

Mayhem 241

Chapter 241 – Turning Misfortune into Blessing (1)

‘!!!!!!’

Blood dripped down from Seo Yerin’s left sword finger.

And about five feet behind her stood Mok Gyeong-un, breathing heavily.

Joo Woonhyang’s expression as she looked at the two of them was close to shock.

‘How could this be…….’

She had expected to see Mok Gyeong-un being brutally defeated by Seo Yerin’s hand, but the opposite result had occurred.

The peerless sword technique she unleashed had been thoroughly shattered.

One could tell just by looking at the intense whirlwind of sword energy that had vanished in an instant.

Of course, she wasn’t the only one surprised.

‘……He dismantled the technique.’

Seo Yerin, the Sixth Sky Demon, was also at a loss for words from shock.

While there had been those who blocked this continuous True Chasing Second Revolving Sword technique when she used it, no one had ever dismantled it before.

After all, this Chasing Second Revolving Sword was a technique that maximized power and compensated for weaknesses through clockwise and counterclockwise rotations.

Yet Mok Gyeong-un had shattered it.

And he did so by unifying all of his sword energy into a single point.

‘How could something like this happen?’

This was something even Seo Yerin herself couldn’t do.

Gathering sword energy into a single point was a realm that even she couldn’t reach at her current level.

Yet he had entered that supreme realm in an instant?

Even though she saw it with her own eyes and directly experienced it, it was unbelievable.

‘To think such talent existed in this world.’

It was beyond imagination.

Was this the level of talent her great-grandfather, once called the pinnacle of the old martial arts world, possessed?

No matter how outstanding one’s martial talent was, reaching a level that surpassed one’s own limits, let alone entering a realm one couldn’t access, during a duel was something utterly incomprehensible.

-Drip!

Cold sweat trickled down her cheeks.

Her left hand had already lost strength due to Mok Gyeong-un's unified sword technique.

If he unleashed this technique that transcended the realm of limitations once more, she wondered if she could even block it.

'No. At times like this, fighting spirit is crucial.'

Even he would have difficulty executing such a technique again.

Since he had used a technique that far exceeded his own limits, his body must have been strained.

If she targeted that point, subduing him was still well within reach.

Moreover, she had yet to use her unique skill.

-Swoosh!

Seo Yerin flicked the blood off her left sword finger and tightly clenched her right sword finger.

Then, as she turned her body, she spoke.

"Impressive. However, I also....."

-Thud!

It was at that moment.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been breathing roughly, suddenly collapsed to the floor.

Hazy steam rose from his fallen body.

-Sssss!

Seeing this, Seo Yerin furrowed her brows, unable to hide her bewilderment.

She approached the fallen Mok Gyeong-un.

Even heat could be felt, as if his body temperature had skyrocketed.

-Swish!

Seo Yerin placed a finger on one of Mok Gyeong-un's acupoints.

Then, after examining the exposed parts of his body, she clicked her tongue with trembling eyes.

His entire body was severely swollen with bruises, as if all his muscles had ruptured, and even the strange energy within his body was raging erratically like someone who had lost control.

'His body has been overused beyond the extreme. Is this the price of that single sword strike that surpassed his abilities and limits?'

The condition was more serious than she thought.

But it wasn't incomprehensible either.

After all, that single sword strike wasn't something the current Mok Gyeong-un should have been able to execute.

Since he wielded a sword his body couldn't endure, this was probably the natural consequence.

"Haa."

Seo Yerin let out a sigh.

With this degree of internal and external injuries, participating in the Embroidered Uniform Guard selection was impossible from the start, and continuing to participate itself seemed unreasonable.

If he couldn't control his blood vessels, meridians, and internal energy here, he might lose his martial arts forever.

However, all of this was something he brought upon himself.

'This bastard tried to kill Woonhyang and the trainee Wi Bu-cheong. In the end, he must be punished for what he did.'

There was no need to go out of her way to help him.

It would be better to refer him for disciplinary action in this state.....

"Sixth Sky Demon!"

At that moment, upon hearing Joo Woonhyang's voice, Seo Yerin turned her head.

-Thud!

The sound of a window opening could be heard.

Soon, the chilly autumn wind slapped his cheeks, causing him to regain consciousness.

Joo Woonhyang slowly opened his closed eyes.

It was difficult to understand what had happened.

He clearly remembered talking to Seo Yerin about what had happened with Mok Gyeong-un before losing consciousness.

‘Ugh.’

His stomach felt as if it had been turned inside out.

Dizziness washed over him, but as he regulated his breathing, it soon subsided.

‘Where am I?’

In addition to the cold air, the scent of medicinal herbs permeated the room.

It seemed this place wasn’t his dormitory.

As he was feeling puzzled, a clear voice reached his ears.

“You’re awake.”

“Sixth Sky Demon!”

The owner of that voice was none other than his teacher, Seo Yerin.

Joo Woonhyang hurriedly raised his upper body from the bed.

However, perhaps due to his internal injuries, he couldn't even sit up halfway.

Seo Yerin spoke to him as he struggled.

"Don't strain yourself. Your internal injuries were quite severe. Fortunately, I treated them with internal energy, so if you circulate your energy for about two days, you'll be fine."

"Did you heal me, Master?"

".....I'm the only one who can treat you."

"Aaaah."

Joo Woonhyang let out an exclamation at her words.

It was because they shared the same Innate True Energy that she could treat and heal his internal energy.

Joo Woonhyang slowly circulated his Innate True Energy and examined his body.

'!?'

Joo Woonhyang furrowed his brows for a moment.

The amount of Innate True Energy within his body had increased significantly compared to usual.

If he gained enlightenment with this much energy, he could reach the 4-star level.

Joo Woonhyang looked at her with surprised eyes.

“Sixth Sky Demon. How could this…….”

Seo Yerin shook her head and spoke to the astonished Joo Woonhyang.

“You’ve also mastered the Innate True Energy, so you know it differs from regular internal energy.”

Of course, he knew that.

Ordinary internal energy masters couldn’t control Innate True Energy.

Only she could assist in treating his injuries.

“The Innate True Energy I injected to treat you was more than I expected. This injury has turned misfortune into a blessing for you.”

She spoke calmly, but Joo Woonhyang clicked his tongue inwardly.

It was quite a large amount of Innate True Energy.

Of course, for her level, it might not be considered much.

-Pak!

Joo Woonhyang endured the pain and forcefully clasped his hands in salute.

“Thank you, Sixth Sky Demon. How can I repay this favor…….”

Before he could finish, Seo Yerin shook her head again.

Then, with a soft sigh, she said,

“It’s fine. More importantly, you were right.”

“About what?”

“As you said, it seems trainee Wi Bu-cheong had indeed stuck a poisoned needle into the wooden pillow of the bed. The Poison Investigation Unit has already confirmed it.”

“Ah!”

It was Joo Woonhyang who had defended Mok Gyeong-un to the best of his ability before fainting.

In fact, he didn’t have to defend him.

Even though Mok Gyeong-un had changed his mind halfway, it was true that he had tried to kill Joo Woonhyang.

However, he owed a debt to Mok Gyeong-un and strangely didn’t want to do that.

So, he had made sure Seo Yerin cleared up the misunderstanding.

“Therefore, since trainee Mok Gyeong-un saved your life and considering what you explained, he received a suspension of indictment as a mitigating factor.”

Embroidered Uniform Guards had arrived at the scene while he was defending Mok Gyeong-un.

No matter how many nearby Guard warriors he had knocked unconscious by sealing their acupoints, it would have been stranger if the nearby Embroidered Uniform Guards on duty hadn't noticed such an intense fight.

Regardless of the circumstances, Mok Gyeong-un, who had escalated the incident, was referred to the disciplinary department, but ultimately received a suspension of indictment.

"Thank you, Sixth Sky Demon."

"No need. However, even though trainee Mok Gyeong-un received a suspension of indictment, he may have to voluntarily withdraw from the Embroidered Uniform Guard selection."

"What?"

What does that mean?

Could it be because of Mok Gyeong-un's injuries?

He had already guessed that Mok Gyeong-un's body had been strained after shattering Seo Yerin's technique and suddenly collapsing.

So Joo Woonhyang asked,

"Are his injuries severe?"

"Yes. He drew out a power that exceeded his own abilities."

She recalled the conversation she had with the Embroidered Uniform Guard's exclusive imperial physician last night.

[How is it? Even though I wanted to control his internal energy, I couldn't do anything because he possessed a completely opposite energy to mine.]

[.....Oh my. I don't know how to tell you this.]

[What do you mean?]

[As a physician, I don't practice martial arts, so it's difficult for me to speak about energy, but there are too many ruptured muscles and blood vessels throughout his body.]

[I'm aware of that. I just want to know if he'll recover.....]

[With this extent of injuries, recovery in the near future is absolutely impossible.]

[Then, is it possible if he takes time?]

[It's hard to give you a definite answer. Since major muscles are torn and ruptured in many places, even if he recovers, he may have difficulty moving as he did before.]

[Ah.....]

It was an unfortunate situation, but it was serious.

The circulation of his internal energy was also a mess, and it wasn't just regular internal energy but an energy completely opposite to Innate True Energy, so she couldn't treat it as she had done for Joo Woonhyang.

With a body like this, continuing the Embroidered Uniform Guard selection process was unreasonable.

She might have to advise him to voluntarily withdraw as soon as he woke up.

Late the next night.

There are various ranks within the Imperial Hospital.

Among them, the lowest rank, the 9th-grade Chambong, had to be on standby at all times to check on patients' conditions, even if not in the dispensary.

Cho Cham-bong, a 9th-grade physician of the Embroidered Uniform Guard's internal hospital, clicked his tongue while looking at a patient with needles stuck all over his body.

His entire body was covered in bruises, and it was the first time he had seen a patient like this.

[You won't have many opportunities to examine a patient in such a critically severe condition. So, observe and record in detail.]

[Yes, Supervisor.]

Upon receiving orders from the Embroidered Uniform Guard's Sixth Sky Demon, his senior, the 7th-grade physician Supervisor Jae, who was diagnosing and treating the patient, gave him the opportunity to examine the patient as well.

Supervisor Jae had already judged that this patient's complete recovery was virtually impossible.

In fact, he had felt the same when he personally checked the patient's pulse and examined the affected areas.

With this degree of damage to the muscles and blood vessels, the patient might not be able to move properly for a long time, or even walk properly for the rest of his life.

'Tsk, tsk. What in the world did he do to end up like this?'

It was utterly incomprehensible.

With such thoughts, Cho Cham-bong sat next to the patient with a decoction in hand.

He slowly dipped a cloth into the medicine and placed it inside the patient's mouth.

For unconscious patients, the tongue is brought into contact with the soaked cloth to allow them to absorb even a small amount of the medicinal energy.

-Swish!

Cho Cham-bong, who had placed the cloth on the patient's tongue, checked his pulse.

Then, one of his eyebrows trembled and rose.

'What's this?'

Something was strange.

Just last night, the patient's pulse was extremely irregular and weak.

But now, the pulse was steady.

Finding this odd, Cho Cham-bong checked not only the pulse on the wrist but also the major acupoints, including the neck.

Doing so, he stood up with a surprised expression.

‘What’s going on? How could this happen overnight…….’

Thinking that he should report this to his senior who was in the dormitory, Cho Cham-bong entrusted the task of administering the medicine to a dispensary worker and hurriedly left.

Not long after he left, the door opened, and someone entered.

As the person entered, the dispensary worker who was holding the medicinal cloth to the patient’s mouth was startled and stood up to greet him.

“What brings you here so late at night, Your Excellency?”

An old eunuch in a red official robe with face powder.

He was none other than Eunuch Beom of the Western Depot.

Eunuch Beom approached the dispensary worker and asked,

“I came to check on the patient’s condition.”

The dispensary worker couldn’t help but feel inwardly puzzled by these words.

That was because he knew this patient was a Guard trainee participating in the Embroidered Uniform Guard selection.

Why would a eunuch from the Western Depot come to see such a person?

Although puzzled, the dispensary worker stepped aside and said,

“The patient’s condition is not very good, so it will take several more days for him to wake up.”

“Is it that serious?”

“That’s what the attending physician, Supervisor Bae, said.”

“Ah. Is that so? It seems quite severe.”

“From what I heard, even if he’s lucky enough to wake up, he won’t be able to move for a while, and he may not be able to walk properly for the rest of his life.”

Upon hearing the dispensary worker’s words, the corners of Eunuch Beom’s mouth slightly curled up.

The dispensary worker’s suspicion grew even more at that sight.

The patient’s condition is said to be poor, but why does he seem pleased?

Finding it strange, Eunuch Beom said,

“Could you give me a moment alone?”

“But the medicine needs to be administered now…….”

“It won’t take long.”

With those words, Eunuch Beom took out a bundle of silver coins from his bosom.

The dispensary worker gulped at the sight of this.

Then, he quietly accepted the bundle of silver coins, bowed his head, and left the room.

Once alone, Eunuch Beom approached the patient who had needles stuck all over his body and his eyes closed.

“Hohoho.”

Eunuch Beom laughed, unable to contain his joy.

He had never expected things to go so smoothly.

Just until yesterday, he had been sweating profusely, pleading for reconsideration, saying that this fellow had endangered His Majesty and himself because that person had shown interest in him.

However, that person’s judgment was different.

Even if he was someone who had endangered His Majesty and himself, if he was such an outstanding talent, that person wanted to bring him under his wing somehow.

He even gave orders to meet with the fellow and arrange a position for him.

For Eunuch Beom, it was an order that couldn’t have been more troublesome.

But the heavens helped him.

‘It was Mok Gyeong-un, wasn’t it?’

Eunuch Beom looked down at Mok Gyeong-un and grinned.

He had thought that a monstrous fellow like him would rarely be defeated by anyone, but how coincidental was this?

It was an opportunity given by the heavens.

For the sake of His Majesty, himself, and that person, a guy like this must never be allowed to come close.

So, with certainty,

‘I’ll shatter your danjeon, you bastard.’

If that happened, even the slightest possibility of him rising from the dead would completely vanish.

With that in mind, Eunuch Beom brought his hand toward Mok Gyeong-un’s abdomen.

Just as his palm was about to touch the skin below the navel,

“What are you doing?”

‘!?’

In an instant, Eunuch Beom’s body froze as he was about to place his palm.

What the fuck was that just now?

Did he mishear?

He was clearly told that the patient’s injuries were severe and he wouldn’t wake up for several days.

But what the hell was going on?

‘Could it be?’

Eunuch Beom’s eyes slowly moved from the abdomen up the chest, neck, and then to the face.

-Thump!

At that moment, his heart sank.

That’s because Mok Gyeong-un, who had been lying as if dead with his eyes closed, had suddenly opened his eyes wide and was staring at him.

