the lord’s Evil Commandment Sword without much effort.

Just as he was about to make a move, a voice reached his ears.

-Leave it be.

‘Lord?’

Seop Chun glanced at Mok Gyeong-un with puzzled eyes.

The unique weapon had fallen into Peng Seok-im’s hands, so why was he telling him to just leave it?

He couldn’t understand, but his lord’s orders were absolute.

Thus, Seop Chun didn’t intervene.

In the meantime, the clash of techniques between Peng Seok-im and the leader reached a conclusion.

-Thud! Slash!

Unable to withstand the might of the sword technique, an opening appeared, and Peng Seok-im swiftly slashed the leader’s side without missing the chance.

Fortunately, it didn’t cut deep enough to reach his internal organs, but as the sharp sword energy penetrated, the leader, unable to endure the pain, fell to one knee.

-Thud!

“Argh!”

“Leader!”

Seeing him like this, Lady Seo cried out in a desperate voice.

The leader of Eastern Depot was the only close associate who could protect her.

But he had been defeated.

At this rate, there was no one among her subordinates who could stop that man.

“Hehehe. You castrated bastard. I’ll let you live for a bit, so watch carefully from there. Today, I’ll show you that bitch Seo Yang-hyo lying beneath me, panting and begging.”

“Ugh... Y-You bastard.”

The leader, clutching his side, endured the pain and tried to stop Peng Seok-im.

But with an injured body, there was no way that would happen.

Peng Seok-im kicked the chin of the leader who was trying to grab him.

-Thwack!

“Ack!”

The leader, who was hit in the jaw, let out a short scream and spat blood as he tumbled to the ground.

Peng Seok-im, who had knocked him down, advanced towards the pavilion without hesitation.

-Step step!

“What are you doing? Stop him at once!”

The eunuch Yoo-bong pressed the warriors, but to no avail.

None of the warriors stepped forward to stop him.

They were too afraid of death.

As it seemed hopeless, Yoo-bong finally shouted, looking at the advance and rear parties of the Heaven and Earth Society.

“Brother Gan. Brother Ok. Please help. If Her Majesty is violated, you won’t be able to proceed with your mission either.”

“.....”

However, despite his request, no one stepped forward.

Gan-yang and Ok-gi, whom he had known for a long time, remained still as if they hadn’t heard, and Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak of the rear party also just watched with their arms crossed, as if it wasn’t their business.

“Wise choices.”

Peng Seok-im, consumed by desire and madness, also seemed to have no intention of going out of his way to fight them, so he just passed by.

His mind was filled with nothing but the thought of violating Lady Seo.

As he approached her, his desire had already swelled to its limit, and his lower body had also greatly bulged.

-Grip!

Seeing this, Lady Seo bit her lip hard as if it was humiliating.

She had trusted the Hebei Peng Family so much.

But how could such a man transform into a brazen lecher?

No matter how much she thought about it, she couldn't understand.

Thus, she looked at Mok Gyeong-un standing beside her and asked,

“...What on earth did you do?”

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders and replied,

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

“The younger brother of Magistrate Peng may be somewhat frivolous in his behavior, but as a member of the orthodox martial world, he knows how to keep his word. And that's how he was when I first saw him.”

But his current appearance was vastly different from usual.

Those filthy eyes were filled with nothing but madness and desire.

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“Do you think I did something to him?”

“Then are you saying you didn’t?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Then why is Peng Seok-im...”

“You’re mistaken. That is Peng Seok-im’s true desire.”

“What?”

“Those possessed by the demonic energy of the Evil Commandment Sword reveal their true desires, their hidden thoughts.”

“Desire? What the hell are you talking about?”

“Coincidentally, shall we call it karma?”

“Karma?”

“When I entered this place, I warned the soldiers collecting the weapons. I told them my sword was a cursed demon sword, so it was dangerous and they should never draw it.”

‘What nonsense is this?’

Lady Seo couldn’t easily believe Mok Gyeong-un’s words.

How could a person reveal their desires or inner thoughts just by grasping a sword?

At that moment, Yoo-bong, who was in front of the pavilion, hurriedly turned his head and spoke.

“Y-Your Majesty! If that sword is truly the Evil Commandment Sword, it is indeed a legendary demonic sword.”

“It’s really a legendary demonic sword?”

She furrowed her brows in confusion.

There was no way Yoo-bong, her own eunuch, would lie about this.

Moreover, hadn’t he even betrayed the Heaven and Earth Society?

-Step step!

Just then, Peng Seok-im, who had reached right in front of the pavilion, spoke with a madness-filled laugh.

“Hehehe. Seo Yang-hyo. I finally have you in my arms.”

-Shudder!

At these words, goosebumps rose all over Lady Seo's body.

She had considered the orthodox martial artists to be honorable warriors, unlike the wicked Heaven and Earth Society.

