

Mayhem 251

Chapter 251 – Demon (1)

[All this old man can see from that person is a blood-stained throne.]

[A blood-stained throne?]

A throne is a symbolic seat for monarchs like kings, emperors, or feudal lords, is it not?

What does it mean for a human who embodies the very essence of a demon to be connected to a throne?

No, to be exact, it was called a blood-stained throne.

“Blood-stained...”

The throne symbolizing the pinnacle stained with blood held great significance.

After all, countless bloody struggles would have taken place to claim that seat.

Though the time period remained vague, these words definitely narrowed down the scope.

‘It’s not that old man, Zhou.’

Although he completely degenerated, indulging in wine and women, how could that dying old man possibly fulfill her wish?

In the first place, how could a mere human grant her desire?

It was a mystery, but this man was practically a sage.

He wouldn't speak nonsense.

[Kang Sang[1]. Let's hope your words prove true.]

With those words, the nine-tailed golden fox concealed herself through death and left the kingdom, as a long time passed.

At first, she simply observed to find the human from the prophecy.

However, such a person did not appear.

Suspecting that he might have deceived her, she took out her anger on all sorts of Taoist priests.

Then, she changed her mind.

If she couldn't find him, she would create him herself.

Thus, the nine-tailed golden fox altered her approach and playfully corrupted the beings called monarchs, one by one.

This applied not only to the feudal lords of the Central Plains but also to all the nearby countries like Dongyi, Dongying, and Xizhang.

Nevertheless, none of them brought her what she desired.

They merely degenerated and led their nations to ruin.

'A human who is the embodiment of a demon.'

Judging solely by this fellow's memories, he certainly comes close to evil or demonic.

However, this guy had little to do with a throne.

Then, is he simply an inherently wicked human?

If she delved to the end of his memories, she might uncover the origins of his evil nature.

The nine-tailed golden fox dove into the depths of Mok Gyeong-un's mind.

-Swish!

Quite an intriguing fragment flowed in among the incoming pieces.

'Oh-ho. Look at this.'

Was that raccoon bastard here?

That unworthy brat who pompously called himself the King Slayer or whatnot was causing a ruckus, but to think he was trapped here.

But did this guy absorb the raccoon's demonic energy?

Memory fragments are literally like shards.

They appear disjointed, but it seems the raccoon had part of his demonic energy absorbed by this fellow.

‘What’s this?’

How did a human absorb the energy of a demon beast, no, an Imae Mangnyang?

Come to think of it, as she delved deeper into his memories, this guy was even absorbing the energy of the dead.

How is this possible?

In the first place, a living being cannot coexist with the energy of the deceased.

The more she explored his memories, the more astonishing things appeared one by one.

‘Is this really a human?’

While puzzled, she went back a long way and saw Mok Gyeong-un’s deceased grandfather.

For the first time, she felt intense anger.

This seemed to be the point where his suppressed evil erupted.

However, since it was still repressed, she would need to examine earlier memory fragments to find the more fundamental part.

‘Show me. Your origin....’

The nine-tailed golden fox delved into Mok Gyeong-un’s memories.

But while digging deeper, she encountered a colossal wall spanning the entire space within the darkness.

‘Huh?’

The existence of such a wall within one’s mind and memories signified that something was artificially blocking it.

The nine-tailed golden fox grew intrigued upon seeing this.

What could be the reason for sealing off his earlier memories?

Whether he did it himself or it was a taboo imposed by someone else, she didn’t know, but...

‘Reveal yourself.’

The nine-tailed golden fox attempted to forcibly pierce through the wall of memories.

For her, who had lived thousands of years, this was not a difficult task.

Just as she was tearing down the wall of memories, at that moment...

-Rooaaar!

Right then, from within the cracking and crumbling wall of memories, an atrocious and utterly evil energy began to surge out.

‘What’s this?’

As she tried to breach the sealed memories, why was such a wicked energy gushing forth?

Is this fellow truly human?

This ferocious energy was attempting to block her from infiltrating his mind.

It felt as if this existence was alive within him.

‘All right. Let’s see who prevails.’

The nine-tailed golden fox drew upon more of her demonic energy.

If it could block her to this extent, there must be something it didn’t want to be seen. Did it think it could stop her like this?

-Swoosh!

Although it was within his mind, the nine-tailed golden fox manifested in her original form.

Her appearance as a nine-tailed golden fox reaching seven zhang (丈) in size was majestic, befitting a great Spiritual Beast bearing the titles of Demon[2] and King[3].

As she opened her mouth in her true form, vast demonic energy gathered, forming an enormous sphere.

-Whoosh!

It was dazzling enough to illuminate the darkness.

-Try to stop this.

-Boom! Kaboom!

The sphere of demonic energy instantly collided with the wall of memories.

Intense explosions erupted in succession as the wall, struck by the energy sphere, collapsed, creating a massive hole.

Not missing this chance, the nine-tailed golden fox entered through the hole.

A breach had been made in the blocked memories.

Now she could see what memory fragments would be revealed.

At that moment, a bizarre scene began to unfold within the incoming fragments.

It was...

-Crack!

The sight of an intact sky distorting.

Through the crevices of the distorting fissures, a mass of black flames surged upward like erupting volcanic lava and plummeted to the ground.

‘!!!!’

What the hell is this?

Why does such a scene exist within a mere human's memories?

Right then, another fragment flowed in.

-Swish!

Within a vast pit, black flames were blazing fiercely, and someone was gazing at them with a face filled with awe, then promptly prostrated.

That someone was none other than this fellow's murdered grandfather.

Why was that old man showing such a reaction towards the black flames?

As she wondered...

‘What?’

The nine-tailed golden fox's golden pupils trembled violently.

Within those black flames, a gaze was felt.

It wasn't just flames?

No, in the first place, the ominous and pure energy emanating from those black flames did not exist in the human world.

No words like ferocious, vicious, or evil could define it.

It was as if the very existence itself was.....

-Flinch!

Right at that moment.

The gaze felt from the black flames directly met the nine-tailed golden fox's eyes.

'Huh?'

This was a memory.

Yet, how could it be staring at her?

She could be considered a third-party spirit merely observing the memories.

As she found the situation incomprehensible and bizarre...

[Get out.]

A voice resounded within the nine-tailed golden fox.

Simultaneously, the black flames suddenly spread in all directions, instantly engulfing the space filled with memory fragments within the darkness.

-Fwoosh!

At that instant, the nine-tailed golden fox couldn't hide her bewilderment.

This heat should have been a memory fragment, but its intensity felt as if it had materialized.

And the black flames were gradually encircling her.

The nine-tailed golden fox spoke while gazing at them.

-Just what are you? How can an existence as foreign as you reside within a mere human?

She believed this existence was not merely latent within his memories but actually alive within him.

Otherwise, it couldn't have such an impact even on the spiritual realm.

Her words were met with no response.

-Fwoosh!

The black flames simply kept devouring the space itself, as if trying to engulf even her.

The nine-tailed golden fox then roared and unleashed her demonic energy.

-You think you can do anything to me?

A dazzling golden demonic energy gushed out from her, who had transformed into her true form.

That golden demonic energy collided with the black flames, clashing.

-Swoosh!

Her golden demonic energy, which had reached its peak, forcefully pushed back the black flames that tried to devour her, exuding the majesty of a great spiritual beast known as one of the Six Demons.

Although weakened by the seal, even the Assassin King of the Sea, the Restraining Badger Celestial-Dog couldn't withstand her.

Instead, she pushed back the black flames and tried to glimpse more of the memory fragments.

-You're just trapped within a human, yet you think you can challenge me!

As the nine-tailed golden fox further intensified her demonic energy, the black flames fluctuated.

The corners of her mouth in her true form curled up.

Whatever was inside this bastard, did it think it could match her, who had accumulated demonic energy for thousands of years since ancient times?

Reveal your identity right now...

-Thud!

At that very moment, the nine-tailed golden fox's golden pupils trembled.

This wasn't due to the battle unfolding within his mind.

At some point, her consciousness had split in two, allowing her to simultaneously view the memories and reality.

In reality, the nine-tailed golden fox had her hand placed on Mok Gyeong-un's head, maintaining the state of entering his mind.

However...

“You.....”

Mok Gyeong-un, who should have been unable to move with his mind suppressed, moved.

He only moved once, but the stimulation there was so intense that her focus couldn't help but be divided.

The nine-tailed golden fox looked at Mok Gyeong-un's face.

‘This is.....’

Mok Gyeong-un's dilated, hazy eyes had regained vitality.

But along with that vitality, something had changed.

His pupils had turned entirely black, resembling lustrous obsidian, and those eyes held a viciousness akin to the black flames.

‘Is it you who were trapped within the wall of memories that have taken over that body?’

So, by stimulating the physical body in reality, you intend to drive me out.

As if I would be so easily...

-Thud!

“Haak!”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un's lower body moved roughly.

Simultaneously, the nine-tailed golden fox unknowingly let out a moan.

The nine-tailed golden fox glared at Mok Gyeong-un with trembling breaths.

“Haa... haa... you...”

-Thud!

“Heuk.”

With a single movement of Mok Gyeong-un’s waist, her mind seemed to scatter from the excitement.

Perhaps because of that, the force of the black flames, which had been pushed back by the golden demonic energy within his mind, suddenly intensified.

The nine-tailed golden fox’s golden pupils trembled.

Her transformation technique had already been undone, reverting her to her original appearance, yet he was making such rough movements against her, indicating that it wasn’t his original self.

It was the ferocious and vicious self within those black flames.

-Thud!

She tried to push Mok Gyeong-un’s body away.

Simply touching or doing something like that was one thing, but if he stimulated her so roughly, her mind would scatter in the power struggle with the black flames...

-Thud!

“Ack!”

At that instant, the nine-tailed golden fox's slender back arched like a bow.

Her head tilted back, and her breathing grew ragged.

‘What is this?’

-Sizzle!

Amidst the power struggle within his mind and the exciting stimulation, she had failed to notice that her demonic energy was being absorbed by Mok Gyeong-un's hand grasping her chest.

Simultaneously, the black flames within his mind not only regained momentum but also expanded, pushing back the golden demonic energy.

‘…… This is disadvantageous.’

With him pressuring her from three directions—mind, stimulation, and absorption—it would become difficult for her to confront him, no matter how powerful she was.

The speed at which her demonic energy was being absorbed was also accelerating.

In the end, she judged that it was impossible to immediately see his fundamental memories.

Thus...

-Swish!

She withdrew the spiritual body that had assimilated into him.

Then, she grabbed Mok Gyeong-un's cheeks and pulled him in for a kiss.

Their tongues softly intertwined and tangled as her demonic energy flowed through Mok Gyeong-un's mouth, spreading to his head and entire body.

With that...

-Sizzle.

Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, which had turned black like obsidian, returned to normal.

'!?'

Mok Gyeong-un, who had regained his senses, furrowed his brows.

After all, he had become one with the nine-tailed golden fox.

He didn't expect to be kissing her as well.

-Thud!

Mok Gyeong-un forcibly separated from her.

She licked her lips as if savoring them, then grinned and spoke.

"Have you regained your senses, dear?"

“Dear?”

“We’re already so passionately entangled, so it’s okay to call you that, right? Or should I call you something else?”

-Grip!

Ignoring her words, Mok Gyeong-un tried to detach his body from hers.

However, he couldn’t do so because she was embracing him with her legs.

He tried to draw upon his demonic energy, but she clung even tighter to him and whispered meaningfully into his ear.