Chapter 242 – Turning Misfortune into Blessing (2)

Eunuch Beom, the eunuch from the Western Depot, couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

He had been reassured after hearing from Supervisor Jae, the physician in charge of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, that Mok Gyeong-un’s injuries were so severe that he wouldn’t wake up for several days.

However, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been lying as if dead with his eyes closed, suddenly opened his eyes and stared at him, causing Eunuch Beom to be startled.

‘What’s going on?’

He wasn’t sure what had happened, but it seemed Mok Gyeong-un had woken up earlier than the physician’s prediction.

Eunuch Beom, whose heart had nearly leaped out of his chest from shock, quickly composed himself.

Although he had been surprised by Mok Gyeong-un's opened eyes, Mok Gyeong-un was still an injured man.

Wasn't it said that his condition was so dire that he might never walk properly again?

'They say you get scared by the ladle after being frightened by the snake.'

It seemed the defeat he had suffered there had greatly affected him.

There was no need for him to be intimidated in this situation, but he had unconsciously shrunk back.

-Chak!

Eunuch Beom, who had hesitated, hurriedly placed his hand above Mok Gyeong-un's danjeon.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been staring at him, raised an eyebrow and spoke.

"What are you trying to do?"

"Your name is Mok Gyeong-un, isn't it?"

"So what?"

"Ha. Your imposing manner is still impressive."

"....."

‘To not even blink an eye in this situation, he has a grand presence indeed.’

In a state where he couldn’t move due to his injuries, Eunuch Beom had his hand placed above Mok Gyeong-un’s danjeon.

This meant that with just a little force, he could shatter Mok Gyeong-un’s danjeon.

Yet, Mok Gyeong-un showed no sign of dismay.

Rather, he was incredibly calm.

-Kkwak!

Eunuch Beom pressed his fingers into the area around Mok Gyeong-un’s danjeon, applying force.

Then, he spoke.

“This may be misfortune for you, but the heavens are on your side.”

“.....”

“Accept the consequences of insulting His Majesty and shattering this old man’s shoulder without resentment.”

“His Majesty?”

Seeing Mok Gyeong-un’s puzzled expression, Eunuch Beom scoffed and said,

“Didn’t this old man clearly warn you not to provoke that noble person?”

"That noble identity you spoke of was His Majesty?"

"Don't carelessly utter his name. A ruffian from the martial arts world like you has no right to speak of him so casually."

Eunuch Beom scolded him sternly.

In response, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said,

"The title 'His Majesty' must be quite revered, seeing as you tell me not to even mention it."

"Insolent fellow."

This guy's arrogance was astounding.

However, his sarcastic attitude in this situation was truly irritating.

Eunuch Beom gathered his internal energy and formed a sharp qi on his fingertips, stabbing it into Mok Gyeong-un's abdomen.

-Pfffft!

About one knuckle of his finger penetrated the abdomen.

Eunuch Beom curved the corners of his mouth mockingly.

Now, even this guy should realize that he was in a position where he had to beg and plead.....

'!?'

Eunuch Beom furrowed his brows.

Even though five of his fingers had penetrated about one knuckle deep into the abdomen, Mok Gyeong-un was staring at him without any change in expression.

He seemed to possess an incredibly strong endurance.

At this point, he should have been groveling pathetically.

However, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth.

"It's a bit different from what I expected. I don't think the person above your master would have ordered you to kill me."

'This bastard?'

Eunuch Beom's eyes flickered with surprise.

How did this guy guess the intentions of that person?

As he wondered, Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head slightly and continued.

"If they had sent an even stronger eunuch to test me, it doesn't seem like they would have done that. But since you're acting this way, is it because I'm injured and the person above you has changed their mind? Or are you defying their orders and seeking revenge on me, not wanting to miss the opportunity while I'm injured?"

'!?'

Eunuch Beom was momentarily dumbfounded.

Who the hell was this guy?

He was reading the situation based on fragmented circumstances without even knowing who that person was.

Due to the incident at the inn amidst the heavy rain, Eunuch Beom had already considered Mok Gyeong-un to have an exceptionally sharp mind, bordering on being vicious, but this left him tongue-tied.

This guy's true value wasn't limited to his martial arts.

His intelligence was also outstanding.

That made him even more fearsome.

'My judgment is indeed correct. This guy must never be allowed near His Highness.'

Although Eunuch Beom had wanted to see Mok Gyeong-un looking fearful or pathetic, now he only thought of quickly shattering his danjeon.

As he tried to apply force to his fingers,

-Tremble!

Suddenly, as if blocked by something, his fingers couldn't penetrate the flesh.

Moreover, the internal energy that had been in his fingers gradually dissipated.

‘What in the world?’

At that moment of bewilderment,

His fingers, which had penetrated with a strong repulsive force from inside the body, were expelled outward.

‘What?’

What was going on here?

Both the physician and the Embroidered Uniform Guard supervising the martial arts had said that Mok Gyeong-un’s internal injuries were so severe that he would have difficulty controlling his own body.

With ruptured blood vessels, muscles, and disrupted internal energy circulation, he should have been no different from a cripple.

Yet, how could he exert this level of power?

Eunuch Beom, who had been momentarily astonished, tried to strike Mok Gyeong-un’s abdomen again.

‘I must destroy his danjeon.’

Regardless of what had happened, if he destroyed the danjeon, everything would be over.

Just as Eunuch Beom’s palm was about to crash down on Mok Gyeong-un’s danjeon with enough force to shatter not only the danjeon but also the internal organs,

An unexpected event occurred.

It was,

-Papapapapapak!

The needles inserted all over Mok Gyeong-un's body were ejected outward.

If they had simply been pulled out, it would have been fine, but each needle was imbued with internal energy, scattering in all directions like hidden weapons,

-Pfftpfftpfftpfftpfftpfft!

"Huk!"

Eunuch Beom hurriedly waved his hands, trying to block them, but seven needles pierced through his body.

Although they were thin needles, three penetrated his abdomen, one his shoulder, one above his right clavicle, and the others pierced through his left palm and right thigh.

"Kuh..."

The pain was so excruciating that Eunuch Beom collapsed backward.

Particularly, the areas where the needles had penetrated his abdomen and above his clavicle were in a dire state.

They were all vital acupuncture points.

Eunuch Beom hastily circulated his internal energy, trying to block the punctured areas.

However,

‘The internal energy is dissipating.’

Centered around the punctured areas, his internal energy was scattering.

In a panic, Eunuch Beom drew upon more internal energy and circulated it.

If the internal energy was dissipating, the only way to overcome it was with stronger internal energy.

Right at that moment,

-Shuk!

‘!?’

Eunuch Beom’s eyes widened.

He saw Mok Gyeong-un sitting up from the bed.

But that wasn’t all; black steam began to emanate from his entire body, and the bruised skin gradually lightened in color.

‘Could it be that he’s healing?’

No matter how he looked at it, that seemed to be the only explanation.

His speculation was correct.

As Mok Gyeong-un sat up and circulated the rampaging energy within his body, it stabilized, and the bruised skin rapidly restored itself.

In fact, Mok Gyeong-un's body had undergone a miraculous self-recovery overnight, and the remaining external wounds were healing.

"Ahh..."

A small gasp escaped Mok Gyeong-un's mouth.

This was because, as he circulated and soothed the rampaging energy within his body, he noticed that the amount of energy had significantly increased compared to before.

Especially the demonic energy, which had increased by more than 40%.

'What's this?'

Even Mok Gyeong-un himself had been aware when he collapsed.

The technique of concentrating sword energy into one had surpassed the limits of his body and enlightenment.

As a result, his overexerted body couldn't endure it and had broken down.

This was the first time such a thing had happened since he began cultivating martial arts.

-Are you alright, mortal?

Cheong-ryeong, who had been waiting for Mok Gyeong-un to wake up, asked with a worried voice.

She, too, had been concerned that something might have gone wrong due to Mok Gyeong-un exerting a force beyond his limits and the physician's words.

If it had been possible to possess Mok Gyeong-un, she would have wanted to temporarily take over his body and heal him.

However, since possession was impossible for Mok Gyeong-un, she could only watch.

-Yes. I feel much better now.

-How did you manage to exert such power?

-That power...

-The one where you unified the sword energy into one.

Even she had been astonished upon witnessing Mok Gyeong-un's technique.

It was a realm that even she, who still had lingering attachments to the sword even after death, couldn't imagine, let alone reach.

Yet, she wondered how this fellow had momentarily approached a domain close to the pinnacle of swordsmanship.

-I'm not sure. Nothing else comes to mind.

-You didn't think of anything else?

Upon hearing these words, Cheong-ryeong genuinely admired Mok Gyeong-un.

In that fleeting moment, transcending any realm, he had considered that to be the only optimal move.

Mok Gyeong-un had simply realized it.

It was just that his enlightenment and body hadn't fully supported him, so he had borne the full brunt of the backlash.

Cheong-ryeong, who had been clicking her tongue, finally spoke.

-You bastard, you really are a born martial arts genius.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes flickered with surprise at her words.

This was because she, who usually refrained from speaking even in ordinary situations, had given him a proper compliment for the first time.

It seemed she acknowledged him to that extent.

-But don't overexert yourself. Even if you momentarily approached such a realm through a heaven-defying enlightenment, you have now experienced firsthand the consequences of doing so when unprepared.

-Well, that's true. But...

-But what?

Mok Gyeong-un silently clenched his fist tightly.

The intensity of the force exerted by his hand.

It had become much stronger than before he collapsed.

It was as if the swollen and torn muscles had become even more robust to endure it.

This wasn't a mere feeling.

'The blood vessels are the same.'

The speed at which energy circulated had greatly increased.

Just like when he had surpassed the bottleneck, it had now become as natural as breathing.

Because of this, Mok Gyeong-un himself felt a strange sensation.

'How curious.'

Would others also experience such a rapid change in their bodies when surpassing their limits?

It didn't seem so.

According to the medical knowledge he had learned from his grandfather and various medical texts, the human body was designed to slowly adapt to limits or harsh situations, not undergo such drastic changes.

'Hmm.'

In that regard, he seemed to be distinctly different from ordinary people.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un turned his head.

There, he saw Eunuch Beom from the Western Depot, lying on the floor, dragging his body and trying to quietly escape while suppressing his presence.

Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and got off the bed.

‘Da-damn it!’

Startled, Eunuch Beom hurriedly struck the floor with both hands.

-Pak!

Using the rebound force, he tried to stand up.

However,

-Thwack!

“Ugh!”

As he got up, Mok Gyeong-un kicked him, causing him to fall back down.

Mok Gyeong-un pressed his foot on the area between Eunuch Beom’s neck and chest.

-Kkwak!

“Kuh-kuh!”

Pressing down on that area, it was impossible for Eunuch Beom to breathe properly.

To the suffocating Eunuch Beom, Mok Gyeong-un said,

“It seems you don’t have much attachment to life.”

“Kuh... Wh-what?”

“Just like last time, even though I was minding my own business, you deliberately provoked me.”

-Flinch!

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Eunuch Beom’s face turned red and then ashen.

Struggling to breathe, he hastily said,

“Kuh-kuh... If- if you... try to harm me here... His Highness Prince Gyeongjin will never...”

“Ah. So it was him?”

The corners of Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth twitched.

Seeing that expression, Eunuch Beom’s eyes wavered.

What was this?

It was different from the reaction he had expected.

Prince Gyeongjin was the younger brother of His Majesty the Emperor and one of the four true powers of this nation.

With this cunning fellow, he should have understood what he meant, so why was he making such an ominous expression?

Right at that moment,

-Crack! Crunch!

The sound of a clavicle breaking rang out.

Eunuch Beom couldn't hold back the scream of pain.

Mok Gyeong-un kicked his chin.

-Thwack! Crunch!

“Kuh...!”

The sound of teeth colliding and shattering echoed.

Mok Gyeong-un bent down and brought his face close to the suffering Eunuch Beom.

“Does it hurt a lot?”

“Kuh...”

As he opened his mouth, all of his teeth were cracked, and broken pieces fell out with a clatter.

Of course, they fell into his mouth, causing him to choke and sputter.

Mok Gyeong-un grabbed the face of Eunuch Beom, who was coughing up blood, and examined it closely. Then, he smiled brightly and said,

“Fortunately, the skin on your face is intact.”

Upon hearing those words, the suffering Eunuch Beom furrowed his brows.

What the hell was he talking about?

After making his jaw and teeth like this, was he now saying that his face was fine?

‘Damn bastard.’

You have made a grave mistake.

In the end, by making him like this, he had gained justification to persuade His Highness.

A dog that couldn’t be leashed shouldn’t be kept.

‘Prepare yourself.’

Anyway, since there was also the crime of attempting to assassinate His Majesty, using this as justification, he would definitely...

-Pfffft!

At that moment, Eunuch Beom’s eyes widened.

He felt a sharp blade penetrating his jaw and reaching inside his nose.

The pain rushed in all at once, causing him to twist his body in a struggle.

But then,

-Tatatatatatak!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-woon sealed his acupoints, rendering him unable to move.

Of course, he also sealed the points that would stop him from making any sound.

In agony yet unable to speak, Eunuch Beom could only open his eyes wide as Mok Gyeong-woon whispered softly in his ear.

“It’s a pity you didn’t just die back then. If you did, none of this would have happened.”

‘!?’

-Screech!

With those words, Mok Gyeong-woon carefully moved the blade up and down.

As if he was delicately peeling off the skin.

‘Wh-what are you doing?’

Eunuch Beom’s eyes widened even further, his pupils shaking madly.

Regardless, Mok Gyeong-woon continued his work with an elated smile.

-Screech! Screech!

‘Stop! Stop it!’

With his eyes wide open, Eunuch Beom watched as his facial skin was slowly peeled away, his pupils gradually losing focus.

Chapter 243 – Turning Misfortune into Blessing (3)

Two government officials were hurriedly heading to the Embroidered Uniform Guard hospital.

They were Supervisor Jae, a 7th-grade physician, and Cho Cham-bong, a 9th-grade physician.

With drowsy eyes, Supervisor Jae spoke in an irritated voice.

“If what you say isn’t true, you’d better be prepared for the consequences.”

“It’s the truth. I even checked the eight major pulses.”

“Oh my. You...”

Supervisor Jae shook his head.

That’s because the Guard trainee named Mok Gyeong-un, who was hospitalized, was in no condition to wake up or improve in a short period of time.

Yet, how could his pulse return to normal overnight?

After assigning night duty, it seemed like the physician had left his senses somewhere out of fatigue.

‘Nonsense.’

He was determined to give him a good scolding.

As they approached the hospital, they saw someone squatting outside, dozing off.

It was the dispensary worker.

“Hey, you rascal.”

Cho Cham-bong reprimanded him upon seeing him.

The dispensary worker was startled and jumped up from his spot like a disciplined soldier.