That's why she had also wanted to cut ties with the Heaven and Earth Society and switch to them.

But if the hidden desire of a man who claimed to be righteous was to lust after her body, in the end, they weren't much different.

Overcome by disappointment more than fear, she said to Mok Gyeong-un,

"...Help me."

"You want me to help you?"

"I will never ask for help or join hands with the righteous faction or others again. So please, protect me from that man."

"Well..."

'!?'

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, she looked at him in disbelief.

Then what the hell was she supposed to do here?

As she was baffled, Mok Gyeong-un sneered.

"Ah, at this rate, Your Majesty's body will be violated by that man's filthy thing."

“You!”

How could she not know that?

In the end, desperate with fear, she spoke as if pleading.

“W-What do you want?”

At this, Mok Gyeong-un raised the corners of his mouth sharply, as if he had been waiting, and replied briefly.

“Submission.”

Chapter 230 – Desire (3)

‘Su-submit?’

Imperial Consort Seo’s eyes trembled like crazy.

She knew he wanted something, but she never expected him to demand it so blatantly.

‘This bastard dares!’

No matter how cornered she was, she was the Imperial Concubine.

For a mere ruffian from the martial arts world to tell her, the mother of the Crown Prince of this nation, to submit to him?

How could he say such a thing unless he was truly insane?

If she had to die, she would rather die than submit to such a bastard just to save her life...

“You can’t go to Her Majesty!”

At that moment, the eunuch Yoo-bong blocked Peng Seok-im, who was consumed by madness and desire.

However,

-Bam bam bam!

“Ugh!”

-Thud!

Yoo-bong was hit in the chest and abdomen by Peng Seok-im’s lightning-fast punches and fell to his knees.

Yoo-bong, who couldn’t even match Assistant Commander Jang from the Eastern Depot, had no chance of standing up to Peng Seok-im.

Even without using a sword, he was no match for him with his bare hands.

Peng Seok-im kicked the head of Yoo-bong, who was kneeling, and sneered.

-Thud!

“Ack.”

“A eunuch brat dares to act up.”

After easily knocking down Yoo-bong, Peng Seok-im looked at Imperial Consort Seo, licking his tongue, and said,

“Seo Yang-hyo. Let’s see that beautiful flesh of yours.”

With bloodshot eyes and heavy breathing, Peng Seok-im.

Seeing his appearance filled with desire, Imperial Consort Seo unknowingly took a step back.

Many men had coveted her over the years, but since it was inside the palace, they had maintained a minimum level of courtesy and didn’t utter such vulgar words.

She felt extremely humiliated and frightened.

“P-Peng Seok-im, do you think you’ll get away with this?”

“Get away? What does that matter? Seo Yang-hyo, once you taste this thing all night, you’ll never be able to escape from it.”

Peng Seok-im fondled his swollen manhood and said.

Seeing this, she turned her head away in disgust.

Was this the true desire and nature of that man?

It was too filthy.

If she were to be violated by such a man, she felt like biting her tongue and dying.

At this, she said to Mok Gyeong-un,

“Didn’t you say you would grant all my wishes?”

“...”

“Mok Gyeong-un!”

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un ignore her, she bit her lower lip until it bled.

What kind of bastard was he?

Imperial Consort Seo shouted desperately,

“Are you even human? Do you intend to just leave a weak woman to be violated by that bastard?”

She appealed to his humanity.

She had no intention of giving Mok Gyeong-un what he wanted.

At this, Peng Seok-im, who was approaching, glanced at Mok Gyeong-un and burst into laughter, saying,

“Hahaha. Are you asking a mere gigolo-like twerp for help?”

Even though he was consumed by madness and desire, his perception was still sharp.

In his eyes, Mok Gyeong-un seemed like a young lad who was merely at the peak level.

It was ridiculous to see her seeking help from such a young lad.

-Swish!

Peng Seok-im aimed his Evil Commandment Sword at Mok Gyeong-un and said,

“Hey, kid. Want to try blocking it?”

In response to his threat, Mok Gyeong-un smiled brightly and stepped aside, replying,

-Swish!

“Of course not. Do as you wish.”

“You! You bastard!”

Seeing this, Imperial Consort Seo was dumbfounded and at a loss.

Was he really going to just watch her, the mother of the Crown Prince and the noblest person in this country, be violated by such a lowly bastard?

To her, who was in distress, Mok Gyeong-un smirked and said,

“I wonder if His Majesty the Emperor would like a woman who has been violated by another man.”

‘!?’

The moment she heard these words, her expression stiffened.

She had only considered this moment to be humiliating, but upon hearing Mok Gyeong-un's words, various thoughts swirled in her mind.

If the Emperor found out that she had been taken by this bastard, he would be furious.

That fury might not just end with this bastard but extend to her and the Crown Prince, who had been defiled.