“I thought about calling you ‘Jeong’, but that doesn’t suit you either.”

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes sharpened.

Regardless, she hugged Mok Gyeong-un tightly and spoke.

“I’m not sure about the throne, but you might be the very human embodiment of a demon that I’ve been searching for. Ah! Yes. The title that truly suits you is none other than ‘Demon’.”

Chapter 252 – Demon (2)

“I’m not sure about the throne, but you might be the very human embodiment of a demon that I’ve been searching for. Ah! Yes. The title that truly suits you is none other than ‘Demon’.”

Demon.

Mok Gyeong-un couldn't make sense of the nine-tailed golden fox's words.

His focus was solely on the fact that she knew his real name, Jeong.

‘What did she do?’

Even if his mind had been hazy, the chances of him uttering it himself were low.

But if she mentioned Jeong, then...

‘Did she... see my memories?’

There was no other explanation.

Meanwhile, the nine-tailed golden fox caressed Mok Gyeong-un's cheek and spoke.

“How is it? The title ‘Demon’ sounds good, right? Just calling you ‘Demon’ is a bit dull, so should I add something like a surname in front of it? Falling from the sky...”

Before she could finish her sentence, Mok Gyeong-un cut her off and asked.

“Did you look into my memories?”

“Oh my. You’re quick-witted. Well, not all of them, but I’d say a part of them?”

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes turned cold.

He felt displeasure at the fact that she had pried into his memories, regardless of anything else.

And judging by the current situation, she had forcibly engaged in relations with him.

Or rather, they were still in the midst of it?

-Squeeze!

The nine-tailed golden fox wrapped her legs tighter around him and spoke with a flushed face.

“Haa. Hey. Since we’ve already started, shouldn’t we finish it?”

“.....”

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

At this rate, he would be dragged along by this fox demon’s intentions, no matter what.

Then, whether it turned out good or bad, he had to do something.

Thus, Mok Gyeong-un tried to gather all the remaining demonic energy within his body to somehow resist...

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes flickered with surprise.

‘My demonic energy has recovered. No, it has increased.’

The demonic energy within his body had nearly doubled compared to its original amount.

It was a phenomenon he couldn't comprehend at all.

His injuries were quite severe, and he had even lost consciousness, so why had his demonic energy increased to this extent?

But that wasn't the end of it.

Moreover, a vast amount of demonic energy had been absorbed into his body.

It was incomparably greater than what he had absorbed from the monstrous raccoon, the King Slayer (弑海王), and the purity of the demonic energy was exceptionally high.

‘…… It's difficult to assimilate.’

The demonic energy was so immense that even if he tried to assimilate it, there would be excess remaining.

Instead, continuously keeping it within his body might even become poisonous.

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

In that case, there was a way to utilize this pure and vast demonic energy.

Mok Gyeong-un then closed his eyes.

At that moment, the nine-tailed golden fox spoke in a seductive and alluring voice.

“What? You don't like this form? Or do you want me to take on that vengeful spirit's appearance like before?”

-Swish!

As soon as those words ended, the nine-tailed golden fox swept her face with her hand and used her transformation technique.

In an instant, her face changed to resemble Cheong-ryeong's.

“Mortal.”

Even her voice became identical.

The nine-tailed golden fox, transformed into Cheong-ryeong, swayed her hips and whispered into Mok Gyeong-un's ear.

“Haa. Mortal, open your eyes...!?”

-Flinch!

At that moment, the nine-tailed golden fox's eyes turned sharp as she looked at Mok Gyeong-un's right hand.

-Crackle! Crunch!

With Mok Gyeong-un's right hand as the center, his entire arm bulged with vast demonic energy, and his blood vessels protruded before turning pitch-black.

Seeing this scene, the nine-tailed golden fox inwardly felt it was absurd.

‘This demonic energy....’

It was her own demonic energy.

Although it had been absorbed by him, demonic energy was essentially like a deadly poison to humans, so she thought it would be difficult for him to immediately assimilate and use it.

But he was using this demonic energy without assimilating it?

‘Is this guy for real?’

He didn’t seem human.

Apart from the existence trapped within his mind, this body was definitely human.

But she didn’t expect something like this to be possible.

The nine-tailed golden fox’s gaze then shifted to Mok Gyeong-un’s neck.

If she moved her tails and twisted his neck right away, she could dispose of him before he could even unleash the demonic energy.

However, if this fellow was truly the human embodiment of a demon that Kang Sang had prophesied about, killing him would be no different from losing him before he could accomplish anything.

“Tsk.”

In the end, the nine-tailed golden fox released her legs that were wrapped around him and used her tail to grab Mok Gyeong-un, throwing him towards the floor.

-Crash!

Mok Gyeong-un's body pierced through the floor and sank deep into it.

“Sigh.”

With the amount of demonic energy he had gathered now, he could inflict damage on her as well, so the only answer was to make him lose consciousness.

The nine-tailed golden fox clicked her tongue as if she was disappointed.

She thought she could finally satisfy her desires after a long time, but it seemed unlikely at the moment.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter.’

She could just keep him with her and entice him.

If he was already wicked, there was no need to corrupt him further. Wouldn’t it be perfect if she just made him hers?

Just as she was thinking that...

-Papapapapak!

The nine-tailed golden fox hurriedly crossed four of her tails like a shield to block the front.

At the same time, a black line brushed past, and then...

-Kaboom!

‘Ugh.’

The nine-tailed golden fox’s body pierced through the ceiling of Prince Gyeongjin’s residence and soared upwards.

Through the hole that was made, someone fell and landed on the floor of the residence.

-Tap!

The one who landed was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

-Drip! Drip!

Blood was flowing from his black and grotesquely transformed right arm.

Mok Gyeong-un looked at his right arm and exhaled roughly.

“Huu..... huu.....”

As a side effect of amplifying the demonic energy absorbed from the nine-tailed golden fox using the Reversing Blood Technique, the blood vessels in his right arm had ruptured.

It had definitely exceeded the level he could handle without assimilation.

However, although it was only for a single strike, he had used the nine-tailed golden fox’s demonic energy itself to unify his sword energy, so its power was immeasurable.

-Mortal!

At that moment, the translucent form of Cheong-ryeong approached Mok Gyeong-un.

Looking at his right arm, which was a bloody mess, she asked with concern.

-Are you all right?

“Well. I think I’ll be fine, won’t I?”

-..... Where do you get such words from? Your hand and arm.....

Cheong-ryeong clicked her tongue as she looked at it.

The tremendous demonic energy contained in Mok Gyeong-un’s previous strike was enough to astonish even her.

It was probably the energy he had absorbed from the nine-tailed golden fox.

Since he tried to handle such immense energy, even if only temporarily, it was only natural for his hand and arm to end up in this state.

Mok Gyeong-un approached Cheong-ryeong, disregarding his limp right arm.

Then...

-Swish!

Cheong-ryeong turned her head with a perplexed expression.

After all, Mok Gyeong-un was currently naked.

Moreover, his masculinity was still quite prominent, making it difficult for her to look at him directly.

“Why are you acting like this?”

-You..... right now..... your state.....

Seeing Cheong-ryeong unable to form proper sentences, Mok Gyeong-un finally recognized his own state.

“Ah.”

With that, Mok Gyeong-un extended his left hand towards the left side of the residence.

Several of Prince Gyeongjin's outer garments were hanging there.

There were no pants in sight, but he used the sleeves as a belt to cover his lower body.

After confirming this with a glance, Cheong-ryeong turned her head halfway and spoke in a blunt tone.

-You're like a beast in heat.

“.....”

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un closed his mouth.

Normally, he would have answered without much thought, but the memory of engaging in relations with the nine-tailed golden fox, who had transformed into Cheong-ryeong, right in front of the real Cheong-ryeong, faintly resurfaced.

Even though he had fallen victim to the nine-tailed golden fox's technique, thinking that he had done such a thing in front of the person involved made him feel strange.

Could it be that Cheong-ryeong was also acting this way because of that?

After remaining silent for a moment, Mok Gyeong-un asked her.

“Are you displeased?”

-Displeased?

“Yes.”

-Wh-what would I be displeased about? I'm a dead spirit anyway. What concern is it of mine if you engage in relations or make a mess with any wench?

Despite claiming to be unaffected, her voice had risen quite a bit.

She even showed signs of stammering.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un bluntly said.

“Even so, that fox demon transformed into your appearance, making it seem like I did it with you. So I thought maybe.....”

-Enough! Enough! Enough!

“.....”

Cheong-ryeong urged Mok Gyeong-un to stop speaking.

She was already on the verge of going crazy with that scene constantly swirling in her mind.

As she had just said, she kept reminding herself that she was already dead and that her only purpose remaining in this world was to resolve her lingering resentment.

But her heart didn't quite agree with that.

‘Damn it!’

Every time that scene came to mind, she couldn't help but be conscious of Mok Gyeong-un.

Her reason understood that the nine-tailed golden fox had done it to disrupt Mok Gyeong-un's mind, but looking at it the other way around, it was like that.

She had been watching him continuously, but he didn't treat women as women.

So when he was said to have engaged with that third Mortal of the Heaven and Earth Society's leader, Yu So-yeon, who resembled her, she had only considered it as him using her.

‘…… What the hell is this?’

But this time, the situation was a bit different.

Why did he react only when she transformed into her appearance after enduring so well?

Thinking about this, she couldn't help but be concerned, even while claiming to be a vengeful spirit.

It was as if this Mortal fellow...

‘…… Could it be that he sees me as a woman?’

Cheong-ryeong, who had been clutching her head, glanced at Mok Gyeong-un.

Even after what had just happened, this guy was looking at her with the same eyes as usual.

Seeing this, she started to feel angry.

Wasn’t she making a fuss and being self-conscious all by herself?

Her mood was becoming unstable and uncontrollable.

Just then...

-Swish!

At that moment, she felt a touch on her head.

The only one who could directly make a spirit body feel a sensation was Mok Gyeong-un.

The moment she felt Mok Gyeong-un’s gentle touch, Cheong-ryeong’s cheeks turned bright red despite being a spirit body, and she shouted in a flustered manner while covering her body.

-D-don’t touch me!

“What am I supposed to do if I don’t touch you?”

-What?

At those words, Cheong-ryeong's eyes widened.

What the hell was this guy saying now?

Truly bewildered, Cheong-ryeong covered herself even more and backed away, saying.

-..... Are you really a beast? Like a fox, no, a raccoon. Anyway, now that you've done it with that wicked beast, do you want to do it with a vengeful spirit too, regardless of whether they're dead or alive?

“.....”

-You're so desperate to satisfy your desires.....

“What are you talking about?”

-What do you mean, what am I talking about? You, to me.....

“If you stay in that state, your spirit body will scatter and disappear, won't it?”

-Huh?

“I'm trying to share the demonic energy I've absorbed with you, but it seems like you've misunderstood something.”

-.....

At that moment, she couldn't hide her embarrassment.

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders at her and approached her, extending his hand and asking.

“I should have asked beforehand. Is it okay if I transfer the demonic energy to you?”

-.....

In response to Mok Gyeong-un’s question, Cheong-ryeong quietly nodded her head without being able to meet his eyes.

If her spirit body hadn’t been weakened, she would have wanted to find a mouse hole and crawl into it right away.

The corners of Mok Gyeong-un’s mouth twitched as he watched her.

Then, he placed his hand on her spirit body and tried to infuse the absorbed demonic energy.

But at that very moment...