Then, noticing Supervisor Jae and Cho Cham-bong, he spoke in a flustered manner.

“M-My lords.”

“I told you to take care of my patient, yet you’re slacking off.”

“Th-That’s not it.”

“What do you mean that’s not it? Right now...”

“A guest has come inside at the moment.”

“A guest?”

Out of the blue, who was this guest?

As they were wondering, the dispensary worker carefully said,

“It’s the Junior Supervisor Eunuch of the Western Depot.”

“Junior Supervisor Eunuch?”

At those words, Supervisor Jae and Cho Cham-bong looked at each other, unable to hide their bewilderment.

Among the eunuchs of the Western Depot, the position of Junior Supervisor Eunuch was high enough to directly attend to the imperial family.

But why had a Junior Supervisor Eunuch come to the Embroidered Uniform Guard hospital?

Thinking something was amiss, they hurriedly went inside.

Upon entering, Cho Cham-bong, who was leading the way, looked around.

Then, seeing a bed, he couldn’t hide his perplexity.

“Gasp!”

Seeing him so shocked that he almost fell backward, Supervisor Jae and the dispensary worker also looked in that direction.

However,

“Eek!”

“Wh-What is this!”

The reason for their shock was simple.

On the bed where the patient should have been lying, something torn into dozens of pieces was placed.

As physicians, they could immediately sense what it was.

It was none other than a dismembered corpse.

Faced with such a horrific sight, they were utterly perplexed about what to do.

As they stood there, shocked and at a loss, a rustling sound came from somewhere.

They simultaneously turned their heads.

It was in front of the medicinal herb drawers where various medicinal ingredients were stored, and someone wearing a red official robe could be seen.

“M-My lord?”

The dispensary worker unknowingly called out to him.

Then, the person in the red official robe turned his head and grinned eerily in the flickering lantern light.

‘!!!!!’

Bi-gyeong Palace.

This was the palace where Prince Gyeongjin, one of the four most powerful figures in the country, resided.

Originally, Prince Gyeongjin was governing the Sichuan region as a royal relative, but when the current emperor, who had cherished him even before his enthronement, ascended to the throne, he was summoned to the capital, Kaifeng.

And a palace was given to him to stay in.

Although the emperor cherished his younger brother, he added the character “bi” meaning “to be cautious and diligent,” to the name of the palace to remind him not to forget his proper place.

Of course, despite the emperor’s consideration, Prince Gyeongjin had steadily expanded his influence, leading to his current position.

-Swish!

A middle-aged man in his mid-fifties, exuding elegance, turned the page of an old book.

A middle-aged eunuch in a red official robe quietly observed him from near the door.

Just by looking at his splendid official attire, one could guess his position.

The middle-aged eunuch was none other than the Chief Eunuch of the Western Depot.

-Swish!

The middle-aged man, who had been turning the pages at a steady pace, finally spoke.

“Eunuch Beom is late.”

At his words, the Chief Eunuch of the Western Depot, Eunuch Ho, spoke in a groveling voice.

“Your Highness, shall I send someone to fetch him?”

The identity of the elegant middle-aged man with an impressive mustache was none other than Prince Gyeongjin, the master of this Bi-gyeong Palace.

As one of the four most powerful figures who controlled the country, he exuded not only elegance but also an arrogant and extraordinary spirit that seemed to encompass all things.

“No, it’s fine. When the time comes, he will come on his own.”

“Understood, Your Highness.”

At Prince Gyeongjin’s words, the Chief Eunuch of the Western Depot, Eunuch Ho, bowed his head with his hands clasped together.

However, concern was evident in his eyes as he bowed.

‘He won’t disobey Your Highness’s order, will he?’

He had already seen Eunuch Beom unable to hide his joy upon hearing the news that Mok Gyeong-un, the late-stage disciple sent by the Heaven and Earth Society, had suffered severe injuries.

That worried him quite a bit.

‘He must have been very scared.’

He could fully understand such feelings.

According to the reports, it was natural for anyone to rejoice and not miss this opportunity after suffering such injuries and humiliation.

However, this was not an opportunity for him.

[Examine that person’s condition. We cannot lose such a valuable talent.]

Prince Gyeongjin wanted to have that late-stage disciple from the Heaven and Earth Society.

Being someone with a strong desire for talented individuals, he didn’t care at all that Mok Gyeong-un had threatened the princess he cherished.

On the contrary, he said that someone like him was all the more worth taming.

This might be the difference between those with the ambition to rule the world and ordinary people.

‘Eunuch Beom, please refrain from doing anything foolish.’

If he took this as an opportunity to do something foolish, His Highness would not forgive him.

His Highness disliked those who disobeyed his orders more than anyone else.

At that moment, Prince Gyeongjin closed the book he was reading and spoke.

“By the way, how is that wench still unharmed?”

“If you’re referring to that wench...”

“I’m talking about that wench from Auspicious Palace.”

“Ah... You mean Consort Ho, Your Highness.”

Consort Ho.

The emperor had numerous women.

Among them, there were two women who received his particular favor: Imperial Noble Consort Seo and Consort Ho.

Originally, the emperor favored Imperial Noble Consort Seo the most, but he also didn’t hesitate to show affection to Consort Nam and Consort Seomun, who bore his children.

Consort Seomun had a deep connection to Prince Gyeongjin’s maternal side, his mother’s family.

Therefore, Prince Gyeongjin had spared no investment and effort to ensure that Consort Seomun could receive the emperor’s favor.

However, at some point, the dynamics within the Inner Court had changed.

It was because of the sudden appearance of Consort Ho.

‘A peerless beauty that one couldn’t help but be captivated by.’

This was what everyone who saw Consort Ho said in unison.

The appearance of the palace maid who had just entered the palace was so outstanding that rumors spread, saying her beauty rivaled that of Imperial Noble Consort Seo, who was called the epitome of beauty.

Naturally, the story reached the ears of the lascivious emperor.

‘A mere three years...’

It hadn’t been long since she entered the palace.

A young wench from a palace maid background, without any backing, had enchanted the emperor with her appearance alone and reached the position of consort in just three years.

Even Consort Seomun, who had given birth to a son, couldn’t become a consort.

‘A dangerous wench.’

At least Imperial Noble Consort Seo had won the emperor’s heart over a long period of time.

But this woman had achieved it in just three years.

Prince Gyeongjin couldn’t understand it.

Although the emperor was lascivious and couldn’t resist any woman, his conquests were also quite severe, and he would quickly lose interest.

Even with his beloved Imperial Noble Consort Seo, he never stayed with her for more than three days.

However, he stayed in Consort Ho's quarters for as long as half a month, showing an immense favor towards her.

‘What kind of sorcery is she using?’

Because of this, Prince Gyeongjin and the other powerful figures also considered her dangerous.

Even when they tried to bring her under their control, strangely, everyone failed.

Prince Gyeongjin had also tried to do so but to no avail.

He even tried to meet her in person and turn her to his side, but he ended up hearing humiliating words from her instead.

[If you're a royal relative, why don't you live in accordance with your proper place and prostrate yourself flat?]

Upon hearing these words, Prince Gyeongjin was greatly enraged.

No matter how much she was a consort favored by the emperor, she couldn't dare say such things to him so recklessly.

In the end, Prince Gyeongjin decided to use an extreme measure.

It was to use a slow-acting poison to make Consort Ho slowly die.

Unlike other concubines, she had no backing or people to help her, so even if her body weakened, there would be no one suitable for her to turn to for help.

So, Prince Gyeongjin intended to subjugate her when she was weakened.

However,

“Two months have passed, yet why is there no effect at all?”

At Prince Gyeongjin’s question, the Chief Eunuch Ho answered with a troubled expression.

“…I apologize, Your Highness.”

In fact, Eunuch Ho was also puzzled by this.

That’s because he was told that the effects would appear in a month, but even after that period had passed, Consort Ho remained perfectly fine.

So, he had instructed the palace maid who had been planted to increase the dose of the slow-acting poison.

Nevertheless, two months had passed, but Consort Ho showed no signs of weakness.

On the contrary, there was even an illusion that her complexion was getting better by the day.

“Isn’t there a stronger poison?”

“I apologize, Your Highness, but according to the person who manufactured the poison, if the dose is increased further, it may be detected by the food taster palace maids or the supervisor of the Imperial Hospital.”

At Eunuch Ho’s words, Prince Gyeongjin let out a soft sigh.

With Imperial Noble Consort Seo alone being a handful, if Consort Ho were to give birth to a son on top of that, the political situation could become even more chaotic.

‘Should I focus on preventing her from conceiving instead?’

However, this was something the other three powerful figures would take action on even if he didn’t.

From their perspective, it was also an undesirable situation.

Just as his thoughts were becoming complicated, a eunuch’s voice was heard from outside.

-Your Highness, Eunuch Beom requests an audience.

“He’s finally here. Let him in.”

-Yes, Your Highness.

The door opened, and Eunuch Beom, who had his head bowed and hands clasped together, entered.

He bowed and greeted Prince Gyeongjin.

The Chief Eunuch of the Western Depot, Eunuch Ho, who was watching him, had a glint in his eyes.

‘Hmm?’

That’s because, unlike the usual Eunuch Beom, he seemed calm.

Even his energy was well-concealed, making it difficult to sense.

Eunuch Ho's eyes narrowed.

No matter how much Eunuch Beom had reached the pinnacle-stage of Transcendent Realm, Eunuch Ho was a peerless master counted among the top four in the palace.

‘He shouldn't be able to completely hide his energy from me.’

As he was finding it strange, Prince Gyeongjin gestured for Eunuch Beom to come closer and spoke.

“So, how is that person's condition? Is he likely to recover?”

-Step!

At this question, Eunuch Beom, with his head bowed, tried to take a step forward.

At that moment, Eunuch Ho quickly blocked his way with a swift lightfoot technique.

“Stop right there.”

Prince Gyeongjin frowned and asked.

“Eunuch Ho, what are you doing?”

“Your Highness, please allow me to examine Eunuch Beom for a moment.”

“Examine him? What do you mean?”

“Eunuch Beom, raise your head.”

Eunuch Ho told Eunuch Beom, who had his head bowed, to lift his head.

Eunuch Beom slowly lowered his hands and raised his face.

Eunuch Beom's face, with the characteristic powdered makeup of eunuchs, looked no different from usual.

However, if there was one thing different,

‘…These eyes?’

Eunuch Beom, who was always cautious in everything when standing before His Highness Prince Gyeongjin and the head of the Western Depot, had a face and eyes that were utterly calm.

Eunuch Ho's eyes sharpened as he grasped the handle of the leather belt at his waist and drew it out.

-Shing!

As he pulled the leather belt, a soft sword hidden inside was revealed.

Pointing the tip of the soft sword at Eunuch Beom, Eunuch Ho spoke in a voice filled with vigilance.

“Who are you, you bastard?”

Eunuch Beom remained silent at his question.

Prince Gyeongjin, who had also sensed something suspicious, stood up from his seat and grabbed the sheath he had hung on the decorative stand behind him.

What on earth was going on?

Just then, Eunuch Beom's lips twitched, and he opened his mouth.

“Ah, this is why quick-witted people are troublesome.”

‘!?’

This was not Eunuch Beom's voice.

His voice was hoarse, mixed with the characteristic gruffness of an old eunuch.

But this voice was very young.

Chapter 244 – Prince Gyeongjin (1)

“Ah, this is why quick-witted people are troublesome.”

‘!?’

The young voice coming from the mouth of Eunuch Beom, an eunuch of the Western Depot.

As soon as they heard it, vigilance filled the eyes of Prince Gyeongjin and the Chief Eunuch of the Western Depot, Eunuch Ho.

Having been with Eunuch Beom for a long time, they could naturally distinguish him by his voice alone.

Chief Eunuch Ho spoke while pointing his soft sword.

“You... Who the hell are you?”

“There are definitely limitations with just the face.”

“What?”

“Seems like you were lucky back there.”

The corners of Eunuch Beom’s mouth twitched.

Eunuch Beom, or rather the true identity behind that face, was Mok Gyeong-un.

From the moment he entered Prince Gyeongjin’s palace, Mok Gyeong-un had no intention of avoiding being discovered at all costs, and through them, he realized the weaknesses of the Human Skin Mask.

It was difficult to deceive the energy of a master with keen senses like Eunuch Ho, even if he could fool them with just the face.

‘Without internal energy, it would be difficult with just deception.’

If he could manipulate the yang energy of internal energy, he would have imitated the unique energy emitted by Eunuch Beom.

However, Mok Gyeong-un’s energy was different from others, so he couldn’t do that.

Moreover, if the voice was distinctly different or if he tried to deceive those who had known the face of this human skin for a long time, it was virtually impossible.

Considering this, it could be said that he was lucky at the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

That's because the real Mok Gyeong-un had such a bad reputation that he didn't interact with his half-siblings, let alone his servants.

In conclusion,

‘The Human Skin Mask is not a card to be used in this way.’

It was difficult to deceive those who knew the face or were close to him.

However, that didn't mean this was a useless card.

If he changed his approach, he could create amusing situations like before.

‘It depends on how you think about it...’

Right then,

-Swish!

The soft sword of the Chief Eunuch Ho aimed at the space between his eyebrows.

In an instant, Mok Gyeong-un slightly tilted his head back and narrowly dodged the tip of the soft sword.

-Swish!

‘He dodged it?’

It may have looked like a light strike, but it was an extremely fast thrust that even masters at the pinnacle-stage of Transcendent Realm would find difficult to avoid.

Yet, when Mok Gyeong-un lightly dodged it, Eunuch Ho couldn't help but be inwardly surprised.

‘This bastard is no ordinary person.’

It was a single thrust he had made with the intention of quickly subduing him, as it was in the presence of His Highness Prince Gyeongjin.

It was difficult to ascertain his level based on his energy, which was barely detectable, but with this one move, it became clear.

‘He’s a master on par with me.’

If he was such a supreme master, he could assess the opponent’s skill with just a single move.

Eunuch Ho slightly bent and then straightened the wrist holding the soft sword.

The soft sword wriggled like a living snake and aimed at Mok Gyeong-un in a peculiar direction.

-Swish!

However, Mok Gyeong-un dodged the trajectory of the soft sword by simply taking half a step back.

As if he had anticipated that he would dodge it, Eunuch Ho shouted.

“Look here! An enemy has infiltrated!”

It was a cry infused with inner force.

Outside, there were Embroidered Uniform Guards and eunuchs from the Western Depot.

Calling for their help was not to repel this person but to evacuate His Highness.

However,

-An enemy has infiltrated! An enemy has infiltrated! An enemy has infiltrated!

At that moment, Eunuch Ho's voice resonated in the room like an echo.

It wasn't just a voice but one infused with inner force, so it was so resounding that Prince Gyeongjin frowned and hastily covered his ears.