Then everything would end in catastrophe.

‘No!’

Just thinking about it was utterly horrifying.

At this, Imperial Consort Seo wrapped her arms around her body and shouted at the approaching Peng Seok-im,

“D-Don’t come! If you come, I’ll bite my tongue and kill myself!”

“Kill yourself?”

-Paat!

At that moment, Peng Seok-im, who had been slowly walking and enjoying her frightened appearance, instantly closed the distance with a body movement technique and sealed her acupoints.

-Tap tap tap tap tap!

Her body instantly stiffened.

“Gasp!”

“That can’t happen. I’ve been looking forward to this moment for so long.”

“You! You!”

“Ah. Don’t worry. I’ve made it so that only enough strength remains in your mouth to bite your tongue.”

“What?”

“Since we’re doing it anyway, wouldn’t your wailing and screaming excite my thing even more?”

‘!!!!!’

At his vulgar words, Imperial Consort Seo’s face contorted in humiliation.

“Hehehe.”

-Rip!

However, as if enjoying even this sight, Peng Seok-im laughed and tore her luxurious outer garment.

Revealing her white flesh and undergarments.

Unable to endure the shame as her clothes were torn, tears welled up in Imperial Consort Seo’s eyes.

It was too humiliating.

Was she going to be violated by such a lowly bastard?

She looked at Mok Gyeong-un with trembling eyes.

‘!?’

Imperial Consort Seo was at a loss for words when she saw Mok Gyeong-un looking at her with an expressionless face.

Was that bastard really human?

How could he have such an emotionless gaze even after seeing this?

-Grip!

“Aah!”

At that moment, Peng Seok-im grabbed her undergarment and the fabric covering her chest at the same time.

It seemed he was trying to tear them off at once and completely expose her upper body.

Even after seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un showed no particular reaction, standing with his arms crossed.

He was like an evil spirit with no humanity at all.

‘How could the rain I encountered be from these bastards...’

It was truly a situation of being caught between a rock and a hard place.

Being violated by this filthy bastard and being cast out by the Emperor, or submitting and becoming subservient to that evil-like bastard, both were the worst-case scenarios.

-Rip!

At that moment, her upper undergarment and the fabric covering her chest were completely torn off.

Along with it, her voluptuous upper body was revealed.

Seeing her white and elastic appearance, unbelievable for a body that had given birth, Peng Seok-im licked his tongue and drooled.

Unable to move, she was fixed in place, her face flushed with shame as she shed tears.

Her appearance further excited Peng Seok-im.

“Hehehe.”

-Grip!

“Aaah!”

Peng Seok-im roughly grabbed one of her breasts, and his other hand was already heading towards her lower body.

At this, Imperial Consort Seo finally shouted in desperation,

“I’ll do it! I’ll do as you say, so kill this bastard right now!”

At her outcry, Peng Seok-im sneered and said,

“No matter how desperate the great Imperial Consort Seo Yang-hyo is, to ask this lowly one to kill me, truly...”

“You heard her, right?”

At that moment, hearing the voice from behind, Peng Seok-im snorted.

Then, grasping the hilt of the Evil Commandment Sword with his right hand, he turned his head towards Mok Gyeong-un and said,

“Kid. This is your last chance. I’m in a great mood since I’m about to have a grand affair, so I’ll let it slide just this once. Get lost right now.”

“That might be difficult.”

“Difficult? Ha!”

At this, Peng Seok-im got up.

Then, turning his body and aiming his sword at Mok Gyeong-un, he said in a low voice,

“You must be crazy, wanting to die. You gigolo-like bastard.”

“You’re out of luck.”

“What?”

“If you hadn’t coveted someone else’s sword recklessly, none of this would have happened.”

“What nonsense are you spouting!”

-Slash!

With a shout, Peng Seok-im swung the Evil Commandment Sword towards Mok Gyeong-un’s neck.

It was so fast that it seemed to separate the head from the body in an instant.

However,

-Smack!

‘!?’

Peng Seok-im’s eyes widened.

That’s because Mok Gyeong-un’s palm had blocked the blade.

“What on earth...”

-Whoong!

At that moment, the blade of the Evil Commandment Sword, which had touched Mok Gyeong-un’s palm, trembled and emitted a sword cry.

At this, Peng Seok-im, who was consumed by desire and madness, couldn’t hide his surprise.

The sword was reacting to this young lad as if it were alive.

‘The sword is resonating?’

What was happening?

“Now, please return my sword.”

“Your sword?”

“Yes.”

At those words, Peng Seok-im frowned fiercely and shouted,

“Don’t spout nonsense! This sword is mine! It’s not something a kid like you can covet!”

-Paat!

With that, Peng Seok-im removed the blade from Mok Gyeong-un’s hand and tried to unleash a sword technique.

However,

-Crackle! Crackle!