-Tap!

Someone gently descended through the ceiling.

It was none other than the nine-tailed golden fox.

‘Oh no!’

Mok Gyeong-un pushed Cheong-ryeong’s spirit body behind him and drew upon his demonic energy.

He had gathered that immense demonic energy into a single point and imbued it into his sword energy to launch an attack, but he didn’t expect her to withstand it.

She was almost unscathed.

The only difference was that a part of one of her tails had been cut off.

Even then, it was only the tip of her tail that had been sliced off.

‘…… Just a part of her tail, huh.’

She was truly a being of a different caliber, befitting the title of one of the Six Demons and a great spiritual beast close to a divine beast.

He wasn't a match for her from the beginning.

As the atmosphere grew heavy and the tension reached its peak...

-Smack!

The nine-tailed golden fox, who had a murderous expression on her face, casually tossed the severed part of her tail and opened her mouth.

“For a moment, I thought about just killing you, but let's stop here.”

‘!?’

Chapter 253 – Demon (3)

Just a moment ago...

-Swoosh!

A sharp sword strike that unified demonic energy and swordsmanship.

The nine-tailed golden fox, pushed back by it, was forced up to a height of nearly a hundred jang.

The sword energy itself was much sharper than before, but with her own demonic energy directly added to it, its power was so strong that she had to use four tails simultaneously to counter it.

-Swish!

Pushed back into the air like that, she stopped midway.

As if she had wings, she floated and clicked her tongue in disbelief.

‘Using my demonic energy to target me?’

This brat is truly troublesome.

In her thousands of years of life, it wasn’t as if there had never been those who threatened her.

But almost all of them were beings called sages or wicked beasts close to divine beasts like herself.

The nine-tailed golden fox’s eyes narrowed.

‘Is it the influence of that being trapped within his mind?’

It didn’t matter what it was.

This brat was close to being a human who embodied the very essence of a demon, which she had been searching for all this time.

-Sting!

At that moment, the nine-tailed golden fox frowned.

After all, even though she thought she had blocked it properly, the tip of her tail had been nearly severed and was dangling loosely.

“Ha!”

In an instant, her eyes turned murderous.

Not anywhere else, but he had sliced off a part, albeit a small one, of her tail, which was a concentration of her demonic energy?

Her tail was a body part that angered her even if it was just scratched, but now that it had been cut, the nine-tailed golden fox's rage surged.

‘Should I kill him?’

For a moment, even murderous intent arose within her.

However, she quickly suppressed it.

‘Endure it. If I kill him here, I won’t know if he will become the existence that Kang Sang spoke of.’

She licked the dangling, severed part of her tail with her tongue.

The blood from the wound quickly stopped.

The nine-tailed golden fox completely tore off the severed portion of her tail.

Then, her lips twitched.

‘Come to think of it, for a young human who hasn’t even lived for twenty years to already possess this much power, the possibility is indeed the highest.’

This fellow would grow stronger at a rapid pace.

Then, her desire might be fulfilled before long.

‘Keeping him by my side and continuously watching over.....’

As she was thinking that, something flashed through her mind.

It was because of something she had seen in Mok Gyeong-un’s memories.

Moreover, upon further thought, this fellow not only had exceptional innate talent but was also rapidly growing stronger due to his thirst for revenge.

That meant there was a chance he might not become the form she desired even if she kept him by her side.

Besides, he was already immensely evil from the beginning, even without being corrupted.

Finally reaching a conclusion, the nine-tailed golden fox licked her lips.

“Aah. What a pity.”

She wanted to keep him by her side and enjoy him, but it seemed she would have to put that on hold.

“For a moment, I thought about just killing you, but let’s stop here.”

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un, who had raised his guard to the extreme, looked at the nine-tailed golden fox with incomprehensible eyes.

Cheong-ryeong was the same.

The nine-tailed golden fox, the Hundred Face King, was a great spiritual beast close to a divine beast.

If she desired, it was not only possible for her, who was called a moving calamity, to kill them but also turn this entire imperial capital into a sea of blood.

To her, all of this was merely a form of amusement.

That’s how absolute the nine-tailed golden fox’s power was, so when she suddenly suggested stopping as if on a whim, they couldn’t help but feel puzzled.

At that moment, the nine-tailed golden fox shrugged her shoulders and spoke.

“I was thinking of making you my plaything right away, but it seems unwise to pluck an unripe fruit.”

“…… What do you mean?”

“It’s exactly as I said. I’m saying I’ll leave you alone for the time being.”

“Leave me alone?”

“Yes.”

The nine-tailed golden fox glanced at the severed part of her tail and said.

“You’re quite sharp to be able to cut my tail, but that’s still far from enough.”

“……. You mean to kill you?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the nine-tailed golden fox burst into laughter, holding her stomach.

“Hahahahaha. Kill me? Even using my demonic energy, you barely managed to slice off the tip of my tail, so isn’t that too greedy of you?”

“…….”

Mok Gyeong-un remained silent at her words.

There was indeed a huge gap between the nine-tailed golden fox’s power and his own.

To her, he was probably nothing more than an insect at best.

Since he was no match for her anyway, if she showed mercy, even if it was on a whim, he should gratefully accept it.

However, the words the nine-tailed golden fox had said lingered in his mind.

‘I’ll leave you alone for the time being.....’

It sounded like she would let him go for now but would continue to target him.

No, somehow, it seemed like she would.

‘Why?’

He couldn’t understand why she was coveting him.

[You might be the very human embodiment of a demon that I’ve been searching for.]

Although she had said those words, he couldn’t fully comprehend their meaning either.

Meanwhile, the nine-tailed golden fox lightly gestured, and the clothing that had been pushed into the corner of Prince Gyeongjin’s residence flew over and put itself on her.

-Swish!

With just a single gesture, her hair and pupils turned black again.

With this, she had once again become Consort Ho, who boasted a radiant beauty.

Mok Gyeong-un picked up the severed part of her tail that had fallen to the floor and held it out to her.

“Take it with you.”

At those words, Consort Ho smiled and said.

“I’m giving that to you.”

“Giving it to me?”

“Yes. Keep that well.”

“……. I don’t have a preference for carrying around such things.”

“It would be good to carry it around. It will serve as proof that I’ve taken a liking to you. Ah. Is it because it’s bothersome to carry it like that? Then...”

-Swish!

Consort Ho lightly waved her hand.

The severed part of her tail transformed into a round medallion with golden fur attached to it.

“Isn’t it convenient to carry it like this?”

“If it’s proof that you’ve taken a liking to me, it’s even more uncomfortable to carry around.”

“You’re quite honest. But there’s no harm in carrying that around. From what I’ve seen, you seem to get entangled with quite a few wicked beasts.”

“…….”

It was difficult to deny those words.

At some point, vengeful spirits and wicked beasts had started to get involved with him frequently.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say it had been since his eyes had opened.

“So keep it with you. Even if it's just a part of my tail, carrying it will prevent you from getting entangled with bothersome things.”

Even if it was a severed part of her body, traces and remnants of her demonic energy remained.

If he possessed a part of her, known as the Hundred-Faced King, ordinary wicked beasts wouldn't be able to approach him, and even those with a certain level of power would naturally stay away from him.

‘And if you have that, I can find you wherever you go.’

The nine-tailed golden fox inwardly smirked.

Even if she didn't keep him by her side, with this method, she could meet him whenever she wanted.

No matter how high-ranking a great spiritual beast was, if they deliberately hid in this vast Central Plains continent, it would be difficult to find them.

“.....”

Silently holding the medallion made from her tail, Mok Gyeong-un eventually put it inside his clothes.

It wasn't because he accepted it out of genuine gratitude, but also because there was no benefit in provoking the nine-tailed golden fox at the moment.

And if worse came to worst, he could just leave the imperial palace later.

As if reading Mok Gyeong-un's true intentions, the nine-tailed golden fox smiled and said.

"If you get caught trying to discard it, be prepared to face the consequences. Understood?"

At her words, Mok Gyeong-un showed an annoyed expression.

Regardless, the nine-tailed golden fox turned around without any lingering attachment, as if her business was done, and tried to leave Prince Gyeongjin's residence.

'Is she really just leaving?'

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong inwardly tried to feel relieved.

But then, the nine-tailed golden fox stopped for a moment and spoke as if she had forgotten something.

"Ah, right. I put the Embroidered Uniform Guards and the capital's guards outside to sleep. But can you handle the matters inside here on your own?"

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un glanced at the unconscious Prince Gyeongjin and the beheaded corpse of the Western Depot's Chief Eunuch, Eunuch Ho.

If Eunuch Ho had escalated the situation, it would have been different, but now that he was dead, they could handle it according to the original plan.

However, just in case, he asked.

"If I say I can't handle it, will you help?"

"No."

“Then why did you ask?”

“Just because. You’re not so stupid that you can’t even handle this much.”

“.....”

She had no intention of helping from the beginning.

Since he didn’t have much expectation, Mok Gyeong-un wasn’t too disappointed.

But then, the nine-tailed golden fox chuckled and said something unexpected as she left.

“That mark you were looking for. I think I’ve seen it somewhere.”

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes widened in an instant.

It was a sudden remark, but since the nine-tailed golden fox had stolen a glimpse of his memories, he could immediately understand what those words meant.

Although he had shown a calm and cold demeanor towards other things, at the mention of the mark, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes fiercely transformed.

“..... What do you mean by that?”

“You understood, didn’t you?”

“Did you see it in my memories?”

“That’s right. I’m talking about the scar left on your dead grandfather’s body. I’ve seen that somewhere.”

As soon as those words ended...

-Swish!

Using the foot technique, Mok Gyeong-un instantly blocked the nine-tailed golden fox’s path and spoke in a cold tone.

“Where did you see it?”

She grinned and said.

“Why are you curious?”

“I’d be grateful if you could tell me.”

“Gratitude alone isn’t enough.”

As if slowly increasing the dosage, the nine-tailed golden fox put her hands behind her back and circled around Mok Gyeong-un.

Looking at her, Mok Gyeong-un finally spoke.

“What do you want?”

At that question, the nine-tailed golden fox licked her finger stickily and said.

“Do you want to finish what we couldn’t do earlier? If you satisfy me right here, I might tell you.”

“Is that what you want?”

“Yes.”

“Then right now.....”

Suddenly, Mok Gyeong-un couldn’t finish his sentence and unconsciously glanced behind him.

He saw Cheong-ryeong looking at him with a subtle gaze.

Seeing that gaze, Mok Gyeong-un couldn’t continue his words.

If it was related to the mark left on his dead grandfather’s body, he would stop at nothing to find clues.

‘.....’

He hesitated even though he could obtain information just by engaging in relations once.

Mok Gyeong-un questioned his own attitude.

Why was he being conscious of Cheong-ryeong?

He couldn’t understand it at all.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un finally opened his mouth.

“Let’s forget about it.”

“What?”

One of the nine-tailed golden fox’s beautiful eyebrows rose.

On the other hand, Cheong-ryeong’s pupils, who had been looking at Mok Gyeong-un with a somewhat anxious gaze, flickered with surprise.

‘Why?’

She could understand it because it was a matter involving an important clue, but for some reason, she had been feeling bitter.

But at Mok Gyeong-un’s unexpected refusal, her mood became strange.

“Tsk.”

The nine-tailed golden fox clicked her tongue with an incredulous expression and said.

“This hurts my pride.”

“What?”

“In all my life, I’ve been rejected because of a mere vengeful spirit.”