“Ugh.”

‘Damn it!’

Eunuch Ho's complexion darkened.

The echo in this confined space was because the shout had bounced off and rebounded.

Through this, Eunuch Ho could tell.

‘He has surrounded the entire room with true energy.’

Even a master at the pinnacle-stage of Transcendent Realm could cover a certain space with their true energy to block sound.

Naturally, a master of this caliber wouldn't be unable to do so.

-Tap tap tap!

Eunuch Ho displayed a peculiar footwork with quick, tottering movements, distancing himself from Mok Gyeong-un, and then stood in front of Prince Gyeongjin.

It was to protect him.

Eunuch Ho sent a secret message to convey his thoughts.

-Your Highness, this person is no ordinary master. Even I won't be able to subdue him easily, so if an opportunity arises, you must leave this place, even if it means breaking the window.

At his words, a glint flashed in Prince Gyeongjin's eyes.

As the Chief Eunuch of the Western Depot, Eunuch Ho was a master of martial arts whose match was hard to find throughout the entire palace.

This was the first time he had seen him show such vigilance.

That meant the unknown person wearing Eunuch Beom's face was a dangerous individual and an outstanding master, right?

‘Then...’

Prince Gyeongjin spoke to Mok Gyeong-un, who was wearing Eunuch Beom's face.

“Hey, you. Who sent you here?”

‘Your Highness?’

Seeing his behavior, Chief Eunuch Ho inwardly clicked his tongue.

It was no different from an assassin infiltrating the palace, yet in this situation, his master, whom he served, had the audacity to talk to such a person. He was truly bold.

But there was no way such a person would obediently answer His Highness's question...

“Well, who could have sent me?”

‘!?’

Eunuch Ho frowned and looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

What the hell was he?

If he had come to assassinate His Highness, there was no way he would answer such a question one by one.

As he was puzzled, Prince Gyeongjin spoke calmly.

“For a master like you, whom even Eunuch Ho here is wary of, there are only three people who come to mind who could send you.”

They were the powerful figures of the palace, excluding himself.

He thought it would be one of the three: Hang Yoon, the Grand Preceptor who also served as the Admiral of the Central Navy; the Prince Jong, the emperor's second prince; or Imperial Noble Consort Seo.

“Seeing that they even had you imitate the face of Eunuch Beom, who can be considered my close aide, they seem to have made up their mind.”

This was an excellent move, even in his own opinion.

If it was said that he had died at the hands of Eunuch Beom, it would ultimately be concluded as an internal conflict.

Although the Embroidered Uniform Guards would investigate whether it was someone’s instigation, it could be easily ended by eliminating the real Eunuch Beom.

Prince Gyeongjin clicked his tongue and said,

“You must have killed Eunuch Beom, right?”

“For a noble person, you’re quite smart.”

“Thank you for the compliment.”

At his calm tone, Mok Gyeong-un was inwardly intrigued.

Although it was amusing to see him misunderstand and speculate based on partial circumstances, he was indeed different from ordinary people, befitting a clan that ruled a country.

It could be seen from how he tried to calmly unravel the situation while being tense.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“Then you must know that further conversation is meaningless.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un clenched his sword fingers.

Sharp sword energy flowed out, and the air became heavy with murderous intent.

It was to the extent that even Prince Gyeongjin, who had not learned martial arts, could feel it.

‘It’s suffocating.’

Faced with Mok Gyeong-un’s sharp aura, Eunuch Ho gripped his soft sword and assumed a fighting stance.

-Your Highness, while I hold off this person, you must leave no matter what.

Chief Eunuch Ho, who repeated those words once more, tried to launch himself toward Mok Gyeong-un.

Right then, Prince Gyeongjin stopped him.

“Hold it!”

At his command, Eunuch Ho couldn’t hide his troubled expression.

If he were to release his fighting stance first in this situation, it would become difficult to protect Prince Gyeongjin.

Nevertheless, Prince Gyeongjin persisted.

“...Your Highness, that must not be done. This person is truly dangerous.”

“It’s fine, so stop.”

“Your Highness!”

“Didn’t I say it’s fine? I trust you. And if today is my last day, it would be my fate to go even if you don’t stop him.”

At Prince Gyeongjin’s words, Chief Eunuch Ho bit his lip and released his fighting stance.

Since the opponent was a master who couldn’t be let down his guard against, he didn’t want to easily release his vigilance, but he couldn’t disobey His Highness’s order.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un spoke with puzzlement.

“Doesn’t seem like a good choice.”

At those words, Prince Gyeongjin clasped his hands together and showed courtesy toward Mok Gyeong-un.

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes flickered at the sight.

What kind of behavior was this all of a sudden?

As he wondered, Prince Gyeongjin bowed his head and spoke.

“I am a person who values talent and respects the strong who deserve to be treated well.”

“You respect the strong?”

“That’s right. I need many heroes like you for what I want to do.”

‘Ah...’

At Prince Gyeongjin’s words, the Chief Eunuch of the Western Depot, Eunuch Ho, was troubled.

His Highness’s strong point, or rather his bad habit, had emerged.

If there was a desirable talent, regardless of whether they were an enemy or an obstacle, he would first reach out to them.

This could be used in a good way, but there were also cases where it wasn’t.

Especially if they were an enemy targeting his life.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un spoke.

“You’re quite a unique person.”

At his tone, which sounded intrigued, Prince Gyeongjin couldn’t help but feel inwardly relieved.

If he were someone who showed no reaction at all despite his utmost courtesy, there would be no room for negotiation.

However, showing such a reaction meant that he was someone who could be persuaded.

“I may be unique or foolish, but I have a great desire for talented individuals.”

“It seems that way.”

“Since the situation is like this, I'll be straightforward. I don't know whose request or order you received, but using an excellent talent like you for such a dirty job like assassination is no different from misusing resources.”

Misusing resources.

It meant using the resources of one state in another state, implying that they were being used in a place where their true value was not recognized.

“So, with a heart that earnestly desires talent, I want to invite you to become my person. I don't know what compensation you receive from them, but I am willing to treat you even better, so please become a pillar of support for me.”

Pillar of support.

It referred to a person who could be entrusted with important tasks of a household or a country, meaning someone who could handle the most critical matters.

Prince Gyeongjin's persuasive abilities and eloquence were close to being unrivaled.

With his profound learning, he had made numerous talents his own people through such eloquence.

‘It is said that people bow their heads to those who recognize their worth. I don't know whose person he is, but no one will be able to treat him as well as I can.’

Whether it was Imperial Noble Consort Seo, who only had her body as a weapon, the arrogant and unmatched influential official Hang Yoon, or the cruel Second Prince, who believed his position had been stolen.

Which one of them could match his magnanimity?

-Tremble tremble!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un lowered his head, covered his mouth with his palm, and slightly shook his face.

It seemed as if he was emotionally overwhelmed.

Seeing this, the corners of Prince Gyeongjin's mouth slightly rose.

It appeared that this gamble, born from his desire for talent, had paid off.

Prince Gyeongjin approached Mok Gyeong-un.

“Your Highness!”

Prince Gyeongjin shook his head.

“It's alright. This person has understood my intention.”

With those words, Prince Gyeongjin approached Mok Gyeong-un again and placed his hand on his right shoulder, laughing heartily.

“Hahaha! It seems that I have virtue. To gain such an outstanding warrior with the capacity of a fortress...”

Suddenly, Prince Gyeongjin couldn't finish his sentence.

That's because Mok Gyeong-un's face, as he lifted his head, was closer to boredom, as if he was forcibly holding back a yawn, rather than being overwhelmed by his eloquence.

“You...”

“Ah, I apologize. It seemed too obvious that I was trying to hold back a yawn, as it’s not polite to yawn while you’re delivering an impassioned speech.”

At those words, Prince Gyeongjin was dumbfounded.

He had shown such courtesy and praised him, yet the only reaction he showed was holding back a yawn?

This was equivalent to insulting him, a royal and a prince.

Prince Gyeongjin was inwardly very displeased, but since he was too close to Mok Gyeong-un, he suppressed it and spoke in a gentle voice.

“Perhaps my words were too long. Then let me put it simply. Please become my person.”

With those words, he clasped his hands together and bowed his head once more, showing courtesy.

As a prince, he had lowered himself to this extent and praised him.

If he had done this much, even this bastard should show sufficient sincerity...

-Stab!

At that moment, something sharp pierced Prince Gyeongjin’s left eyeball.

Rather than the pain from the needle that suddenly pierced his eye, Prince Gyeongjin was startled and tried to push Mok Gyeong-un away.

-Grab!

However, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed his wrist, making it impossible to push him away.

“You bastard!”

Seeing this scene, the enraged Chief Eunuch Ho hurriedly tried to save Prince Gyeongjin.

However,

“If you don’t want to see His Highness die, it’s best to stay still.”

“You scoundrel!”

Chief Eunuch Ho hesitated on the spot.

He gritted his teeth.

Even if His Highness had said it was alright, he should have somehow prevented him from getting close.

Meanwhile, Prince Gyeongjin, who was squinting his left eye, spoke to Mok Gyeong-un in an incomprehensible tone.

“Wh-Why are you doing this? I even showed courtesy and said I would treat you even better...”

“Ah. You’re asking why I suddenly did that?”

“...Yes.”

“Because you talk too much.”

‘!?’

Chapter 245 – Prince Gyeongjin (2)

Despite his courteous offer, which befit his status as royalty and a prince, the reason for stabbing his eye was simply because he talked too much?

Prince Gyeongjin was so dumbfounded that he was momentarily at a loss for words.

However, that was short-lived.

Immense pain rushed in, from his pierced eye to a severe headache.

“Ugh!”

“Your Highness!”

The Chief Eunuch of the Western Depot, Eunuch Ho, called out to him in a worried voice.

Eunuch Ho was extremely furious.

If it weren’t for Prince Gyeongjin, he would have wanted to unleash killing techniques on that insolent scoundrel right away.

But if he wasn’t calm, His Highness might really lose his life.

Suppressing his anger, Chief Eunuch Ho carefully spoke.

“Please, I beg you to calm down. If you release His Highness unharmed, I promise not only to let you go safely but also to grant you anything you desire.”

“Anything I desire?”

“That’s right. If you release His Highness unharmed.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“Ah. Then you can do anything for His Highness, right?”

That wasn’t even worth mentioning.

“Of course!”

Chief Eunuch Ho answered with emphasis in his voice.

As the right-hand man who had served Prince Gyeongjin for a long time, he was willing to do anything for him.

Mok Gyeong-un curled his lips and said,

“Then, if you take your own life, I will release His Highness.”

“What?”

At those words, Chief Eunuch Ho’s expression froze for a moment.

He had expected the fellow to demand something that would benefit him in some way, as he was human, but he never thought he would tell him to end his own life.

Unable to suppress the anger he had been holding back, Eunuch Ho raised his voice.

“Are you even calling that a proper request?”

“Oh? Are you getting angry now?”

“What?”

“You said you could do anything for His Highness, but are you suddenly reluctant to give up your life?”

At those words, Chief Eunuch Ho’s face contorted.

This cunning bastard was toying with him by creating a dilemma.

This was clearly the fellow’s scheme.

If he were to die, the fellow would become even more unrestrained.

However, if he said he couldn’t die here, His Highness Prince Gyeongjin might doubt his loyalty.

It was literally a dilemma where he couldn’t do either.

At that moment, Prince Gyeongjin, who had been holding his pierced eye in pain, opened his mouth.

“Ugh... Eunuch Ho. Don’t fall for this person’s scheme while worrying about me.”

“Your Highness!”

“I won’t doubt your loyalty over such a thing.”

At Prince Gyeongjin’s words, Mok Gyeong-un laughed and said,

“You may talk a lot, but you’re pretty good at assessing the situation.”

“Haa... Haa... The fact that you asked Eunuch Ho to take his own life means you can’t easily subdue him, right?”

“Well, you’re not wrong.”

Chief Eunuch Ho was not someone who could be killed in an instant.

Therefore, if he were to take his own life, things could become much easier.

“Then, could Your Highness tell Chief Eunuch to take his life on my behalf? If you do that, I’m willing to release you right away.”

“Don’t say things you don’t mean.”

“Things I don’t mean?”

“Even though I treated you with courtesy, you ended up like this. Do you think I would believe those words?”

“Ah, I suppose that’s true.”

“I would never utter such words. Rather, there is only one command I would give Eunuch Ho.”

“What?”

“Eunuch Ho. Don’t worry about my safety and immediately break the window and go alert others of the enemy’s infiltration.”

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un raised an eyebrow.

Then, despite the pain, Prince Gyeongjin curled his lips and said,

“You may be able to kill me here, but you won’t be able to leave the palace alive.”

“You’re making it interesting.”

“Does this situation seem amusing to you? Then, can you really stop him if the head of the Embroidered Uniform Guards, Southern Pacification Commissioner, arrives?”

‘Southern Pacification Commissioner?’

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

This was because, according to the information he had heard beforehand, one of the three people he should be most wary of in the palace was Southern Pacification Commissioner, known as the pinnacle of the Embroidered Uniform Guards.

He wasn’t simply the pinnacle of the Embroidered Uniform Guards.

Southern Pacification Commissioner Gu Seong-baek.

His other title as the protector of the emperor was the Blade King of the Northern Faction, the current pinnacle of the martial arts world and one of the Six Heavens.

There were many famous anecdotes about him, one of which was the story of him splitting three large ships led by the Changjiang Water Route Stronghold on the Yangtze River with a single blade.

Thanks to that tremendous feat, Southern Pacification Commissioner Gu Seong-baek newly added his prestige to the pinnacle of the martial arts world, which was originally called the Five Heavens.

‘One of the Six Heavens.’

However, as the palace’s supreme master, he never leaves the emperor’s side even for a moment.

Therefore, some in the martial arts world call him a hidden dragon or a famous blade trapped in its sheath.

But the situation is different inside the palace.

“If the palace’s masters, including the Southern Pacification Commissioner, arrive, do you think you can easily escape after harming me, no matter how outstanding a master you are?”

The reason Prince Gyeongjin said this to Mok Gyeong-un was simple.

It was to let him know that if he was prepared to risk his life, revenge could be taken immediately.

“…I see.”

As if Mok Gyeong-un had grasped the situation to some extent, Prince Gyeongjin spoke in a slightly softer tone.

“Then how about we both take a step back?”

“Step back?”

“That’s right. I won’t force you to become my subordinate. But you should also stop trying to kill me and leave. If you do that, I will stake my honor and treat this matter as if it never happened.”

This was the best measure Prince Gyeongjin could think of.

It was a ploy to let him know that the situation was harmful to both of them and make him give up on his own.

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“Your current approach is much better than your earlier verbose talk.”

“…Then will you accept my proposal? You don’t even know my identity, so you have nothing to lose by retreating from here, right?”