At that moment, the blood vessels on the back of Peng Seok-im’s hand holding the hilt of the Evil Commandment Sword bulged, and he couldn’t control the inner energy of his hand as if he were possessed.

“Ugh!”

Unable to endure the pain, Peng Seok-im involuntarily released the hilt from his hand.

-Stab!

The Evil Commandment Sword, which had fallen from his hand, stuck into the ground and stood upright.

The blade trembled on its own, and Peng Seok-im had an expression of utter incomprehension at this sight.

“W-Why is it rejecting me?”

Although it was a demonic sword, he believed the sword had chosen him.

However, the sword was clearly rejecting him.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un grasped the hilt of the Evil Commandment Sword, which was standing upright on the ground, and pulled it out.

-Whoong!

The sword cry grew louder, and light flowed from the blade.

Seeing this, Peng Seok-im's eyes trembled.

Did this bastard really receive the choice of this demonic sword?

“Then, farewell.”

“What?”

-Slash!

Before he could even finish his question,

Peng Seok-im, realizing that something sharp had brushed past his neck, was startled and grabbed his neck with both hands.

-Smack!

Then, Mok Gyeong-un lightly swung the blade of the Evil Commandment Sword to shake off the blood.

Seeing this, despair filled Peng Seok-im’s eyes.

Ignoring him, Mok Gyeong-un approached Imperial Consort Seo, who was immobilized on the ground, and released the sealed acupoints.

-Tap tap tap tap tap!

With her acupoints released, she was startled and wrapped her arms around her chest.

It was humiliating, but her resentment towards Peng Seok-im was greater, so she glared at him and said,

“Why didn’t you kill him?”

“I did kill him.”

“You killed him?”

“Yes.”

“What are you talking about? Isn’t he still alive and well?”

Peng Seok-im, who was clutching his neck and looking anxious, was still alive.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and approached him.

Peng Seok-im moved his eyes from side to side, showing signs of rejection.

However, Mok Gyeong-un ignored this and placed his finger on his forehead, flicking it.

-Tap!

Then,

-Slide!

Peng Seok-im’s head, which he had been barely holding, slid back and fell.

-Thud!

-Splat!

As the head hit the ground, blood gushed out like a fountain from the cross-section of the severed neck.

Seeing this, Imperial Consort Seo’s eyes became dazed.

Although he was a vile bastard who had tried to violate her, seeing his decapitated corpse right in front of her made her feel like she was going to lose her mind.

‘A monster... This bastard is a real monster.’

The eunuch Yoo-bong, who had been holding his broken nose, clicked his tongue inwardly.

He hadn’t even seen the sword cutting the neck properly.

Moreover, even the person himself only realized it after being cut, hastily grabbing his severed neck.

It was truly a ghostly swordsmanship.

Shocked inwardly like that, the eunuch Yoo-bong hurriedly ran to Imperial Consort Seo and covered her with his outer garment.

“Ugh...”

Imperial Consort Seo trembled and wrapped herself in Yoo-bong’s clothes.

Although it was better than seeing the severed head of Peng Seok-im’s older brother, Paeng Yi-mun, it was still equally disgusting.

At this, Yoo-bong carefully said to Mok Gyeong-un,

“Her Majesty is having a hard time, so can you give us some time by changing the location?”

“That’s not difficult.”

Hearing this, Yoo-bong inwardly breathed a sigh of relief.

By naturally changing the location like this and entrusting Imperial Consort Seo to the palace maids, he should stay out of their sight for a while.

Having betrayed them, there seemed to be no benefit in lingering in front of them.

“Then, I’ll escort Her Majesty for a moment...”

“Ah, I almost forgot.”

“Pardon?”

To his questioning, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head.

“I’m not talking to you.”

At this, Imperial Consort Seo, trembling, looked at him in confusion.

What did he almost forget?

Then, Mok Gyeong-un smiled brightly and said,

“Since you promised to submit, I thought I’d show you the end of a traitor.”

‘!!!!!’

As soon as those words were spoken, Yoo-bong was startled and tried to say something to Mok Gyeong-un.

“L-Lord Mok. I am also loyal to you...”

-Slash!

Before he could even finish his sentence,

In the blink of an eye, Mok Gyeong-un’s sword was already above Yoo-bong’s head.

Yoo-bong’s eyes widened as if they would tear.

Then,

-Slide!

A vertical red line appeared in the middle of his face.

Imperial Consort Seo slowly turned her head to the side with trembling eyes.

As she turned her head, blood flowed from the red line, and Yoo-bong’s body was split in half with a splat.

Blood spurting from the split body drenched her.

-Splat!

Stiffened by fear, she couldn’t move a muscle.

Mok Gyeong-un gently stroked the blood-soaked cheek of Imperial Consort Seo and softly said,

“I believe you will conduct yourself well.”