“…… What are you talking about?”

“Nevermind. I’ve lost all desire to do it anyway. Hmph!”

With those words, the nine-tailed golden fox stomped her feet angrily and left Prince Gyeongjin's residence.

Mok Gyeong-un momentarily thought about stopping her but eventually lowered his slightly raised hand.

Since he had already given up himself, what good would it do to stop her?

He didn't dwell on things that had already ended, so Mok Gyeong-un also turned around to go to where Cheong-ryeong was.

But then, a voice was heard.

“Among the Embroidered Uniform Guards in the Inner Court, there is someone with that mark.”

It was the nine-tailed golden fox's voice.

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un looked at the door she had left through with puzzled eyes.

Then, through the half-closed door, she poked her head out and said.

“I was about to leave, but just this once, I'm making a special concession. The medallion I gave you made from my tail... never take it off your body.”

“..... I won't.”

That wasn't difficult at all.

At Mok Gyeong-un's answer, the nine-tailed golden fox snorted and closed the door with these words.

“Hmph. See you again. Heavenly Demon.”

Chapter 254 – The Mark (1)

“Hmph. See you again. Heavenly Demon.”

-Thud!

After the door closed, Mok Gyeong-un frowned.

Then, Cheong-ryeong asked with a puzzled expression.

-Heavenly Demon?... Why is the nine-tailed golden fox calling you that?

“…… Who knows?”

He remembered that the nine-tailed golden fox said she would call him that because he was the embodiment of a demon itself.

But as for why she added the character for “heaven” in front...

[How is it? The title 'Demon' sounds good, right? Just calling you 'Demon' is a bit dull, so should I add something like a surname in front of it? Falling from the sky...]

Suddenly, the words she had said flashed through Mok Gyeong-un's mind.

Although he had interrupted her midway, she had abruptly mentioned something about falling from the sky.

What the hell did that mean?

-Throb!

At that moment, a strong pain was felt from the top of his head, the Baihui acupoint.

Mok Gyeong-un covered his head with his hand.

If it had been a mild headache, he would have ignored it and moved on, but it was an intense pain that momentarily turned his vision white and made it difficult to stand.

-Mortal!

As Mok Gyeong-un stumbled, Cheong-ryeong hurriedly approached to support him.

However, with her spirit body having become hazy, she couldn't grab hold of Mok Gyeong-un of her own volition.

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un, who had brushed past her hand, knelt down on one knee.

-Mortal. Are you all right? Mortal.

At her worried voice, Mok Gyeong-un reached out his hand and said.

“I’m fine...”

-Throb!

Before he could finish his sentence, the pain intensified as if his pulse was throbbing.

At that moment, a scene he had never seen before suddenly flashed through Mok Gyeong-un's mind.

It was...

-Swoosh!

The sight of himself falling from an extremely high altitude towards the ground.

The height was so great that even the mountains, no, the mountain ranges on the ground appeared small.

What the hell was this?

Why was a scene he had never experienced before appearing like a past memory?

That wasn't the end of it.

-Throb!

As that scene disappeared, another scene appeared.

It was a scene of his deceased grandfather looking at him and bowing down as if he had felt some sort of thrill and was unable to hide his shock.

‘Why on earth?’

It was a face of his grandfather that he had never seen before.

Why was he prostrating himself towards him with that expression?

Just as he was puzzled...

-Mortal!

Cheong-ryeong’s voice rang in his ears, and the scenes of memories that had seemed to vividly unfold before his eyes were abruptly cut off.

At the same time, the headache that had felt like his head was about to burst also subsided.

“Ah.....”

-Mortal? Why are you acting like this? Did you injure your head?

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been in a daze, raised his head and looked at Cheong-ryeong.

Her face, which was looking at him with worried eyes, had changed a lot since they first met.

If in the past, it felt like she was concerned about disappearing together with him if he died, now it felt like she genuinely cared about his well-being.

‘A different expression.....’

A person cannot remain the same towards others.

That much was evident just by looking at his grandfather's face in his memories.

What exactly was that just now?

Why did it suddenly feel like something he had never experienced before... no, was it really a memory he had never experienced?

‘Strange.’

Come to think of it, it felt like a part of his memory had been cut out, and he couldn't remember anything prior to a certain point.

Then, could that just now have been a part of those missing memories?

As he was lost in thought, Cheong-ryeong's voice was heard.

-Mortal. It seems to be because of the absorbed demonic energy. Perform breathing exercises right away.

“Breathing exercises?”

-Yes. No matter how strong you are, unassimilated demonic energy is no different from poison. So it would be better to assimilate the demonic energy first.

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

She was also in a precarious state at the moment.

Her spiritual power was continuously dispersing, and at this rate, she could even vanish, but seeing her prioritize him first gave him a strange feeling.

Thus...

“Before that, let me give you the demonic energy first.”

-There's no need for that. Right now, your condition is worse...

“No. Giving you the demonic energy won't take that long, right?”

-Swish!

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un placed his palm towards Cheong-ryeong's spirit body's head.

And he sent a portion of the nine-tailed golden fox's demonic energy that remained in his body.

The moment the demonic energy entered through her spirit body's head, Cheong-ryeong's pupils trembled.

-Ah!

She had been astonished by the high purity of the King Slayer's demonic energy when she received it as well.

But this was incomparably superior to that.

The moment it entered, it felt as if her eyes were opening wide and she was undergoing an awakening.

This highly pure and vast demonic energy grasped her dispersing spirit body once again and made its translucency dense once more.

-You... should... do it first...

“Even if I assimilate the demonic energy, it will take quite some time. So let’s assimilate it together.”

-.....

“And once we finish assimilating it, things will probably get quite busy.”

If the nine-tailed golden fox’s words were true, then among the Embroidered Uniform Guards, there was someone with that scar, the mark, that had been left on his deceased grandfather’s body.

That person would also possess some sort of clue, so they had to find them.

The next day, in the dark of night when everyone was asleep.

In one of the Embroidered Uniform Guards’ offices.

Someone with a covered face secretly entered the unlit place.

It was none other than Mong Mu-yak.

‘Just as the information said.’

Through the spies infiltrated in the imperial palace, he had learned that the Judicial Department’s office would be empty around this time.

Thus, he had waited for an opportunity and sneaked in at night.

On the surface, it was an ordinary office with display shelves, bookshelves, and a desk.

However...

‘From the outside, this office should be slightly larger in size. That means there must be a hidden space.’

-Tap! Tap!

Mong Mu-yak touched the bookshelf attached to the wall here and there.

Then, the moment he pulled out a book...

-Click!

The bookshelf slightly shifted to the side.

‘Found it.’

Grabbing the gap that had opened up, Mong Mu-yak pushed the bookshelf, and it slid open like a door.

Along with it, the space hidden inside was revealed.

The enclosed dark room was dim, so Mong Mu-yak took a lantern from the desk and lit the candle inside.

‘Ah!’

The interior became visible under the lantern’s light.

There were hidden ledgers, numerous books, and a locked safe.

After quickly scanning through them, Mong Mu-yak approached the bookshelf.

There wasn’t much time, so he had to hurry before the night shift change occurred.

‘Let’s see.’

Mong Mu-yak pulled out the untitled books one by one and examined their contents.

‘These are secret ledgers.’

He had heard that there were quite a few rotten parts within the Embroidered Uniform Guards, but to think they had blatantly created secret ledgers like this.

They might think it’s better not to leave such things behind in the first place, but...

‘The more corrupt they are, the more meticulous they tend to be.’

Ledgers are necessary for future countermeasures.

Incompetent individuals tend to do things haphazardly, but those who prepare for contingencies diligently keep records and ledgers in case of unforeseen circumstances.

After carefully examining the secret ledgers, Mong Mu-yak clicked his tongue and pocketed them.

‘They might come in handy if need be.’

The item he was looking for wasn’t among the books on the shelf.

In that case, it seemed to be in the safe.

Mong Mu-yak took out a thin copper wire from his pocket and inserted it into the lock.

Then, he skillfully picked it.

-Click!

‘Done.’

-Creak!

When he opened the safe, there were quite a few items inside.

From valuable stolen goods to various other things, but he didn’t need any of them.

What he truly needed was only one thing.

Among the various books in the safe, it was...

‘Found it!’

The Underground Prison Registry.

He had previously used spies to identify the safe movement routes at different times to find this.

And finally, he had found what he wanted.

‘Now we can know the location.’

To accomplish the secret order they had received, they first needed to find out where that person was imprisoned in the underground prison.

The underground prison was so vast in scale and heavily guarded with traps and sentries that if they didn't know the location and the prison's routes beforehand, they might fail in the rescue attempt.

‘Let's see.’

-Rustle!

The Underground Prison Registry listed the locations and names of the cell blocks where the prisoners were held.

As expected of a place known to hold only vicious and notorious prisoners, Mong Mu-yak, who was also from the Heaven and Earth Society, recognized quite a few names.

However, the name he was searching for was nowhere to be found.

‘…… This is troublesome. Could it be that he's not imprisoned here?’

After flipping through for a while, he reached the registry of the lowest level of the underground prison, the Inescapable Prison.

According to the spies, the individuals imprisoned in the Inescapable Prison were those deemed the worst by the imperial palace, and even their identities were strictly managed.

Therefore, the security of the Inescapable Prison was said to be incomparable to the other levels.

‘This will be difficult.’

Clicking his tongue, Mong Mu-yak flipped through the Inescapable Prison’s registry.

-Rustle!

The number of pages wasn’t very large.

But the moment he turned the first page, Mong Mu-yak’s eyes widened.

‘The Red Turban Rebellion’s deputy leader is still alive?’

He had heard that about thirty years ago, a great famine occurred, and uprisings broke out in various parts of the country.

The ones leading it were the Red Turban Rebellion’s leader, Yi Jeok, and deputy leader, Yi Baek, and the number of government troops they had killed reached a staggering hundred thousand.

The leader, Yi Jeok, was known to have been captured at that time when the Left and Right Governors’ Armies were mobilized.

The price of rebellion was, of course, having one’s limbs torn apart in front of the people.

At that time, he thought the deputy leader, Yi Baek, had also died, but his name was brazenly listed here.

‘A big shot right from the first page.’

After flipping a few pages, astonishing names appeared in abundance.

Each and every one of them was the worst kind of prisoner, and it was impossible to know what would happen if they were released.

He didn't understand why they kept such individuals alive.

If it were the Heaven and Earth Society, they would have killed them from the beginning to prevent future troubles.

‘Hmm.’

Mong Mu-yak, who had been continuously turning the pages, stopped midway.

In the latter half, there was a list of individuals labeled as martial artists.

‘There were martial artists too?’

Although there were occasional martial artists included in the registries of the first to third levels of the underground prison, he didn't expect there to be martial artists in the Inescapable Prison as well.

Who could be imprisoned as a martial artist deemed the worst by the imperial palace?

Out of curiosity, Mong Mu-yak flipped through the list.

‘I've never heard of any of them before.’

Even he, a member of the Heaven and Earth Society's leader's direct information department, didn't recognize most of the names.

Could it be because they were old and hardly any information remained about them?

Just as he was puzzled, Mong Mu-yak's eyes widened.

‘!?’

[百二十六 – 舊血教 – 六血星]

‘No. 126 – Old Blood Cult – Sixth Blood Saint

Seeing the entry, Mong Mu-yak couldn't hide his astonishment.

Although it was an organization that no longer existed in the current martial arts world, it was notorious enough to be passed down through word of mouth, so he was also aware of it.