“That’s true.”

“Then please release me.”

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un stroked his chin as if pondering.

Prince Gyeongjin was confident that if he wasn’t truly prepared to risk his life, he would accept his proposal this time.

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

“I’ve thought about it, but I don’t think there’s any need for that.”

“You truly!”

“No matter how I think about it, Chief Eunuch over there doesn’t seem like he would let you die.”

“Ha!”

Prince Gyeongjin clicked his tongue as if dumbfounded and said,

“If I give the order, Chief Eunuch will unconditionally follow it. You seem to be underestimating both me and Eunuch Ho.”

“It’s not underestimating. As far as I know, the palace has strict laws and regulations, right?”

“What are you trying to say?”

“If you die, won’t they hold those responsible for your safety accountable as well?”

“...”

“And with death, no less.”

At those words, Prince Gyeongjin was rendered speechless.

This was an undeniable fact.

If he were to be assassinated by someone, according to the palace regulations, all the Embroidered Uniform Guards and eunuchs who had guarded him would also be held accountable and executed.

Prince Gyeongjin inwardly clicked his tongue.

Since the enemy threatened his safety, he had proposed a method that could be a way out for both of them, without being too offensive.

However, this cunning bastard had immediately found a flaw in his scheme that was hard to detect.

In the end, Prince Gyeongjin had no choice but to gamble.

“…Chief Eunuch. Can you give your life for me?”

With those words, Prince Gyeongjin stared intently at Chief Eunuch Ho.

He didn't truly mean for him to sacrifice himself.

‘You just need to show the will to give your life.’

That way, this person might accept his proposal.

Eunuch Ho's eyes were faintly trembling.

No matter how much he had pledged loyalty as a subject, it was a matter of his own life, so he seemed to hesitate even at the word of gambling.

However, as if he had understood the true intention in Prince Gyeongjin's eyes, he was about to answer with determination.

“I...”

But right at that moment, Mok Gyeong-un spoke.

“Ah, since Your Highness is being so resolute, I should make some concessions as well.”

“Concessions?”

“Yes. Then order Eunuch Ho to destroy his own danjeon. If you do that, I’ll spare both your life and Eunuch Ho’s life.”

“What?”

At the words to destroy his danjeon, sparks flew from Eunuch Ho’s eyes.

For a martial artist, destroying one’s danjeon was not much different from giving up one’s life.

Because it meant the end of life as a martial artist.

Although he had not learned martial arts, Prince Gyeongjin was not unaware of this, so he also raised his voice, unable to suppress his anger.

“Eunuch Ho is no different from my right arm. Telling him to destroy his danjeon is like cutting off my right arm. Do you think I would fall for such a scheme?”

“That’s not for you to decide.”

“What?”

“It depends on Eunuch Ho’s choice. I’ll count to five. If he doesn’t destroy his own danjeon within that time, I’ll kill you.”

“You bastard!”

Eunuch Ho couldn't hold back and snapped at him.

He wanted to tear Mok Gyeong-un apart and kill him right away.

However, if he did that, Prince Gyeongjin would likely die at the hands of that person.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un sneered and said,

"I'm not even asking to kill him, just to give up martial arts to save you. If you can't even do that, you don't have any loyalty at all."

"What! You..."

"Then why are you hesitating? I'm saying I'll spare both your life and his. Is it that difficult? Is martial arts more important than His Highness?"

"..."

"Ah, I see. Well, if you're someone who values your own life, of course, martial arts would be precious too. In the end, when you peel back a layer, what's important to humans is their own selves."

"You, you bastard..."

Under Mok Gyeong-un's pressure, pushing Eunuch Ho like this, Prince Gyeongjin's complexion darkened.

This person was extremely skilled at psychologically driving the opponent to the extreme, to the point of suffocation.

It could be seen from Eunuch Ho's wavering appearance.

At this rate, it seemed like he would really give in.

“Ho Gong...”

-Grab!

“Ugh.”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed Prince Gyeongjin's neck.

Prince Gyeongjin, whose throat was blocked, coughed with a red face.

“You!”

“One!”

As he was about to say something, Mok Gyeong-un started counting.

The moment he heard “one,” Eunuch Ho's expression hardened, and he was at a loss, unable to do anything.

Was this fellow really trying to kill His Highness?

No, from the moment he appeared wearing something like Eunuch Beom's human skin mask, it might have been a given.

“Two!”

Eunuch Ho bit his lip hard.

He had only two choices.

Either destroy his own danjeon as the fellow said, or break through the door as His Highness ordered, alert others of the enemy's infiltration, and seek help.

However, if it was the latter, His Majesty the Emperor would certainly hold him accountable.

In that case, the death penalty was definitely set.

-Crunch!

Whichever he chose, it was the worst situation for him.

At that moment, he saw Prince Gyeongjin, whose neck was being held, gesturing something toward him with his hand.

It was,

‘Ah...’

He was pointing to his belly with his hand.

In other words, it meant to destroy his own danjeon.

Seeing this, Eunuch Ho's eyes sank heavily.

In the end, when his life was in danger, Prince Gyeongjin chose his own safety over the aftermath.

“Three!”

As the word “three” came out of Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth, strength entered Eunuch Ho’s hand holding the soft sword.

In that fleeting moment, countless thoughts flashed through Eunuch Ho’s mind.

And finally, he made his choice.

It was none other than,

-Pak!

As Eunuch Ho threw the soft sword infused with strong energy toward Mok Gyeong-un, he immediately launched himself, smashed the window, and fled.

‘Chief Eunuch!’

At this sight, Prince Gyeongjin’s eyes widened as if they would tear apart from the sense of betrayal.

In the end, he had chosen his danjeon instead of saving him.

-Tap tap tap!

Eunuch Ho, who had broken through the window, bit his lip hard.

It was an unavoidable choice for him.

He had a way to escape the palace itself if worse came to worst regarding the palace's laws and the responsibility that would follow, but there was no answer if his danjeon was destroyed.

What if that fellow changed his words and killed both him with a destroyed danjeon and His Highness?

Then it would become an even worse situation.

‘Your Highness, I apologize. In the end, you also thought of your own safety rather than mine, didn’t you?’

And even if the fellow kept his promise and spared His Highness’s life, he didn’t think Prince Gyeongjin would employ him again with a destroyed danjeon.

In that case, it was better to plan for the future.

However, as Eunuch Ho, who had gone outside to raise an alarm, frowned.

‘What’s this?’

The surroundings of the palace were too quiet.

Within the Bi-gyeong Palace alone, there were dozens of Embroidered Uniform Guards and palace guards.

Yet, he couldn’t feel their presence at all.

What on earth was going on?

Thinking something was strange, Eunuch Ho thought he should escape from the palace for now, considering that the fellow might chase after him.

So, as he was about to launch himself out of the palace,

-Tok tok!

The sound of footsteps came from the direction of the palace gate's pavilion.

Eunuch Ho unconsciously looked in that direction.

There, he saw a stunningly beautiful woman in splendid red and gold clothes walking toward him, holding something in one hand.

At that moment, Eunuch Ho's expression hardened.

Because the moment he saw the woman's face, he immediately recognized who she was.

'Consort Ho?'

Chapter 246 – Prince Gyeongjin (3)

Consort Ho.

The emperor had numerous women.

Among them, there was one woman who received his particular favor: Imperial Noble Consort Seo.

However, the dynamics within the Inner Court, which seemed like they would be maintained for a long time, changed at some point.

It was because of the sudden appearance of Consort Ho.

‘A peerless beauty that one couldn’t help but be captivated by.’

Everyone who saw Consort Ho showered her with praise.

The appearance of the palace maid who had just entered the palace was so outstanding that rumors spread, saying her beauty rivaled that of Imperial Noble Consort Seo in her prime.

The woman who entered the palace as a maid rose to the position of consort in just three years by enchanting the emperor with her appearance alone, without any backing.

As a result, even the four most powerful figures in the palace had recently become most wary of this woman who had captured the emperor’s heart.

But why had Consort Ho appeared in the Bi-gyeong Palace, Prince Gyeongjin’s territory?

And without any attendants or palace maids to serve her, no less.

Something was very strange.

-Tok tok!

In her hand as she walked, there was a fairly large cloth bundle, making it even more puzzling.

However, rather than her strange appearance, Chief Eunuch Ho of the Western Depot had to hurry and inform the emperor’s residence of the enemy’s infiltration, so he hastily clasped his hands together and bowed to her, saying,

“Consort Ho, I apologize for not being able to properly pay my respects due to the urgent situation. An unidentified enemy has infiltrated His Highness’s quarters, so...”

“Enemy?”

“That’s right. Therefore, I must request assistance, so I ask that you please return, Madam. I shall...”

“Wait.”

At that moment, she called out to Eunuch Ho.

As the situation was already urgent, Eunuch Ho unintentionally answered in an irritated voice.

“Madam, there’s no time for this...”

-Swish!

At that moment, Consort Ho threw the cloth bundle she was holding to Eunuch Ho.

The cloth bundle looked quite heavy, as it was sagging, but when she lightly threw it with one hand, Eunuch Ho caught it with a puzzled expression.

-Pak!

‘She threw this with one hand?’

It was indeed quite heavy.

Since he was a man and had learned martial arts, he could easily catch it, but wasn’t Consort Ho an ordinary woman who hadn’t even learned martial arts?

Eunuch Ho asked,

“Madam, I don’t know what this is, but I don’t think I can deliver it to His Highness right away...”

“Look inside and see what it is.”

At her commanding and arrogant tone, Eunuch Ho frowned.

Although she received the emperor’s favor, he was the Chief Eunuch of the Western Depot, so he deserved some respect to a certain extent.

Therefore, Eunuch Ho thought he should just ignore her for now and leave.

After all, he had shown the minimum courtesy.

-Thud!

Eunuch Ho set the cloth bundle she had thrown on the floor.

And just as he was about to kick off the ground and launch himself,

-Pak!

At that moment, the wrapped cloth bundle opened on its own, and something inside popped out.

Unconsciously seeing this, Eunuch Ho,

‘!?’

Was startled and took about half a step back.

That's because inside the cloth bundle was none other than a severed human head.

And not just any head, but the head of a woman,

‘Th-This woman is...’

Eunuch Ho immediately recognized whose head it was.

The owner of this head was none other than the palace maid who had been assigned to Consort Ho's Auspicious Palace.

[Just put a little bit of this powder in soup dishes or strongly seasoned food.]

[Are you sure it will be alright?]

[Don't worry. This secret medicine is difficult to detect even for those who have learned martial arts or physicians with sensitive tongues. So, make sure to add it every day without fail.]

[Understood, Chief Eunuch.]

It was even the palace maid he had met not long ago to receive a progress report.

The moment he saw the severed head of that palace maid, Eunuch Ho couldn't help but reveal his emotions.

No, he couldn't help it.

The palace maid who had died with her neck severed wasn't dead with a distressed face, but was smiling brightly as if she was happy.

This was utterly eerie.

As he was at a loss for words due to this, a voice reached his ears.

“She looks so happy, doesn't she?”

-Swish!

Along with that voice, a hand rested on his shoulder.

And with a fragrance so sweet that it tickled his nose, Eunuch Ho's eyes shook wildly.

When did this woman get so close to him?

Even though he was surprised to see the severed head of the palace maid, he wasn't so disoriented that he couldn't sense someone's presence.

‘Could it be that she has learned martial arts? No, but for that...’

There wasn't even a trace of her having learned martial arts.

If one had learned even a little bit of martial arts, it would show in their walking posture or movements.

Even the structure of their body would change to suit martial arts.

However, Consort Ho was not like that at all.

From her footsteps to everything else, it was difficult to find any traces of her having learned martial arts.

As he was confused, Consort Ho's voice was heard.

“You know, I'm rather refined, so I quite enjoy cooking in addition to raw food.”

“...”

“But one day, someone started tampering with the food I enjoyed eating.”

“Madam... what are you saying right now...”

-Swish!

Before he could finish speaking, Consort Ho's soft and small hand touched Eunuch Ho's neck.

There was nothing particularly stimulating his senses, but the moment her hand touched him, he instinctively felt a chill run down his spine.

“I'm not done talking yet.”

“...”

Eunuch Ho unconsciously swallowed his dry saliva.

What the hell was this woman?

Just being close to her made it uncomfortable to breathe due to an inexplicable pressure.

Was she truly an incredibly supreme master beyond imagination?

As he thought that, she continued speaking.

“It’s really interesting. Humans do similar things in every era. Whether it’s decades ago, centuries ago, or millennia ago, as soon as they’re slightly displeased, the first thing they tamper with is the food.”

“…Madam, I’m truly sorry, but I have no idea what you’re talking about…”

“Playing dumb is also the same.”

“I really…”

“Enough.”

“Pardon?”

“I just need to have some raw food for a change.”

‘!?’

-Stab!

At that moment, something burst through Eunuch Ho’s chest.

It was none other than,

“Ugh... Ugh...”

A hand grasping his heart.

Eunuch Ho's eyes widened as if they would tear apart.

The sight of his heart, gripped by a blood-stained hand, beating and pounding, made him feel like he was going crazy.

In his ear, Consort Ho whispered softly.

“A freshly extracted human heart is a delicacy because it's so fresh. It's yours, but do you want a taste?”

‘!!!!!!’

At those words, Eunuch Ho, who had been coughing and turning pale, finally lowered his head.

Seeing him die faster than expected, Consort Ho pulled out the hand she had pierced through him and muttered regretfully.

“Maybe I should have tormented him a bit more before killing him.”

Now that she had killed him, it felt like she had done it too easily.

Then, shaking her head, she brought the heart she was holding to her mouth,

-Chomp!

And took a crisp bite as if eating an apple.

-Chew chew!

After thoroughly chewing and swallowing the heart, Consort Ho savored it with her eyes closed.

“Ah, this is why I can’t quit raw food.”

Boiled, grilled, and fried foods were delicacies, but they weren’t staples.

She only felt like she was eating when blood and meat juices overflowed.

Like that, Consort Ho quickly devoured the faintly beating heart.

It didn’t take long for her to eat it all.

“That was a good meal.”

Consort Ho wiped the blood from the corners of her mouth with a handkerchief in a refined manner, like a lady.

After wiping the blood, Consort Ho turned her head toward Prince Gyeongjin’s quarters.

Then, with an intrigued look in her eyes and a twitch of her lips, she grabbed the hair of the dead Eunuch Ho’s head.

Around the same time in Prince Gyeongjin’s quarters.

-Swish! Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un released his grip on Prince Gyeongjin's neck.

Prince Gyeongjin, whose legs had lost strength, knelt on the floor.

Although he had tried to hold him as gently as possible, Prince Gyeongjin, who had been suffocating from having his neck grabbed, coughed and caught his breath.

“Cough, cough.”

Looking down at him, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and said,

“An unexpected outcome.”

“Cough, cough... what?”

“I thought that since he was someone who served you, if he had even a shred of loyalty, he would choose to save your life and his own, no matter what.”

He had emotionally pushed him into a corner, but the result was slightly different from what he had expected.

Mok Gyeong-un smiled at this outcome.

“It seems that for those who have learned martial arts, their danjeon is much more precious than their loyalty to their master or their life.”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Prince Gyeongjin, who had finally caught his breath, clenched his fists.

He inwardly felt betrayed by Chief Eunuch Ho's actions.

Since he had served him for a long time, he thought he would act according to his intentions.

However, he never expected him to choose to preserve his martial arts, contrary to those intentions.

‘Eunuch Ho, how could you...’

It was truly disappointing beyond words.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un said with a smile,

“It’s quite unfortunate. To think that a trusted subordinate would choose your death.”

At those words, Prince Gyeongjin spoke with anger in his eyes.

“Are you going to kill me?”

“Since Eunuch Ho made his choice, shouldn’t I?”

-Pak!

At that moment, Prince Gyeongjin prostrated himself toward Mok Gyeong-un and spoke in a desperate voice.

“Spare me.”

He no longer had any dignity or pride as a prince.

Mok Gyeong-un's lips twitched, and he bent down and whispered in the ear of the prostrating Prince Gyeongjin.

“You know that sparing you won’t benefit me at all, right?”

“Please, spare me. I don’t want to die like this.”

“You’ve become quite honest.”

“...”

With a shred of self-esteem remaining, Prince Gyeongjin didn’t respond to those words.

Then, he spoke with a strained voice.

“If you spare my life, I will shift the blame for your crimes onto Eunuch Ho.”

“Oh.”

“…I cannot forgive Eunuch Ho for turning his back on me like this.”

“You’re saying you’ll make it seem like Eunuch Ho did everything.”

“That’s right.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said,

“For once, your thoughts and mine align.”

At those words, Prince Gyeongjin's expression brightened.

He hadn't had high hopes, but it was no different from taking a gamble with a last-ditch effort.

But he never expected it to unexpectedly work.

Well, from this person's perspective, if he killed him, the situation would spiral out of control, so it could be a natural choice.

“Then let us come to an agreement.”

“There's no need for that.”

“What?”

To Prince Gyeongjin, who questioned him, Mok Gyeong-un whispered meaningfully.

“You just need to give me that body of yours.”

‘!?’

It happened as soon as those words ended.

-Shiver!

“Ugh!”

The prostrating Prince Gyeongjin's eyes rolled back, and violent convulsions occurred throughout his body.

Then, as he gradually stabilized, his eyes returned to normal.

No, his eyes had changed from usual.

Prince Gyeongjin got up and opened his mouth.

“I never thought the day would come when I would possess a prince’s body. Disciple.”

The one who had taken over that body was none other than Cheong-ryeong.

As if she was pleased to possess someone else’s body for the first time in a long while, Cheong-ryeong clenched and unclenched her fists, showing a satisfied expression.

To her, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and said,

“Well, it’s not bad since it’s been a while since you possessed someone, right?”

“Well, entering such a noble body isn’t too bad...”

-Startle!

Cheong-ryeong stopped mid-sentence and turned her head toward the door.

It wasn’t just her.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been smiling until just now, also looked at the door with sharpened eyes.

-Thud!

Soon, the door opened, and a beautiful woman wearing splendid red and gold clothes appeared.

The woman who had suddenly appeared smiled radiantly, then held up the torn head of Chief Eunuch Ho and said,

“Won’t you let me join in too, guys?”

Chapter 247 – Consort Ho (1)

“Won’t you let me join in too, guys?”

‘!?’

The sudden appearance of the stunningly beautiful woman in splendid red and gold clothes momentarily hardened the expressions of Mok Gyeong-un and Cheong-ryeong, who was possessing Prince Gyeongjin’s body.

That’s because in the hand of this woman, whom they were seeing for the first time, was the torn head of Chief Eunuch Ho of the Western Depot.

‘What the hell?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s hardened eyes wavered.

Since he had surrounded the room with deadly energy to completely block out sound, he couldn’t accurately sense the approaching sounds from outside.

However, he didn’t feel anything from this woman who had opened the door and entered.

He couldn't see the color of her energy, neither through his senses nor his physical eyes.

‘…What is her identity?’

There was one time he had encountered a similar case.

It was when he met the old man with the bamboo fishing rod.

Due to his overwhelmingly superior level, it was difficult to even sense his energy, and even when he opened the power of his Third Eye, his eyes couldn't withstand the pressure of the energy.

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong, who was possessing Prince Gyeongjin, opened her mouth.

“Consort Ho?”

When possessing someone, depending on the degree of assimilation, one could read their memories.

Even if it wasn't complete assimilation, if it was someone Prince Gyeongjin was familiar with, Cheong-ryeong could also immediately recognize them.

‘Consort Ho?’

At Cheong-ryeong's words, Mok Gyeong-un couldn't hide his bewilderment.

If she was Consort Ho, wasn't she one of the two women the emperor favored?

How did she appear holding the head of Chief Eunuch Ho of the Western Depot, who had gone out to seek help?

As he was puzzled, Cheong-ryeong spoke with a perplexed expression.

“Consort Ho, what in the world are you doing? Isn’t that Eunuch Ho’s head in your hand?”

She spoke as if she had truly become Prince Gyeongjin.

With this, Mok Gyeong-un immediately grasped Cheong-ryeong’s intentions.

It seemed that since she couldn’t determine the other party’s true identity, she was trying to act as Prince Gyeongjin for now.

Therefore, to play along, Mok Gyeong-un tried to clasp his hands together and bow his head.

However,

“Pft.”

The woman called Consort Ho let out a mocking laugh.

Then, she tossed the head of Eunuch Ho she was holding.

-Thud! Roll roll roll!

Consort Ho walked into the quarters and spoke.

“Don’t overdo the acting. spirit.”

‘!?’

At those words, the eyes of Cheong-ryeong, who was possessing Prince Gyeongjin, slightly wavered.

What the hell was this woman's true identity?

Since she had reached the level of a Blue Spirit, even ordinary necromancers had difficulty discerning that she was possessing someone.

Yet, she had immediately noticed it.

Her confident tone made it difficult to play dumb or make excuses.

Therefore, Cheong-ryeong spoke with sharpened eyes.

“Who the hell are you?”

“You?”

“That’s right. You...”

-Pak!

At that moment,

Consort Ho, who had appeared in front of Cheong-ryeong possessing Prince Gyeongjin in an instant, tried to grab her neck.

However, at that very moment,

-Pak!

Cheong-ryeong, who was about to be grabbed, pushed herself to the side, and someone grabbed Consort Ho's wrist.

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

Looking at her grabbed wrist, Consort Ho curled her lips and said,

“You’re quite fast for someone with an old man’s face.”

“...”

Mok Gyeong-un didn’t respond to her words.

No, it was more accurate to say he couldn’t respond.

-Tremble tremble!

Although he was grasping her wrist, apart from it being slender, it was so unbelievably strong that it was difficult for him to withstand it.

Just as he thought he should let go,

-Bam! Crash!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un’s body, which was holding Consort Ho’s wrist, crashed into the wall of the quarters and broke through it.

Consort Ho, who had easily thrown off Mok Gyeong-un, turned her gaze to Cheong-ryeong.

“I can tell your level is quite high, but it seems you don’t know your place. spirit.”

“You...”

-Bam!

Before she could finish speaking, Cheong-ryeong’s body was slammed to the floor.

Consort Ho was pressing down on her head, and although she shouldn’t have been able to feel pain even if she was possessing a human body,

“Ugh...”

A groan escaped her lips due to the intense pain that seemed to penetrate her head.

Cheong-ryeong looked at Consort Ho with perplexed, widened eyes.

The sight of her grinning as if she was having the time of her life made it seem like she was enjoying this situation.

At that sight, Cheong-ryeong could instinctively tell.

‘This woman... is not human.’

It wasn’t a statement stemming from her personality.

She truly wasn’t human.

She hadn’t noticed it because her energy wasn’t revealed, but this force pressing down on her head was undoubtedly demonic power.

Moreover, it was demonic power that was immensely vast and pure to an immeasurable degree.

If just a fragment of it was this powerful, what was the true identity of this being?

‘A demon beast?’

No.

It could be even higher than that.

No matter how high-level a demon beast Imae Mangnyang was, as a spirit who had reached the Indigo Spirit level, her spiritual power was not inferior to it.

At least, she couldn’t be overwhelmingly suppressed like this.

If that was the case, could it be,

‘A spiritual beast?’

Was this woman, who had the appearance of a beautiful human, a spiritual beast?

Spiritual beasts were considered the highest level of Imae Mangnyang.

How could such a being exist in the palace as a woman favored by the emperor?

As she was perplexed, Consort Ho spoke.

“You’re an interesting one. Most spirits or monsters wouldn’t dare enter my territory, but seeing you enter so fearlessly.”

-Crunch!

“Aargh!”

As Consort Ho pressed down on her head even harder, a scream burst out from Cheong-ryeong’s mouth.

Cheong-ryeong felt pain that seemed like it would shatter her spiritual body.

Right at that moment,

-Rumble!

A vast curse power spread throughout the quarters.

Along with it, four pillars shot up around Consort Ho.

Seeing the four pillars that had risen, Consort Ho’s eyes flickered with interest.

“I wonder what this is.”

Consort Ho looked at the pillars, then turned her gaze.

There, Mok Gyeong-un walked out from beyond the shattered wall, forming a hand seal with one hand and grasping his sword finger with the other.

“I felt curse power, but I didn’t know you could also use sorcery.”

As soon as she finished speaking, Mok Gyeong-un extended his sword finger toward Consort Ho.

“Four Peaks Linking Technique.”

-Whoosh!

Along with this, a wall of curse power formed from the pillars and connected.

Then, it tried to imprison Consort Ho.

“Shrink!”

Mok Gyeong-un made a grasping motion with his palm.

The size of the wall created by the Four Peaks Linking Technique began to shrink.

The intention was to cleverly reduce the size of the curse power wall to cut off and trap only Consort Ho’s wrist, which was pressing down on Cheong-ryeong’s head.

However, right at that moment,

“You have a lot of tricks up your sleeve, but what can you do?”

Consort Ho smirked and flicked her finger at the wall of curse power that was about to connect.

-Clang!

-Rip!

At that moment, along with the rebound, Mok Gyeong-un’s palm was torn and forcibly opened.

Not only that, but the wall of curse power that was meant to imprison Consort Ho shattered into pieces, and the curse power scattered in all directions.

“Petty tricks won’t work, so what...”

-Swoosh!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un’s figure appeared in front of her.

Then, he thrust his sword finger, infused with sharp sword energy, toward Consort Ho’s eyes.

Realizing that sorcery didn’t work on her, Mok Gyeong-un immediately switched to martial arts and chose to directly attack her.

However,

-Pak!

Consort Ho waved her hand without dodging Mok Gyeong-un’s sword finger at all.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un’s figure, which was thrusting his sword finger, scattered like an afterimage.

At the same time,

-Bam! Crash!

Mok Gyeong-un’s figure was hit by something right behind her and slammed into the floor.

The impact was so strong that it broke through the floor of the quarters and created a depression around it.

“Disciple!”

Cheong-ryeong called out to Mok Gyeong-un in shock.

Then, she noticed something fluttering above the spot where Mok Gyeong-un had fallen.

It was a tail with golden fur.

‘A tail?’

The tail was connected to none other than under Consort Ho’s skirt.

Consort Ho covered her mouth and laughed.

“Hohohoho, petty tricks like that shadow clone technique won’t work on me. No, you should at least create ten clones for me to possibly find an opening.”

-Swish swish!

Along with that, golden tails rose from under Consort Ho’s skirt.

There were quite a few tails.

Seeing the tails, Cheong-ryeong’s pupils shook intensely.

‘Golden tails?’

At that moment,

A vicious and dark energy suddenly surged from the crater in the floor.

It was none other than demonic energy.

Consort Ho's eyes glimmered with interest as she looked at the flowing demonic energy.

It was because she had never felt such energy before.

‘It’s not human, not a spirit, and not an energy I’ve felt from monsters either...’

Right then,

-Whoosh!

The surging demonic energy suddenly multiplied several times in an instant.

Then, the energy gathered into a single point within the crater and brushed past Consort Ho in a fleeting moment.

-Swish!

A black line appeared in the air.

Along with it, Mok Gyeong-un stood right behind Consort Ho, breathing roughly.

“Haa... Haa...”

The greatest technique he could currently execute was this sword energy and the technique of gathering all his power into a single point.

-Creak! Creak!

His muscles tensed up and cried out throughout his body.

Although he didn't collapse like before, it was still a tremendous technique beyond his comprehension, so he couldn't use it consecutively more than once at the moment.

Mok Gyeong-un slowly turned his head.

‘!?’

Upon turning his head, Mok Gyeong-un frowned.

That's because despite it being his most powerful strike with all his might, Consort Ho was unaffected.

No, it wasn't that she was completely unaffected.

-Drip!

A single scratch appeared on her beautiful cheek, and a drop of blood flowed from it.

Consort Ho wiped it with her sleeve and raised an eyebrow.

“Blood...”

Although it was just a single drop, when was the last time this had happened?

No, it was virtually nonexistent.

It was the first time since her birth that a mere human had inflicted a wound on her.

Consort Ho's eyes turned cold, and then the color of her eyes and hair began to change.

-Swish swish!

They took on a golden hue that felt noble and splendid.

At her transformation, Mok Gyeong-un swallowed his dry saliva.

Even without opening the power of his Third Eye, the energy emanating from the transformed Consort Ho was so distant that it sent chills down his spine.

-Swish swish!

Behind her, whose hair and eyes had turned golden, nine tails rose like mountain peaks.

‘Nine tails?’

Seeing this, something flashed through Mok Gyeong-un's mind.

[There is a being known to be even worse than the Great Demon King, who is said to be the oldest among the Six Demons. That being is an evil incarnate and leads everything to destruction.]

[...Leads to destruction?]

[Many nations, from ancient times to the Yin and Zhou dynasties, have fallen because of that being.]

[Yin and Zhou? Could it be that spiritual beast you're talking about, Golden...]

[That's right. It is the great fox Imae Mangnyang, the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed, who has a hundred faces and is thus also called the Hundred-Faced One, with nine golden tails filled with ominous demonic power.]

Chapter 248 – Consort Ho (2)

Ordinary monsters are typically recorded in books known only to necromancers, such as the “Compendium of Monsters and Oddities from the Classic of Mountains and Seas.”

However, this being with nine golden tails was different.

Records of it could be found not only in ancient texts but also in the Historical Records.