That was because the remnants of the Old Blood Sect, which was said to have been destroyed long ago, and some of the evil faction had gathered to establish the Four Evils Alliance, which was now considered the center of the evil faction.

‘To think there were traces of the Old Blood Sect remaining.’

But what was even more interesting here was the note written below.

Unlike the other entries that merely described the information, this person's entry had a warning that seemed like an instruction, written in a fluttering manner.

‘Keep a distance of ten steps. When delivering meals through the prison's mechanism, cover the eyes and ears.’

Mong Mu-yak frowned.

Why did they warn not to approach within ten steps even though he was imprisoned in the prison?

The next warning instruction was also strange.

Surely, if one was imprisoned in the prison, their martial arts would have been disabled or sealed, so why were they issuing such a strong warning?

Mong Mu-yak, who had been puzzled, flipped the page.

Although the warning itself was quite unsettling, it wasn't the person they were looking for anyway, so it wasn't his concern.

-Rustle!

After flipping a few pages, there were only two left.

With only three pages remaining, Mong Mu-yak became inwardly anxious.

If the name wasn't even on these pages, it would be as if that person wasn't in the underground prison, contrary to the information they had obtained.

-Rustle!

He turned another page like that, but...

‘Huh?’

The page before the last one was somewhat strange.

Usually, the entries listed the prison cell number, who was imprisoned there, and a brief description of that person's identity.

However, the last entry only stated that it was Prisoner No. 129 and strictly warned not to approach within thirty steps of the prison cell.

‘Do not approach?’

It was farther than the person from the Old Blood Sect's Six Blood Star.

Moreover, there was an even more incomprehensible strong warning written afterward.

‘If someone enters within thirty steps, never attempt a rescue? What the hell does this mean?’

Do not attempt a rescue?

What did this imply?

Mong Mu-yak, who couldn't understand it at all, shook his head since this person was also irrelevant to them, and then turned the page towards the last one.

And seeing the name written on the registry, Mong Mu-yak's eyes lit up with joy.

[百三十 – 拜火教 – 聖火靈主]

‘No. 130 – Fire Faith Order – Holy Fire Spiritual Lord!’

He had finally found it.

The last page was particularly clean, indicating that this person had entered relatively recently.

However, unlike the previous individuals, instead of a warning, a completely different instruction was written in a sentence.

[Find the location of the Holy Fire Spirit Orb.]

‘…… What does this mean?’

Holy Fire Spirit Orb?

He couldn't understand why it was written to find its location.

Just then...

-Hey. Hey. Why are you sleeping?

At the sound of a voice coming from outside the office along with the presence of people, Mong Mu-yak quickly closed the safe's door.

If he didn't withdraw, the secured movement route would be disrupted.

Fortunately, he had achieved his objective on time.

-Bong!

The bell signaling the Ox Hour was rung.

Within the imperial palace, a bell was rung every two hours to indicate the time.

-Swish!

Mong Mu-yak, who had accomplished his objective, left the office and headed towards the dormitory following the secured route.

Since all the shift changes took place centered around the Ox Hour, this was the optimal time to move when the handover occurred.

Mong Mu-yak, who was moving along the route while suppressing his presence, climbed over a wall.

-Tap!

Now, there was only one more wall to climb before reaching the dormitory.

Mong Mu-yak, who had been stealthily walking through the darkness, was just about to leap over the final wall at that moment.

-Thud!

At that instant, someone grabbed his ankle as he was about to jump.

Startled, Mong Mu-yak was taken aback and tried to kick the opponent who had grabbed his ankle using leg techniques.

-Thud!

However, the opponent lightly caught his leg technique.

Then, pulling on one of his legs, they quickly subdued his acupoints in an instant.

-Tap tap tap tap!

The unknown individual caught Mong Mu-yak's body, which had stiffened and was about to fall.

And gently laid him on the ground.

Mong Mu-yak's pupils dilated.

That was because the one who had subdued him was none other than a eunuch from the Western Depot.

He had barely managed to leave the office undetected, but he didn't expect to be caught by a eunuch from the Western Depot just before reaching the dormitory.

‘Damn it!’

Judging by the attire, the eunuch seemed to hold a fairly high position.

At that moment, the eunuch from the Western Depot smiled and whispered while placing a finger on Mong Mu-yak's lips.

“You're doing a good job even without me.”

Upon hearing those words, Mong Mu-yak's eyes widened.

The owner of this voice was none other than...

‘Lo-Lord?’

It was the voice of his lord, Mok Gyeong-un, who he had thought was killed at the Embroidered Uniform Guards’ hall.

Chapter 255 – The Mark (2)

Yesterday,

And early this morning.

The supervisory Commander of the Six-Office Commanders, Chae Ho-seong, summoned Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak from the Heaven and Earth Society separately before the training and secretly informed them about the incident that occurred last night.

[What happened?]

[I called you because of an unfortunate accident. Last night, due to an unpleasant incident, your association’s trainee Mok Gyeong-un was attacked and killed while receiving treatment at the infirmary.]

[Wh-what do you mean by that?]

Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak couldn’t hide their bewilderment at the sudden and thunderous news.

Who was Mok Gyeong-un?

He was a monster who had surpassed the wall at a young age, not even an adult yet.

Even though they found it strange that their monstrous lord had been injured and hospitalized in the infirmary, they couldn’t understand what was going on at this moment.

[That can't be. Who would dare...]

[Seop Chun. Calm down.]

[Mu-yak, but...]

[Are you going to be rude to the supervisors?]

[...]

[I apologize. As he was a colleague from the same association, it's unbelievable news.]

At Mong Mu-yak's words, Chae Ho-seong spoke with regret.

[The detailed circumstances are under investigation, but the culprit seems to be a eunuch named Beom Jeung from the Western Depot. It appears that he held a grudge and carried out this incident.]

[Beom... Jeung?]

Upon hearing that name, Mong Mu-yak and Seop Chun recalled the eunuch from the Western Depot.

They didn't know his exact name, but they remembered that his surname was definitely Beom.

Then, did he do this because of what happened back then?

Unable to contain his anger, Seop Chun asked.

[Where is that eunuch bastard?]

[... I understand your feelings, but he is also dead.]

[What??]

According to Chae Ho-seong of the Six Offices, that eunuch named Beom Jeung was serving Prince Gyeongjin, but not only did he commit such an act out of personal grudge, but he also targeted Prince Gyeongjin who was scolding him.

So, he was subdued and killed by the hands of the Western Depot's leader, Chief Eunuch Ho.

‘Damn it.’

The two of them found the situation utterly absurd.

They couldn't easily accept the fact that their monstrous lord had died in such a futile manner.

No, it was hard to believe that he had been injured and hospitalized in the first place.

So, when they protested that something was strange from the beginning, Yu Cheon-ho So Yerin separately called them and bowed her head in apology.

It was...

[What happened is entirely my fault. It occurred because I couldn't properly subdue Trainee Mok Gyeong-un.]

‘!?’

According to her, there had been a misunderstanding last night, and she had confronted Mok Gyeong-un.

At those words, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak couldn't hide their astonishment.

Their lord, Mok Gyeong-un, was a master who had surpassed the wall.

But if Mok Gyeong-un was sent to the infirmary, it meant that she was an even greater master.

‘The Embroidered Uniform Guards’ six commanders is at that level?’

However, she said something incomprehensible to them.

[... It's not that I defeated him and caused his injuries.]

[What do you mean by that?]

[Trainee Mok Gyeong-un possessed an extraordinary talent that I had never seen before. In an instant, he reached a realm beyond his grasp, and as he forcefully tried to assimilate that enlightenment, his body couldn't withstand it.]

What did that even mean?

They found it difficult to comprehend what she was saying.

What did it mean that he reached a realm beyond his grasp, and his body couldn't withstand it?

Anyway, what was certain was that the confrontation with So Yerin had caused Mok Gyeong-un to be hospitalized in the infirmary, and the eunuch from the Western Depot named Beom Jeung seemed to have taken advantage of that opportunity to take revenge.

They couldn't hide their sense of futility at the incident where their chosen lord had lost his life in such a vain manner.

However, even though their lord had died, they couldn't give up on their mission.

Therefore, they had to overcome this sense of futility and resume their mission.

“You’re doing a good job even without me.”

‘M-My lord?’

Mong Mu-yak’s eyes widened.

This voice undoubtedly belonged to his lord, Mok Gyeong-un.

‘Does that mean he’s alive?’

He had truly believed that Mok Gyeong-un had died because they had even shown him the dismembered corpse.

But hearing his voice like this, he couldn’t help but be surprised.

-Tap tap tap!

Mok Gyeong-un released the acupoints he had sealed on Mong Mu-yak.

Originally, Mong Mu-yak was a man of few words, but as the mute acupoint was released, he asked Mok Gyeong-un as if a floodgate had opened.

“What exactly happened? The Embroidered Uniform Guards’ supervisors informed us that you were killed by the Western Depot’s eunuch at the infirmary. They even showed us the dismembered corpse... Ah!”

Mong Mu-yak stopped speaking midway.

That was because the dismembered corpse was in a state where it was difficult to recognize the form.

At that time, he had thought that the eunuch had committed such a horrific act out of a burning desire for revenge.

Mong Mu-yak continued speaking in disbelief.

“Did you intentionally pretend to be killed?”

“Yes.”

“Then what about that face now?”

“It’s a human skin mask.”

At those words, Mong Mu-yak frowned as if he couldn’t understand and asked.

“Did you separately request a skilled craftsman to make it?”

The human skin mask they had ordered was not this one.

It was a human skin mask he had never seen before, so naturally, Mong Mu-yak had questions.

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

“No. This face belongs to the Western Depot’s commander.”

“What? What do you mean by that? Did you separately obtain a human skin mask of the Western Depot commander’s face?”

“I didn’t obtain it separately. It’s his actual face.”

‘!!!!’

At those words, Mong Mu-yak’s expression instantly froze.

For a moment, he doubted his own ears.

‘His actual face?’

What did that mean?

Judging by the way he spoke, it sounded like he wasn’t wearing a human skin mask made by copying the face, but rather, he had peeled off the skin from the face and was wearing it.

To the dumbfounded Mong Mu-yak, Mok Gyeong-un casually said.

“You’re thinking correctly. I found it more efficient and convenient to use as a human skin mask this way.”

“...”

Mong Mu-yak genuinely felt shivers run down his spine.

He was aware that his lord's way of thinking was completely different from ordinary people, but he never expected him to peel off the skin from a living person's face and wear it.

Peeling off the skin from an actual person's face and wearing it as it is was something that most people might think of once but wouldn't do because it was so unsettling.

But the fact that he could actually put it into practice was truly frightening.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un said.

“Anyway, it wasn't intentional, but thanks to that eunuch Beom Jeung targeting me, my movements have become much freer.”

“Then what are you planning to do?”

A human skin mask was like a double-edged sword.

Wasn't the Western Depot's commander someone who attended to Prince Gyeongjin?

If he had the face of a person who had frequent contact with others, no matter how good his acting skills were, the chances of being exposed would be extremely high.

“Now that I have more freedom of movement, I should gather information and explore various methods.”

“… Then you won't be going to the underground prison?”

“I will go.”

“But you are already officially considered dead...”

“I can change to the face of someone who can enter the underground prison when necessary.”

“...”

Mong Mu-yak closed his mouth at Mok Gyeong-un’s clear answer.

However, there was one concern that he couldn’t help but have.