Its first appearance in the Historical Records, considered an official history, was during the Yin Dynasty.

[The fox monster Daji, who devoured King Zhou's concubine Su Yang and transformed into her, corrupted the king, leading him to create the Alcohol Pool and Meat Forest, indulging in extravagance and pleasure. As a result, tyranny arose, and the Yin Dynasty fell at the hands of King Wu of Zhou.]

This fox monster was called by many names, befitting its title of the Hundred-Faced One.

Daji of the Yin Dynasty.

Bao Si of the Zhou Dynasty.

Lady Huo of the Tianzhu Kingdom.

Tamamo-no-Mae of the Eastern Ying Kingdom.

Appearing in numerous forms and names, it influenced the fate and history of nations.

Necromancers and monsters with knowledge referred to this catastrophic and worst monster as follows:

The Hundred-Faced King, the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed.

-Swish swish!

The nine golden tails emitting an ominous and tremendous demonic energy.

With its matching golden hair and eyes, this monster was both mysterious and beautiful.

‘This... This is beyond imagination.’

Cheong-ryeong, possessing Prince Gyeongjin’s body, was at a loss for words.

The demonic power emanating from Consort Ho, no, the Hundred-Faced King Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox who had revealed its true identity, was truly immeasurable.

It was incomparable to the monstrous raccoon dog, the Sea Slaying King, she had seen in the Sihyeol Valley.

In the first place, the Sea Slaying King was in a weakened state due to being sealed.

However, this worst calamity-level spiritual beast, known to be close to a divine beast, not only crushed her fighting spirit but also made her will submit.

‘…There’s absolutely no way to face this.’

Even if one’s martial arts reached the pinnacle, surpassing the wall of walls, it would be impossible.

In the first place, the level of existence of this monster, which had existed since ancient times, was completely different.

It was truly perplexing beyond words.

How could one encounter such a being in the palace of all places?

‘Ah!’

Cheong-ryeong’s eyes wavered.

Come to think of it, this Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox, known as a great calamity, often appeared when a nation’s fate was coming to an end.

The current Central Plains was exactly in such a state.

The Central Plains had become impoverished in many places due to the long-lasting famine, but the emperor and the powerful officials were enjoying extravagance, engaging in power struggles, and exploiting the commoners’ blood and sweat.

Even the martial arts world, which had opposed the government for the sake of chivalry and martial arts, was now colluding with them to plunder the commoners to the extent that it wouldn’t be surprising if the current Central Plains erupted at any moment.

If that was the case, this worst monster might have appeared to put an end to the weakened fate of this nation.

-Clench!

Cheong-ryeong bit her lip hard.

The situation was completely different from when the monstrous raccoon dog Sea Slaying King, who was sealed and imprisoned, had not been fully released.

She couldn't escape, and there was no hope of fighting against this opponent.

She had never felt such despair before.

However,

-Swish!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un was composing himself.

He was seen grasping his sword finger and once again gathering demonic energy into one.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong couldn't hide her bewilderment.

‘Disciple, you...’

Aren't you afraid?

Even though you can feel this tremendous pressure that makes it difficult to even breathe, are you thinking of fighting?

‘What are you thinking?’

Mok Gyeong-un was always cold and rational.

Therefore, he must have naturally realized that he couldn't do anything against this worst being.

Nevertheless, she couldn't understand why he was burning with such fighting spirit.

“Oh.”

This was the same for Consort Ho, no, the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox.

Although she hadn't transformed into her true form, she had properly revealed her demonic power, yet he didn't diminish his sharp aura toward her at all, which piqued her interest.

So she opened her mouth.

“Even if it's just a single drop, since you made me bleed, I will kill you.”

“Do as you wish.”

“Aren't you afraid, human?”

“If I die because I'm weak against my opponent, it's ultimately just the natural order of things, so what is there to be afraid of?”

At his nonchalant words, her eyes flickered with interest.

She had encountered countless humans over a long period of time.

Among those humans, there were certainly some who were so strong that they could hardly be called human.

However, even those individuals, when suppressed by her and faced with the threat of death, showed their ugly sides and revealed their emotions of fear and pain.

“Hmm.”

The corners of the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox’s mouth twitched.

Seeing a human who seemed to have lost all fear after a long time aroused both her interest and curiosity.

She wondered if this human, who showed a nonchalant attitude while talking about the natural order of things, could maintain such composure even in the face of true pain and suffering.

‘I have never seen such a thing.’

She had engaged in amusement for thousands of years, but the outcome was always the same.

Regardless of the being, they were all the same in the end.

Humans became infinitely weak in the face of desire and always succumbed to fear in the face of terror and death.

The Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox spoke with a radiant smile.

“Human, I’m curious to see how long your bold appearance can last.”

-Swish!

She pointed her index finger at Mok Gyeong-un.

At that moment, a mass of white light formed by demonic power rippled and rushed toward Mok Gyeong-un's head in the blink of an eye.

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un moved his neck in an instant to dodge it.

‘Oh.’

He dodged it?

It was a mass of demonic power she had launched, taking into account the speed at which he moved.

Yet, he lightly dodged it.

“Not bad. Then...”

-Swish! Bang bang bang!

The Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox fired demonic power at Mok Gyeong-un in rapid succession with her fingers.

It was so fast that it was impossible to even discern with the naked eye.

However,

-Swish! Swish! Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un dodged them with minimal movement, narrowly avoiding them.

‘I can’t take my eyes off her.’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes never left her fingers.

Although the speed was even faster than ultra-high-speed movement, he could predict the trajectory by keeping his eyes on where her fingers were pointing.

The corners of the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox’s mouth rose.

“Ah, so that’s how you dodged? You’re a clever one. Then how about this?”

-Whoosh!

In an instant, spheres of demonic power, each about the size of a finger joint, surrounded Mok Gyeong-un in uncountable numbers.

“Try dodging this too.”

As the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox made a grasping motion with her hand,

-Bang bang bang!

The small spheres of demonic power that had surrounded him simultaneously rushed toward Mok Gyeong-un.

There were so many of them that they engulfed him in an instant, making his figure no longer visible.

‘Disciple!’

-Crunch!

Just a single sphere of demonic power piercing the ground was enough to imagine its tremendous power, and he had been bombarded by such an incredible number of them.

It wasn’t something that could be dodged or endured.

Cheong-ryeong’s expression, which had been hesitating in despair, changed to anger.

-Swish!

With that, she abandoned Prince Gyeongjin’s body and came out.

Then, she gathered all her spiritual power and struck the floor.

‘Blood Realm.’

-Rumble!

At that moment, blood began to form on the floor, centered around her palm.

-Drip drip!

Blood droplets rising as if falling in reverse.

Blood droplets gushed throughout Prince Gyeongjin's quarters, dyeing everything red.

This was her Ghost Realm created by her strong thoughts.

Although she knew she was no match for the opponent, she had decided to help Mok Gyeong-un rather than perish without doing anything.

However,

-Crack crack crack!

Cracks appeared in the quarters that were being dyed red.

Then, as if nothing had happened, her Ghost Realm, the Blood Realm, disappeared.

The Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox spoke as if it was absurd.

“In front of whom are you arrogantly deploying a realm, spirit? Do you want to perish first?”

-Swish!

The Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox extended her hand toward Cheong-ryeong.

Then, with a strong suction force, her spiritual body was forcibly pulled toward the hand.

Cheong-ryeong's expression distorted.

‘Too strong.’

She knew she was no match, but the gap was too wide.

To the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox, she was literally no different from an insect crawling on the ground.

-Grab!

-Ugh!

Cheong-ryeong's face, whose spiritual body's neck was grabbed by the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox's hand, contorted in pain.

The demonic power was so strong that even a little force seemed enough to instantly annihilate her.

But right at that moment,

-Boom!

A black line burst through the floor and rose upward.

-Slash!

The black line slashed the back of the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox's hand.

The Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox, who had been trying to annihilate Cheong-ryeong, lost her grip on the spiritual body's neck.

‘Disciple?’

In an instant, Cheong-ryeong's eyes widened.

It was because she saw Mok Gyeong-un, whose entire body was covered in blood.

Despite his appearance being a mess from the demonic power bullets, his eyes hadn't lost their spirit at all.

-Whoosh!

As Mok Gyeong-un extended his left hand, Cheong-ryeong's spiritual body was flung backward.

Immediately after that, Mok Gyeong-un tried to strike the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox's head with his right hand in a chopping motion.

However,

-Grab!

Before he could do so, one of the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox's tails wrapped around Mok Gyeong-un's body, and another tail coiled around his wrist.

-Squeeze! Tremble tremble!

Mok Gyeong-un's hand, bound by the tail, trembled violently.

The Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox's eyes flickered with interest as she watched this.

'Look at this.'

Even though she had grabbed him with her tail, the force contained in Mok Gyeong-un's chopping hand was no ordinary.

She could immediately understand the reason.

Mok Gyeong-un's right hand was concentrated with tremendous demonic power.

That demonic power was none other than her own.

“You’re interesting.”

The corners of the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox’s mouth twitched.

She didn’t know what technique he used to absorb the demonic power, but it seemed he had endured the numerous demonic power spheres rushing toward his entire body and gathered that power to the fullest.

And in the fleeting moment when her attention was focused on that spirit, he hadn’t missed the opportunity and burrowed into the ground to attempt a surprise attack.

-Drip drip!

Blood flowed from the wound on her right hand.

Seeing this, the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox let out a hollow laugh.

“Ha!”

She had tried to push him to the extreme and show him the fear of death.

But instead, he had counterattacked in such a situation, and on top of that, he had inflicted another wound on her.

This was truly the first time such a thing had happened.

-Lick!

The Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox licked the flowing blood with her tongue and glared at Mok Gyeong-un with a cold smile.

Through her golden eyes and disheveled hair, she saw Mok Gyeong-un's face covered in blood.

Seeing his face, her eyes flickered with interest.

“You?”

That's because although she knew he was concealing his face with something, she didn't expect the face hidden underneath to be so young.

No matter how she looked at it, he wasn't even in his late teens.

And such a fellow had inflicted wounds on her body, who had lived for thousands of years, twice?

‘This one is completely crazy.’

Rather than feeling unpleasant, she became even more intrigued.

-Creak! Creak!

The blood vessels in Mok Gyeong-un's right hand swelled up as if they were about to burst.

This was a phenomenon that occurred because the blood vessels couldn't withstand the concentration of demonic power in one hand, which was difficult to handle.

-Spurt spurt!

And as a result of not being able to release that power, blood vessels burst in various places on Mok Gyeong-un's right hand, and blood flowed out.

Nevertheless, there was not the slightest change in Mok Gyeong-un's expression.

He only showed a look of regret in his eyes.

At this,

-Squeeze!

The Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox exerted force on the tail that was wrapping around Mok Gyeong-un.

The force was so strong that even the blood vessels on Mok Gyeong-un's face, which was already covered in blood, bulged and seemed like they would burst at any moment.

However,

'Look at this.'

Even though he was on the verge of death, Mok Gyeong-un didn't even groan and instead stared straight at the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox.

There was not a hint of fear in his eyes.

Seeing his appearance, the corners of the Golden Fur Nine-Tailed Fox's mouth twitched.

She had seen so many humans, but in the end, no one had overcome their fear in the face of death. This was the first time.

So, with the corners of her mouth raised, she said,

"I have seen countless humans over thousands of years, but you seem to be the first human who truly shows no fear in the face of death."

"..."

Mok Gyeong-un only glared at her without saying a word.

"Seeing such unwavering and upright eyes makes me curious."

"...About what?"

"I wonder if a human like you would also remain uncorrupted in the face of desire."

"Corrupted?"

As soon as those words ended, the splendid clothes that had been covering her body slid down.

Along with it, an extremely beautiful naked body was revealed.

Chapter 249 – Consort Ho (3)

[TL/N: There were mistranslations regarding the ranks for the Embroidered Uniform Guards in the previous chapter. Kindly refer to the Wiki for updated terms. Amendments will be made for earlier chapters]

“I wonder if someone like you can resist corruption in the face of desire.”

No sooner had she spoken than the golden Nine-Tailed Fox’s radiant red dress slid off her body.

With it, an exquisitely beautiful nude figure was revealed.

Her exposed body was so perfect it was hard to believe she wasn’t human.

With her full breasts, slender waist, and glossy white skin, she looked like a work of art.

Any man who saw this breathtaking figure would be lost in a mire of desire, unable to regain his senses.

-Flinch!

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox smiled seductively at Mok Gyeong-un.

“What do you think of me?”

She took pride in her beautiful body.

Among the numerous supernatural beings who had accumulated spiritual power and could transform into humans, few possessed a body as perfect as hers.

‘Hohohoho.’

No one could resist her body.

Even the tyrant King of Yin and the King of Zhou who overthrew her, as well as countless other kings, princes, warriors, and heroes who remained in history, succumbed to their desires.

It was beyond the capacity of males to resist.

Instinctively, males sought the best females.

‘Those who succumb to desire quickly fall into depravity.’

She had corrupted countless men who had fallen to her temptation.

The effects of their corruption were significant.

While it affected only their close family and friends if they were ordinary individuals, it could sway the fate of a nation if the fallen were burdened with heavy responsibilities.

This was the ultimate pleasure for the golden Nine-Tailed Fox.

A world filled with pandemonium and despair through the fall of one human.

She relished the process.

‘You will be no exception.’

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox reached out to Mok Gyeong-un, who was bound by her tail, and lifted his chin to make him look at her.

But,

‘!?’

One of her eyebrows shot up.

She was curious about how he would react to her naked body, but Mok Gyeong-un's eyes were utterly devoid of emotion.

He looked at her as if she were an ordinary object.

“You……”

Her eyes narrowed.

What was this guy?

Was he holding back?

Human males in their prime should be overflowing with sexual desire.

No matter the situation, it was normal to be overwhelmed with lust at the sight of her perfect body.

How could he look at her with such indifferent eyes?

She started to feel irritated.

‘Well done, mortal.’

Cheong-ryeong, who was watching, was inwardly pleased.

She had worried that Mok Gyeong-un might succumb to the temptation of the stunningly beautiful golden Nine-Tailed Fox, but his emotionless face made her feel unexpectedly good.

“Your patience is impressive.”

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox pouted her lips and then flicked her tongue, gently caressing Mok Gyeong-un’s cheek.

-Suuk!

“It seems you’re holding back, but let’s see how long that lasts.”

“.”

Her hand slowly moved toward Mok Gyeong-un’s tattered clothing, which had been shredded by her spiritual energy.

She grabbed his top and tore it off.

-Jiik!

Mok Gyeong-un’s top ripped away, revealing his bloodied but well-developed upper body.

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox licked her upper lip at the sight.

“For a young guy, you have quite a nice body.”

His face was quite handsome too—no, extremely handsome.