Using the human skin mask of a living person ultimately meant that the person had to be killed.

But if incidents of disappearances or deaths continued to occur within the imperial palace because of that, the situation could gradually escalate.

Thus, Mong Mu-yak cautiously expressed his opinion.

“My lord... If I may say so, changing faces...”

“The moment I go down to the underground prison will be the last time. Obviously, if I change frequently, problems will arise, so don’t worry too much.”

Fortunately, Mok Gyeong-un was aware of the concerns.

Mok Gyeong-un grabbed Mong Mu-yak’s hand, helped him up, and said.

“Seop Chun doesn’t know about this, so Mong Mu-yak, please inform him.”

“Understood.”

“Then please continue with the work.”

-Swish!

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un’s figure vanished as if it had dispersed.

Seeing this, Mong Mu-yak clicked his tongue and muttered.

“Of course.”

There was no way this monstrous person could have died in such a futile manner.

Embroidered Uniform Guards’ Sixth Office of Selection.

The Sixth Office of Selection was an investigative agency, and its leader was the Pacification Commissioner So Yerin.

And the position that assisted the leader of the Sixth Office of Selection was a Thousand-men Commander of the Sixth Office of Selection, and none other than the masked Embroidered Uniform Guard Ma Ra-hyeon.

It was late, but Ma Ra-hyeon was working.

The Pacification Commissioner So Yerin was currently busy as she had been appointed as the deputy supervisor of the Embroidered Uniform Guards' selection, so Ma Ra-hyeon had to take responsibility for the current work, resulting in frequent all-nighters.

Especially on this day, he had to stay behind and organize the incident records due to the events that had occurred at the Embroidered Uniform Guards' infirmary and Prince Gyeongjin's palace, so it took even longer.

-Rustle!

While he was writing the records like that...

-Knock knock!

Someone knocked on the office door.

Ma Ra-hyeon stopped writing the records and raised his head.

He hadn't sensed anyone approaching outside the office, so knocking on the door meant that the person could evade his senses.

‘Is it the Pacification Commissioner?’

For a moment, he thought it might be the Pacification Commissioner, but upon second thought, it wasn't.

If it were the Pacification Commissioner, she would have entered without bothering to knock since she was the leader of this place in the first place.

Thus, Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon's eyes filled with vigilance as he rose from his seat.

And while drawing internal energy, he opened his mouth.

“Who is it?”

-...

There was no response.

Ma Ra-hyeon’s eyes, visible through the gaps in his mask, sharpened.

He couldn’t sense any presence, but someone had knocked on the door.

And there was no answer to his question.

What was their intention?

Just as he was about to slowly rise from his seat and assume a battle stance...

-Thud thud!

The sound of footsteps walking from the corridor outside the office was heard.

And the footsteps went back and forth around the surroundings a few times before finally approaching the front of the Sixth Office of Selection’s office.

‘What’s going on?’

There should be someone who had knocked on the door in front of the office.

However, even though the footsteps of the person who had just appeared had reached the front of the office door, no conversation could be heard.

-Knock knock!

The sound of knocking on the door was heard again.

At this, Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon opened his mouth.

“Who is it?”

Just as his vigilance was at its peak...

A voice came from outside.

-Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon. He sent me.

‘!?’

At those words, Ma Ra-hyeon’s eyes narrowed.

Eventually, Ma Ra-hyeon let out a soft sigh and said.

“Come in.”

-Creak!

As the door opened, a middle-aged man with a short beard wearing a blue robe was revealed.

Just by looking at the blue robe, one could tell that he was an Embroidered Uniform Guard like Ma Ra-hyeon and held the position of Thousand-men Commander.

The moment Ma Ra-hyeon saw him, he felt irritation rising within him.

‘I told him not to send anyone to the Sixth Office of Selection.’

He didn’t expect his teacher and the person he referred to as “he” to boldly send someone even to the place where “he” was, knowing that “he” was absent due to the Embroidered Uniform Guards’ selection.

Or perhaps it was because he knew that “he” was away that he was committing such a brazen act.

Meanwhile, the bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander opened his mouth.

“Even if it’s a face you dislike, shouldn’t you at least greet me?”

“I was informed that we would only meet at the contact point or his residence, wasn’t I?”

“My, my, you’re quite on edge.”

“...”

“Well, I understand that you’re concerned about the eyes around you, but Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon... You’re not in a position to be picky or choosy, are you?”

With those words, the bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander pointed his finger towards Ma Ra-hyeon’s abdomen.

The implication of this was simple.

It was the Gu poison.

-Grip!

Although it was hidden behind the mask, Ma Ra-hyeon was gritting his teeth.

If only he hadn't become addicted to the Gu poison and gained a weakness, he wouldn't have to endure such humiliation.

Ma Ra-hyeon barely suppressed his anger and said.

“… Close the door.”

“Hahaha. Yes. Maintain that obedient attitude. Even if you have complaints, the one in need should act with good manners. Ma Ra-hyeon...”

Before he could finish his sentence...

-Thud!

“Ugh!”

-Thump!

The bearded Thousand-men Commander's eyes rolled back, and he collapsed forward.

Behind him stood a middle-aged eunuch in a red official robe, smiling.

Ma Ra-hyeon couldn't hide his bewilderment at the sudden appearance of the eunuch.

“Lord Ho?”

The eunuch was none other than Eunuch Ho, the supervisor of the Western Depot.

Why had the supervisor of the Western Depot suddenly appeared at the Embroidered Uniform Guards' Sixth Office of Selection?

Moreover, what was this sudden action?

Just as he was puzzled...

“I was going to wait for a moment, but there was no need to wait. Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon.”

‘!?’

At the unique voice and way of speaking coming from Eunuch Ho's mouth, Ma Ra-hyeon's pupils trembled.

‘This voice is?’

Chapter 256 – The Mark (3)

“I was going to wait for a moment, but there was no need to wait. Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon.”

‘This voice is?’

The unique way of speaking and the familiar voice.

The moment he heard it, Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon with piercing eyes immediately recognized whose voice it was.

“You... could it be Mok Gyeong-un?”

“Oh-ho. You have a good memory for voices?”

‘!!!!’

Ma Ra-hyeon couldn't hide his surprise at the response he heard.

The man with a smiling face that resembled the Western Depot's commander Eunuch Ho.

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

“..... So you were alive?”

As the investigative branch, the Sixth Office of Selection, he had been unable to hide his dismay upon believing that Mok Gyeong-un had been killed.

Since he had been attacked while in a critical condition after clashing with his teacher and the leader of the Sixth Office of Selection, Pacification Commissioner So Yerin, he hadn't doubted that Mok Gyeong-un would naturally survive.

But seeing him alive like this, he couldn't help but be astonished.

Ma Ra-hyeon's eyes narrowed through the gaps in his mask as he looked at the face wearing Mok Gyeong-un's human skin mask.

“Ha..... What exactly is that face?”

“Didn’t you just call me Eunuch Ho a moment ago?”

“I did say that, but how did you get that face.....”

Ma Ra-hyeon couldn’t finish his sentence.

The Western Depot’s leader, Chief Eunuch Ho, was not only a eunuch with a high position but also a confidant of Prince Gyeongjin, one of the country’s influential figures.

Wearing the human skin mask of such a person and wandering around was extremely dangerous.

If he were to be exposed, it could turn the imperial palace upside down.

“Are you worried that it might cause problems?”

“Not just problems, but you know I still have something to receive from you, don’t you?”

“Ah. That’s true.”

Ma Ra-hyeon had made a deal with Mok Gyeong-un.

He agreed to provide information related to the underground prison and offer assistance when necessary.

Of course, the price was the removal of the Gu poison in his body.

“Let’s just say there are some circumstances regarding this face. But don’t worry, it won’t cause any problems.”

“.....”

“Besides, from what I saw, it seemed like you were being blackmailed by the person here, weren’t you?”

The person Mok Gyeong-un pointed at with his finger was the unconscious bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had been hiding his presence after coming to make a request and encountering this person, revealed himself upon learning that Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon had Gu poison in his stomach.

Inwardly, Ma Ra-hyeon felt refreshed seeing him collapse, but he quickly concealed that emotion and said.

“..... Even so, it was a rash action.”

“Rash?”

“What are you going to do about the aftermath when he wakes up?”

“Are you worried about the aftermath?”

“.....”

How could he not be worried?

This person was a confidant of “that person” and knew about the Gu poison inside him.

If this person were to wake up, his plan to pretend to obediently follow him while somehow seeking a reversal would obviously be disrupted.

Thus, Ma Ra-hyeon said to Mok Gyeong-un.

“…… You might lose your life if you are suspected.”

“Hmm. Has it escalated to that extent?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s nonchalant words, Ma Ra-hyeon gritted his teeth.

Was he acting recklessly because it wasn’t his own matter?

If the person behind this man had even the slightest suspicion and decided to eliminate him, they could activate the Gu poison and kill him in an instant.

“I don’t think you understand how serious this matter is……”

“It must be serious for you. After all, you’re in a situation where you can’t do anything because of what’s inside your stomach.”

“Even though you know that……”

“Calm down. More importantly, I came because I have an urgent matter to request from you.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Ma Ra-hyeon looked at him with disbelieving eyes.

Right now, the one in a hurry was actually himself.

He had touched someone he shouldn't have and was now trying to resolve his own matter first?

Thus, Ma Ra-hyeon lowered his voice and spoke, his mood turning unpleasant.

“You have the nerve to ask me to help you when my life is hanging by a thread.”

“You seem quite anxious, don’t you?”

“Then keep your promise so that I won’t be anxious.”

Ma Ra-hyeon stated what he wanted from Mok Gyeong-un.

The only way to overcome the current situation was for Mok Gyeong-un to remove the Gu poison in his stomach as promised.

“That’s going to be difficult.”

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t do that until my work is finished. If you, without your weakness, were to insist on fulfilling your duties as an Embroidered Uniform Guard, it would hinder my work.”

-Crunch!

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Ma Ra-hyeon gritted his teeth.

From his perspective, it was definitely a valid point, but he was furious at this reality where everyone, no matter who they were, was trying to exploit his weakness.

He wanted to overturn this situation, whether he lived or died.

-Grip!

Strength entered his fist.

But the reality that he couldn't do so was frustrating.

He hadn't repaid his debt of gratitude to his teacher, and he hadn't found "that person" either.

Therefore, he had to endure with a heart of sleeping on brushwood and tasting gall.

Seeing Ma Ra-hyeon barely suppressing his anger, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

At this, Ma Ra-hyeon reacted irritably.

"Are you mocking me?"

"No. You just seem very angry."

"Knowing that, are you provoking me on purpose?"

"It's not on purpose. But if I'm going to make a request, I suppose I should clean up the situation to some extent for you."

"What?"

What did that mean?

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un bent down and rummaged through the body of the unconscious bearded Thousand-men Commander.

“Stop! What are you doing now? Are you trying to make the situation more complicated?”

Ma Ra-hyeon found it increasingly difficult to contain his anger.

He wasn’t even going to remove the Gu poison, yet he was trying to escalate the situation further.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un, ignoring him, pulled out a book-sized wooden box from the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s pocket.

Seeing this, Ma Ra-hyeon frowned.

‘This is?’

That was because this wooden box was none other than a storage case for human skin masks.

The reason he knew this was that he had received this case containing special medicines from a craftsman.

Mok Gyeong-un held it up and said.

“This looks like a case for human skin masks, doesn’t it?”

“.....”

“Why did he bring this?”