Among human males, faces like his were extremely rare, even over thousands of years.

‘Heh.’

There is a saying that adding gold dust to something already precious is a bonus.

It is better when the target is worth seducing and corrupting.

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox, having stripped Mok Gyeong-un of his top, now moved her hand toward his lower garment.

-Squeak!

Mok Gyeong-un tried to use his demonic energy to free himself from her tail.

But the spiritual power of the golden Nine-Tailed Fox, a being close to a divine beast, was as vast as the open sea and didn't budge.

As Mok Gyeong-un struggled, the golden Nine-Tailed Fox spoke to him in a scolding tone.

“Stay still. This older sister will take care of everything.”

With that, her hand reached Mok Gyeong-un's waistband.

Just as she was about to grab it, Cheong-ryeong shouted urgently.

-Stop it!

Cheong-ryeong raised thorns made of blood to protect Mok Gyeong-un and aimed them at the golden Nine-Tailed Fox's tail.

-Slash!

However, the blood thorns didn't harm the golden Nine-Tailed Fox's tail at all.

Instead, they melted away, scattering drops of blood.

“You're quite annoying. I'll kill you first.....”

-Swish!

At that moment, the golden Nine-Tailed Fox looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

Though his face was still emotionless, there was a faint sense of killing intent.

Though it was faint, she could sense it.

‘Look at this.’

When he showed intent to kill the ghost, he revealed faint emotions for the first time.

She found this intriguing.

She had thought he was almost emotionless, but he was reacting to a mere ghost.

What kind of relationship did these two have?

-Uuuung!

Lesser beings wouldn't see it, but the golden Nine-Tailed Fox could.

The string of fate connecting them.

It indicated they were bound by an ancient master-servant contract, the servant spirit.

But why did they seem to share a bond?

-Ssiiik!

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox's lips curled into a sly smile.

She had corrupted countless humans over thousands of years, knowing better than anyone how to exploit their emotional vulnerabilities.

So,

-Pat!

-Damn it!

With a wave of her hand, she created a barrier of spiritual energy, instantly trapping Cheong-ryeong inside.

Cheong-ryeong tried to break through with her spiritual power, but,

-Slash!

-Urgh!

The moment her spiritual energy touched the barrier, it repelled her.

The burning pain made her ghostly hands turn black as if they were being eroded by the spiritual energy.

It looked as though her hands were being corroded.

“Hey, spirit. If you don’t want to be extinguished, you’d better stay still. If you keep this up……”

-Eudeuk!

Before she could finish her warning, Cheong-ryeong, gritting her teeth, threw herself at the barrier once more.

She sharpened all her energy, turning herself into a sword to break the barrier.

-Thud! Slash!

Even in her ghostly form, she was a swordsman.

She had gained many insights alongside Mok Gyeong-un.

Her determination as a swordsman transcended even her spiritual power at that moment.

-Swish!

‘!?’

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox's eyebrow twitched.

Even a high-level spirit was causing cracks in the barrier she had created with her spiritual power.

This spirit..... Was she willing to sacrifice herself?

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox's lips twitched.

'I can't let that happen.'

If this ghost was extinguished, this interesting human's emotions would stagnate.

She couldn't let that happen.

-Slash!

-Aaaaaah!

Inside the barrier, it was like a thunderstorm, with blue lightning striking Cheong-ryeong.

The lightning inflicted severe pain on her ghostly form, making her scream in agony.

At that moment,

-Kwaaaak!

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox's tail tightened around Mok Gyeong-un.

Her eyes glimmered.

The fierce dark energy inside him had suddenly grown stronger.

She could be sure of it now.

‘…… He is not emotionless.’

He had emotions.

They just weren't easily displayed.

If he were truly emotionless, it would be different, but since he had emotions, even if deeply buried, the situation changed.

-Pak!

One of her tails slapped Mok Gyeong-un's cheek.

It seemed like a simple slap, but it carried tremendous spiritual energy, shaking his brain.

The dizziness made Mok Gyeong-un's head wobble.

-Lick!

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox licked his cheek and said,

“You'd better stay still. Otherwise, I'll really extinguish that spirit of yours.”

She gestured toward the barrier where Cheong-ryeong lay on the ground, her spiritual form severely damaged.

Her ghostly form was so transparent it was clear she was in a dire state.

She lay there, trying to maintain her spirit form.

“. Are you threatening me?”

“Think I’m joking? Try me.”

“Such threats don’t really.”

“What?”

Mok Gyeong-un momentarily closed his mouth at her words.

Normally, he would have told her to do as she pleased, indifferent to whether she extinguished the ghost or not.

But a strange feeling arose.

He didn’t want to see Cheong-ryeong extinguished.

‘. What is this?’

Had he any feelings left besides vengeance and malice?

No matter how much he thought about it, he couldn’t understand why he felt this way since he considered compassion and sympathy irrational.

But logically, why did he dislike the idea of Cheong-ryeong dying?

He couldn't understand.

At that moment,

“Since you seem to have grasped the situation, let's continue, shall we?”

-Chwak!

Before he could react, the golden Nine-Tailed Fox tore off Mok Gyeong-un's pants.

With his pants shredded, Mok Gyeong-un was now completely naked.

“Hohohoho.”

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox laughed heartily and slowly lowered her head, savoring the situation.

There was no place more honest than that part of a male's body.

Even in the face of death, it couldn't be controlled by reason, driven by the instinct to procreate.

Let's see how it reacts to such a perfect female body up close...

‘.....’

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox's expression suddenly turned cold.

She had expected at least some reaction, but her assumption was completely wrong.

As she stared intently at Mok Gyeong-un's unchanged state, for the first time in thousands of years, her pride was about to take a hit.

‘So that’s how it is?’

Fueled by stubbornness, the golden Nine-Tailed Fox slowly approached Mok Gyeong-un, aligning her body with his.

-Mungle!

Her full breasts pressed against his well-defined muscles.

-Pak!

Wrapping one slender leg around his waist, she leaned in close, her breath hot against his ear as she whispered seductively,

“Haa. I’ll turn you into a beast.”

Chapter 250 – Consort Ho (4)

“Haa. I’ll turn you into a beast.”

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox had long perfected a particular skill.

It was to worm her way into the weakened hearts of humans, tempting and corrupting them.

The male human body was remarkably honest to its instincts.

More than just seeing, direct physical contact, skin-to-skin, was where they became truly vulnerable.

-Suuk!

She pressed her body against Mok Gyeong-un, her full breasts soft and yielding as they touched him.

“Haa.”

With one leg wrapped around him, she blew hot breath into his ear.

Sound was another means of arousing a man.

Usually, by this point, most males would have been unable to control themselves and would have lunged at her.

Yet, Mok Gyeong-un remained unfazed.

‘You’re still holding out.’

He was at the age where his desires should be raging, but his patience was astonishing.

Usually, when a man’s desire began to surface, she would penetrate his mind, amplifying his deepest desires.

Once addicted to such desire, they would gradually fall into depravity.

‘Not reacting even to this……’

Her stubbornness only grew. Smiling slyly, she leaned in closer.

She had always used mental intrusion to show what she wanted, except for her first time corrupting a human long ago. Now she decided to change her approach.

-Lick!

She licked his neck with her tongue, her hand sliding downwards.

Her hand made contact with his manhood, stroking it gently to awaken his arousal.

-Fondle!

She knew exactly how to handle a male.

Caressing him with delicate hands, she tried to awaken the dormant desire within him.

But,

-Shlick!

‘. Is this guy impotent?’

She had never encountered someone so unresponsive.

He even looked at her with cold eyes as she carefully stimulated him.

It felt as if she were dealing with a stone.

Clearly, he had repressed emotions.

She hadn't expected him to hold out this long.

“Enough.”

Mok Gyeong-un spoke to her coldly.

Most women would have given up by now, feeling insulted by the lack of response.

But the golden Nine-Tailed Fox's determination only grew stronger.

The more one controlled their emotions and desires, the faster and deeper they would fall into corruption.

‘Let's see if you can withstand this.’

She smiled wickedly and brushed her palm over her face.

In that instant,

-Sruk!

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox's face transformed into someone else's.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes narrowed.

It was Cheong-ryeong.

‘!?’

Known for her shapeshifting abilities, the golden Nine-Tailed Fox had transformed into Cheong-ryeong, indistinguishably perfect.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes shifted.

Unlike Wi So-yeon, the third Mortal of the Heaven and Earth Society Leader, who looked almost like a twin of Cheong-ryeong, this transformation was flawless in appearance and aura.

“Mortal. Haa.”

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox, now in Cheong-ryeong's form, called him like she would.

Looking at him with slightly unfocused eyes, a stark contrast to her usual seductive gaze,

-Flinch!

This time, he showed a slight reaction.

‘Look at that.’

As expected, he was responding.

Although Cheong-ryeong was undeniably a peerless beauty, the golden Nine-Tailed Fox was even more perfect and beautiful. Yet, Mok Gyeong-un reacted to her.

Noticing this, she intensified her efforts to provoke him.

“Mortal……. Haa……I feel strange.”

Mok Gyeong-un exhaled deeply.

Being perceptive and different from others, he knew this was an illusion.

The real Cheong-ryeong was weakened, lying just over there.

But,

-Soft!

“Mortal…… Do something about me.”

Seeing her in Cheong-ryeong’s form, her chest pressed against him with a desperate expression, his body began to react.

‘This is a fake.’

Mok Gyeong-un tried to maintain his rationality.

But once his body started reacting, it was hard to control.

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox’s eyes gleamed.

‘Ha?’

He was far more endowed than she expected.

She had seen countless males over the years.

She could tell for sure,

He was exceptional.

‘Ahh.’

This changes things. A sly excitement filled her eyes.

She had planned to penetrate his mind the moment he showed desire, but now she felt an excitement she hadn't in a long time.

Seeing him struggle within her embrace made her want to indulge him even more.

Transformed into Cheong-ryeong, she pressed against him, feigning helplessness.

“Mortal. Haa……Mortal…….”

As she caressed his cheek with one hand, a strange fragrance and spiritual energy seeped from her hand into his nose.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes grew hazy.

She whispered into his ear.

“Haa……Ravage me like a beast.”

No sooner had she spoken,

-Grab

Mok Gyeong-un roughly grasped her lush hips, pressing his body against hers.

-Kung!

Like a wild animal, his force made the golden Nine-Tailed Fox, in Cheong-ryeong's form, moan.

“Hah.”

Hearing her moan in Cheong-ryeong's voice aroused him further.

Feeling him become one with her, the golden Nine-Tailed Fox's face flushed.

‘Good.’

What female wouldn't enjoy this?

“Hurry……hurry……”

She urged him, her voice low and demanding.

Despite his wild push, he met her gaze and began moving slowly.

Their faces were so close their noses almost touched, creating a charged atmosphere.

‘Haa. What is this guy?’

She expected him to act purely on instinct under her influence, but he moved deliberately, gazing into her eyes with a dazed look.

Oddly, it made her more excited.

‘Different.’

Despite being enthralled, he was different from other males.

Her breathing grew heavy, turning into sensual moans.

“Haaung.”

What began as a means of seduction had now become genuine excitement for her.

Corrupting him could wait.

But then, an unexpected interruption occurred.

-Mortal!!!!!

‘!?’

The real Cheong-ryeong, who had been nearly unconscious, started to recover some energy and witnessed the scene.

-!!!!!!!

Seeing this, she couldn’t bear it even in her spirit form.

She would have felt discomfort if the golden Nine-Tailed Fox had seduced Mok Gyeong-un with her real form, but seeing herself in the act infuriated and confused her.

‘Mortal……. You…….’

Mok Gyeong-un, with eyes clouded by lust, was gazing at the golden Nine-Tailed Fox who looked exactly like her.

It felt like she was the one engaged with him.

Cheong-ryeong snapped out of her daze, feeling a peculiar mix of emotions.

‘No.’

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox was a monster who had seduced and corrupted countless men for thousands of years.

If left unchecked, Mok Gyeong-un would fall too.

She gathered all her remaining strength and cried out.

-Mortal!!

Her cry resonated like a wave.

If he were under the golden Nine-Tailed Fox’s spell, it might break him free.

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox sneered at this.

‘Do you think he can wake up from my spell?’

Entranced by desire and instinct, there was no way he could break free.....

At that moment, she noticed something.

Mok Gyeong-un had paused momentarily in response to the cry.

‘This guy?’

Had he heard that in his current state?

Cheong-ryeong shouted again.

-Mortal! Snap out of it!

-Paarr!

At her continued cry, Mok Gyeong-un’s hazy eyes wavered.

Seeing this subtle change, the golden Nine-Tailed Fox clicked her tongue inwardly.

She had infiltrated his heart by transforming into Cheong-ryeong, but the real one being so close seemed to affect him quickly.

The golden Nine-Tailed Fox sighed inwardly.

‘What a pity.’

She gave up on enjoying herself further.

His mental strength was far stronger than that of ordinary humans, making it difficult to enchant him consecutively.

-Pak!

She grabbed his head with both hands.

Staring into his eyes,

‘I’ll completely enthrall you and make you mine.’

Suddenly, darkness enveloped Mok Gyeong-un’s vision, plunging everything into blackness.

“Human. Shall we take a look at where your fundamental desires stem from?”

The Nine-Tailed Fox delved into Mok Gyeong-un’s mind, sifting through his memories. To corrupt him and make him completely hers, she needed to read the memories that held the root of his desires or potential weaknesses. Relatively recent memories appeared faintly like fragments, but this man, more so than she initially thought...

“I like it.”

She had assumed this man was different from other humans. But his actions and thought processes seemed utterly detached from humanity. This was the first time she encountered a being who wasn’t so much corrupted as innately close to evil and demonic energy.

“How have I not discovered such a man until now?”

She had long searched for an extraordinary being. It was because of a prophecy she heard during an amusement.

[Daji-yeo. No, Nine-Tailed Fox. Someday, you will meet a human who is the embodiment of demonic energy itself.]

[Human? How can a human be demonic energy itself? Didn't you say humans are incomplete beings, neither good nor evil?]

[That's right. However even this old man cannot fully comprehend all the secrets of Heaven.]

[Damn you. What's the point of telling me something you don't even understand well yourself?]

[Find him. He will bring you what you have yearned for the most.]

[...What I desire, he will bring to me? Is that true?]

[It is.]

[Then how can I meet him? With your vaunted ability to read the secrets of Heaven, you should be able to know, right?]

[I do not know.]

[Then there's no other way. We have no choice but to keep fighting.]

[...Will things really turn out this way?]

[You're the one who proposed this deal, claiming you'd reveal what I've desired. But do you think you can end this fight with such a vague story?]

[.....]

After contemplating, he finally spoke.

[All this old man can see about that man is a throne stained with blood.]