Mok Gyeong-un opened the human skin mask case.

Inside, a human skin mask submerged in medicine was revealed.

But the moment he saw this face, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes flickered with surprise.

That was because the face on the human skin mask was very familiar to him.

It was...

“…… It resembles the face of the Eastern Depot's Junior Eunuch Jang.”

Junior Eunuch Jang, the eunuch of the Eastern Depot.

He was a confidant of Imperial Consort Seo, serving her.

Mok Gyeong-un tilted his head and then looked at Ma Ra-hyeon, saying.

“Why does this person have the face, no, the human skin mask of Junior Eunuch Jang from the Eastern Depot?”

At that question, Ma Ra-hyeon sighed and muttered.

“Ah…… So he was planning to use me as well.”

“Pardon?”

“That's the human skin mask I received from the craftsman.”

“You, Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon?”

“It wasn’t me who ordered it.....”

Ma Ra-hyeon cautiously pointed at his own abdomen with his eyes.

It was to convey the fact that the person who had implanted the Gu poison in him had ordered the item.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un immediately understood.

“I see. The person who implanted the Gu poison in you was trying to do something with this.”

“Seeing that this person brought it, it seems he intended to make me wear it.”

Ma Ra-hyeon instinctively sensed it.

Otherwise, why would he bring back the human skin mask case that he had delivered?

“Is that so? Can you also guess what he was trying to make you do after wearing the human skin mask? Well, I can roughly guess, but.”

He could understand that it was to cause chaos.

However, he couldn’t know exactly how he intended to cause chaos.

At Mok Gyeong-un’s question, Ma Ra-hyeon shook his head.

“I don’t know the details either. If you hadn’t knocked this person unconscious, I probably would have known the reason by now.”

“So it’s my fault, you mean.”

“.....”

“In that case, there’s no choice. Let’s wake him up and ask him.”

What the hell was he talking about?

Waking this person up now would make the situation even more difficult to handle.

Thus, Ma Ra-hyeon extended his hand to Mok Gyeong-un and said.

“Stop it. You’re not even going to help me, so why do you keep trying to escalate the situation?”

“I’m not trying to escalate it. I’m trying to help you.”

“What?”

“I said I’m trying to help you.”

At those words, Ma Ra-hyeon furrowed his brows.

What was this sudden talk about?

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed the inside of the unconscious bearded Thousand-men Commander’s collarbone and said.

“It seems like you won’t be able to properly carry out my request if you’re being manipulated by these people. I have no other intentions, so just watch.”

-Grip!

As soon as those words ended, Mok Gyeong-un applied force to his fingers.

At that moment, the unconscious bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander woke up due to the pain.

“Aaaah... mmph!”

Mok Gyeong-un covered his mouth with his other hand as he tried to scream.

Then, he smiled at the awakened bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander and said.

“Are you awake?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s greeting, the bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander’s eyes widened.

That was because Mok Gyeong-un’s face currently resembled Eunuch Ho, the confidant of Prince Gyeongjin and the supervisor of the Western Depot.

Among the Embroidered Uniform Guards, there was no one who didn’t know this face.

‘Eunuch Ho? How is he?’

The bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander showed an expression of incomprehension.

Why was the eunuch from the Western Depot in the office of the Embroidered Uniform Guards' Sixth Office of Selection?

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un continued.

"I controlled the surrounding sounds with my true energy. I just covered your mouth because I didn't want to hear your screams. I'll take my hand off."

-Swish!

As he removed his hand from the mouth, the bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander rolled his eyes and surveyed his surroundings.

Then, he spotted Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon behind Mok Gyeong-un.

Seeing this, his eyes sharpened.

"Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon, what's going on? Just in case, I'm saying this, but to Lord Eunuch Ho....."

-Slap!

Before he could finish his sentence, the bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander's head turned to the side.

The reason his head turned was simple.

It was because Mok Gyeong-un had slapped him.

The bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander slowly turned his head and opened his mouth with anger rising to the top of his head.

“Eunuch Ho. What is the meaning of this? How dare you be here.....”

-Slap!

Before he could finish speaking, the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s head turned to the side again as another slap flew in.

It seemed like a simple slap, but his face hurt as if it was burning.

The bearded Thousand-men Commander barely endured it and said.

“Haa..... Eunuch Ho. This is an act of overstepping your authority. I don’t know why you, an eunuch from the Western Depot, are here, but.....”

-Slap!

Once again, the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s face turned to the side.

After receiving the third slap, not only did the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s left cheek swell up, but blood vessels in his left eye burst, turning it red.

At this, the bearded Thousand-men Commander abruptly turned his head and glared at Mok Gyeong-un.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said.

“You’re a bit quieter now.”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the bearded Thousand-men Commander found it absurd.

Did he slap him just to make him quiet?

Even if he was the supervisor of the Western Depot, he couldn't humiliate and hit him, an Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander from a different affiliation, like this.

However...

“Then shall we have a little talk now?”

‘What’s going on?’

The bearded Thousand-men Commander suddenly found it strange.

That was because, although he had no reason to converse with Eunuch Ho, he had heard his voice a couple of times in passing since he was a confidant of Prince Gyeongjin.

As an eunuch, he had a quite shrill voice, but this voice was different.

‘Could it be?’

The bearded Thousand-men Commander rolled his eyes and looked at the back of Mok Gyeong-un’s hand.

Seeing the back of his hand, the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s eyes narrowed.

As far as he knew, even though Eunuch Ho appeared to be middle-aged due to his profound internal energy and makeup, he was aware that he had reached the age of sixty.

At that age, there should have been wrinkles on the back of his hand, but there were none at all.

With this, the bearded Thousand-men Commander was certain.

‘He’s a fake.’

The person in front of him was definitely not Eunuch Ho, the supervisor of the Western Depot.

Thus...

“Who are you.....”

-Slap!

Before the question could be finished, the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s head turned to the side.

Not only did the slapped bearded Thousand-men Commander’s cheek turn a bluish color, but blood also flowed from his mouth.

Beyond the numbness caused by the pain in his cheek, his head was spinning.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said.

“Just answer the questions I ask.”

“.....”

To the quieted man, Mok Gyeong-un held out the human skin mask case and said.

“What were you trying to do with this?”

‘!?’

Seeing the human skin mask case, the bearded Thousand-men Commander's eyes wavered.

He didn't know the identity of this bastard, but one thing was certain: something had gone wrong.

Thus, the bearded Thousand-men Commander hurriedly racked his brain.

What should he do to escape this situation?

Then, he glanced at Ma Ra-hyeon, who was watching from behind Mok Gyeong-un as if observing.

‘I don't know the identity of this damn bastard, but he must be related to that son of a bitch Ma Ra-hyeon. In that case....’

The bearded Thousand-men Commander urgently shouted.

“If you touch me, Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon will also die!”

He thought that the only answer was to recap the situation.

Although Ma Ra-hyeon wouldn't have disclosed the existence of the Gu poison under a taboo, if it was certain that this man was helping Ma Ra-hyeon, he would realize that he couldn't touch him recklessly...

-Slap!

The bearded Thousand-men Commander's head turned to the side.

Blood flowed from his reddened left eye as his head turned.

His left eye was not visible.

Moreover, a ringing sound of “beep-” echoed in his left ear, and he seemed to have lost both his hearing and vision on one side.

Amidst the pain, the bearded Thousand-men Commander, driven by spite, shouted.

“No. It’s fine even if that bastard Ma Ra-hyeon dies...”

“I don’t know how someone without the Gu of Command in their body can threaten to kill Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon.”

‘!?’

At those words, the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s right pupil trembled as if an earthquake had occurred.

He knew about the existence of Gu poison, so he was aware of what the Gu of Command was.

The Gu of Command was the female Gu that could control the parasitic Gu poison as a pair.

‘H-How the hell does this bastard know that?’

The bewildered bearded Thousand-men Commander looked at Ma Ra-hyeon.

Something had gone wrong.

The bastard was definitely under a taboo, unable to disclose the existence of the Gu poison through his own mouth or any other means.

The moment he disclosed it, the Gu poison would rampage, and he would lose his life.

But how did this person, who had the face of Eunuch Ho, the supervisor of the Western Depot, know about that fact?

‘Damn it!’

Realizing that something had gone wrong, the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s breathing became rough.

-Grip!

Watching him from behind Mok Gyeong-un, Ma Ra-hyeon’s clenched fist tightened.

Due to the weakness of the Gu poison, he had been unable to rebel and had to endure humiliation by doing as he was told.

But seeing the bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard in such a state, looking bewildered, he couldn’t help but feel ecstatic, regardless of the consequences.

Chapter 257 – The Mark (4)

Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon’s heart felt refreshed.

At this moment, he was filled with more ecstasy than anyone else.

However, he soon returned to reality.

It was because Mok Gyeong-un, wearing the human skin mask of Eunuch Ho, the supervisor of the Western Depot, was pushing his opponent into a corner without leaving any room for escape, and he wondered how exactly he planned to handle the situation.

‘If he pushes like this, that person behind this man might kill me with the Gu poison.’

This was as clear as day.

He wasn’t even going to immediately remove the Gu poison in his body, so what was he planning to do?

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un said.

“If you don’t want to lose your remaining eye and ear, you should start giving the answers I want.”

“.....”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander hesitated with trembling eyes.

He couldn’t tell if the person in front of him was the real supervisor of the Western Depot or not.

However, one thing was certain: he was stronger than him and seemed to know a lot.

‘What should I do?’

In fact, there was one predetermined guideline in this situation.

[Thousand-men Commander Woo. What should you do if you get caught in an unexpected situation?]

[I won't create a situation for you to worry about. I'm much more tight-lipped than I look.]

[Anyone can say that. But this old man wants something definite.]

[..... What does Your Excellency want me to do?]

[It's nothing much. I'd like you to always keep this between your teeth.]

[What's that?]

The bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander had a small poison pill in his upper right molar.

This poison pill contained a very small but vicious type of acid that could instantly burn the tongue, throat, and esophagus, and was strong enough to melt all the internal organs.

It was safe to say that the moment it touched the tongue, one would lose their life before counting to ten.

-Tremble tremble!

The bearded Thousand-men Commander's hand trembled violently.

He had to follow the guidelines, but how many people could end their own lives without hesitation?

No matter how much training one received, it was bound to be frightening.

“Huu.... huu.... huu....”

‘I have to do it. I must do it.’

Otherwise, he would continue to be tortured by this person.

Just as he was trying to control his mind as his breathing became increasingly rough...

“Your breathing is out of control, and your pupils keep trembling, as if you’re about to make an important decision. Moreover, in the midst of that, your tongue in your mouth keeps moving towards your upper left molar, enough to feel uncomfortable.”

“What?”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un brought his face close to his mouth.

Then, he sniffed and raised the corners of his mouth coldly.

Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon, who was watching from behind, wondered why he was doing that, but...

“To contain a strong acidic poison, you need an extremely tough stomach lining and special medicinal treatment. That smell is coming from your mouth. Hmm. I’ve heard of the method of putting a poison pill between the teeth like that, but it’s my first time seeing it.”

‘!?’

At those words, the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s right eye widened.

What the hell was this bastard?

He was already filled with fear, unable to go through with it, but now that the existence of the poison pill had been discovered, he couldn’t help but feel bewildered.

-Swish!

At that moment, Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon's figure blurred and suddenly appeared behind the bearded Thousand-men Commander.

-Thud!

“Urgh.”

The Ma Ra-hyeon who appeared behind him grabbed his cheeks with his hands, pulled his lower jaw, and made him tilt his head back.

Seeing his mouth forced open, Ma Ra-hyeon's eyes widened.

There really was something that looked like a poison pill in his upper right molar.

‘Meticulous.’

Ma Ra-hyeon inwardly clicked his tongue.

He had thought this person was a close confidant of that person, but even such a person had taken measures to be killed or die at any time.

As he was clicking his tongue like that, Ma Ra-hyeon tried to put his finger inside the mouth.

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un stopped him.

“Don’t.”

“What?”

“Just leave him be.”

“……. Leave him be? What if he bites the poison pill and kills himself while doing that?”

Then they wouldn't be able to find out anything, and if he died here in the Sixth Office of Selection, it would become even more difficult to handle the situation.

However, Mok Gyeong-un nonchalantly said.

“If he does, then so be it.”

“No. How can you say that……”

“First, take your hands off. How can he speak if you're holding his jaw like that?”

“…….”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Ma Ra-hyeon's eyes showed that he couldn't understand at all.

If he had a poison pill between his teeth, he would definitely kill himself.

But Mok Gyeong-un's attitude was as if it didn't matter at all.

He wanted to remove the poison pill right away, but Ma Ra-hyeon eventually let go of his jaw and stepped back.

The bearded Thousand-men Commander's mind became complicated as his jaw was open and drool was dripping.

Inwardly, he had a strong desire for them to forcibly remove the poison pill.

‘Damn it.’

Then at least he would have had the excuse that it wasn’t his own will, but he felt even more regretful.

However, apart from this, he felt a glimmer of hope.

Since they had seen that he had a poison pill, he thought they wouldn’t continue to torture him and strongly push him into a corner.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said.

“Now, bite the poison pill and die.”

“Wh-what did you say?”

Instantly, the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s expression froze.

“Wasn’t that what you had in your mouth in case you needed to kill yourself?”

“.....”

It was a valid point, but he was dumbfounded that his opponent was urging him to die without even extracting any information.

Meanwhile, Mok Gyeong-un continued.

“Since someone with such strong determination that they even have a poison pill in their mouth won’t answer my questions, I need to shorten the time. Hurry up and kill yourself.”

‘Huh?’

The bearded Thousand-men Commander was at a loss for words.

This wasn’t what he expected.

It was going in a completely different direction than what he had anticipated.

As he was feeling bewildered, Mok Gyeong-un, as if not minding it at all, whispered into his ear with a smiling face.

“If you kill yourself, I’ll make one promise to you. If I find your relatives, blood kin, and those related to you, I’ll send them to your side without leaving a single one behind.”

‘!!!!!!’

As soon as those words ended, the bearded Thousand-men Commander’s face turned deathly pale.

With the face of Eunuch Ho, the supervisor of the Western Depot, he was smiling as if he was excited just thinking about it, his mouth stretched to his ears, and he couldn’t bear the goosebumps all over his body.

A moment later.

The bearded Thousand-men Commander was unconscious, and in Mok Gyeong-un’s hand was the poison pill pouch that had been in his molar.

Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon, who was looking at this, inwardly clicked his tongue.

As an investigative department, he had also interrogated opponents in numerous ways.

But this bastard Mok Gyeong-un had driven his opponent to the edge of a cliff in a completely unexpected direction.

It was as if he knew exactly what would make his opponent terrified.

“So Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon was to become the trigger for a conflict between the Second Prince and Imperial Consort Seo.”

“……. Yes.”

The order the bearded Thousand-men Commander had received was that.

Ma Ra-hyeon was to wear the human skin mask of Junior Eunuch Jang, an eunuch from the Eastern Depot who could be considered a close associate of Imperial Consort Seo, and target the life of the Second Prince, Prince Jong.

It wasn't to actually kill him but to trigger a war between them.

“With the Gu poison in your stomach, it must be frustrating to just suffer.”

“Just suffer?”

“Isn't that so?”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, Ma Ra-hyeon snorted and went somewhere inside the office.

Then, he opened the door of a safe with his name on it and took something out.

It was none other than another human skin mask case.

Ma Ra-hyeon opened its lid.

-Click!

“Oh-ho.”

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes flickered with surprise.

That was because inside was a face identical to the human skin mask the bearded Embroidered Uniform Guard Thousand-men Commander had brought, the face of Junior Eunuch Jang, the eunuch from the Eastern Depot.

“You had your own plan.”

“It’s not the best plan. Because it requires me to risk my life.”

“Well, that’s true.”

The additional human skin mask he had made would serve as another piece of evidence in case the person who had orchestrated this removed the human skin mask used in the incident.

However, the moment he presented this as evidence, that person would end Ma Ra-hyeon’s life with the Gu poison.

In the end, the human skin mask Ma Ra-hyeon had prepared was a move of mutual destruction.

Ma Ra-hyeon, who was looking at Mok Gyeong-un, cautiously opened his lips.

“If I didn’t have a weakness, I could file a request for confinement to the Sixth Office of Selection with just this person’s status and the evidence.”

“And?”

“I have no intention of interfering with your work or betraying you. If you tell me to sign and write a document, I can do it and even swear an oath.”

“So you’re asking me to remove the Gu poison, right?”

“…….. Yes.”

“But what should we do? I’m a bit timid and cautious.”

“You!”

Ma Ra-hyeon raised his voice but suppressed it.

What did he mean by being timid?

Wasn’t it simply because he couldn’t fully trust him?

Ma Ra-hyeon spoke to Mok Gyeong-un in a barely suppressed voice.

“Then what are you planning to do? Even if you continue to detain this person, his confidant, that person will become suspicious, and if you let him go, the result is obvious. Do you want me to die like this?”

“How could that be?”

“Then do you have any plan?”

“You’re asking as if I have a bundle of solutions.”

“Haa.....”

Ma Ra-hyeon let out a sigh.

Since he was in a disadvantageous position, it was difficult for him to even get angry when Mok Gyeong-un spoke like this.

If it came to this, it might be better to engage in mutual destruction with the bastard before the situation became uncontrollable.

Just as he was having such extreme thoughts...

Mok Gyeong-un suddenly got up from his seat and handed the poison pill he was holding to Ma Ra-hyeon.

“Why this?”

“Keep it with you. I’m going, so.”

“Going? You’re just going to leave after causing this mess.....”

“I never said I was just leaving.”

“What?”

“I’m going to meet the person who caused trouble for you and have a talk with him.”

‘!?’

At those words, Ma Ra-hyeon, who was about to grab Mok Gyeong-un, hesitated.

Sang Ik-seo, the 4th-rank Embroidered Uniform Guard Associate Military Commissioner.

If the two Northern and Southern Pacification Commissioners, were the pinnacle in charge of the actual affairs of the Embroidered Uniform Guards, above them were the Associate Military Commissioner, Deputy Military Commissioner and the Military Commissioner, who held command authority.

Here, Sang Ik-seo, who held the position of Associate Military Commissioner, was the third-highest figure in the Embroidered Uniform Guards and the very person who had implanted the parasitic Gu poison into Ma Ra-hyeon’s stomach.

‘What the hell is this bastard thinking?’

He suddenly said he was going to meet Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo, so it was difficult to discern Mok Gyeong-un’s intentions.

Thus, he was about to ask the reason for it, but...

“What are you going to do by meeting him.....”

-Swish!

But before he could even ask, Mok Gyeong-un’s figure blurred and disappeared.

“Damn it!”

He was truly doing as he pleased.

At this, Ma Ra-hyeon couldn't hide his predicament.

It was clear that Mok Gyeong-un wasn't just going to meet that person, but intended to do something.

However, there was a huge problem here.

Although he knew Mok Gyeong-un's martial arts were exceptional, beside Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo was a master of unknown identity who had defeated him in just a few moves.

Chapter 258 – The Mark (5)

In an office at the main hall of the Embroidered Uniform Guard...

A middle-aged man in his fifties with drooping eyes and a scruffy beard sat with his legs crossed on the desk, puffing on a short cigar pipe and exhaling smoke.

“Phew.”

His name was Sang Ik-seo.

He was the Associate Military Commissioner of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, ranked third in the chain of command of the organization as a 4th rank official.

In his office, there was another man in his forties dressed in the uniform of a Hundred-men Commander of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, diligently polishing his sword while sitting comfortably in a guest chair.

Considering their difference in ranks, the Hundred-men Commander should have been standing at attention, but his relaxed posture suggested their relationship was quite horizontal.

-Shwip!

Each time the middle-aged man in his forties wiped the sword, the surrounding air seemed to sharpen in a peculiar way.

This alone was enough to tell that he was no ordinary person.

After a while of quietly focusing on their respective tasks, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo, who had been smoking his pipe, spoke up.

“By now, that guy should be entering the Inner Palace.”

To this, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander replied.

“If it’s according to the set time, yes.”

“Soon, the Inner Palace – no, Prince Jong’s Jikhyeon Palace will be turned upside down.”

“If it succeeds properly, it won’t just be Jikhyeon Palace. The entire Imperial Palace will be in an uproar.”

It was an incident targeting none other than the Second Prince, Prince Jong.

If it were to happen, no matter how much the Emperor cherished Consort Seo, he wouldn't let this matter slide.

“It'll be very amusing.”

The established power dynamics would flip in an instant.

Thinking about how that bitch would suffer made him unable to contain his inner excitement.

Puffing on his cigar pipe and exhaling smoke, he spoke.

“Phew. But Woo-yeon is late.”

Thousand-men Commander Woo-yeon.

He was the Embroidered Uniform Guard assisting him.

By now, he should have already relayed the order to “that guy” and returned.

But he hadn't arrived yet.

Finding this suspicious, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo said with a doubtful gaze.

“Don't tell me that guy defied the Headquarters' order?”

To this question, the middle-aged Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander chuckled and replied.

“No matter how much those guys pretend to be righteous and noble, when it truly comes down to a life-or-death situation, they have no choice but to obey.”

“No choice but to obey, huh... Well, with a bug holding their lifeline in their belly, refusing would mean they’re crazy enough to want to die.”

The bug in the belly.

What they were referring to was none other than the Gu Poison.

Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo, who had been laughing like that, tapped the ashes from his cigar pipe into the ashtray and said.

“Since we’re on the topic, it’s quite convenient, but do you think we could get a few more Gu Poisons? Or perhaps control more of the parasitic type through the Command Gu...”

“I’ve told you before.”

“Told me what?”

“The Gu Poison comes in pairs, so we can’t increase the parasitic type that way. And to create a pair, it requires numerous poisons and training, so it can’t be made just because you want it.”

Upon hearing this, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo licked his lips as if disappointed.

There was this Thousand-men Commander who, despite only being a Thousand-men Commander, wore a mask and acted all high and mighty, which annoyed him. But thanks to the Gu Poison, he had transformed into an obedient slave.

“Then is it possible to recycle the ones inside?”

“The ones inside?”

“I’m talking about the parasitic type.”

“…After the host dies, it will also burst and die not long after. Of course, if we take action beforehand, recycling isn’t impossible.”

“Now that’s good news.”

He had planned to use it a few more times after this incident before discarding it anyway.

But if the Gu Poison could be recycled, he could create another set.

It was truly priceless.

“Tell me when the time comes.”

“Understood.”

“Ah! By the way, is that matter of yours going well?”

“What matter are you referring to?”

“The interrogation of that monk.”

“...”

“If you’re personally going down to the underground prison once every two days to interrogate him, the item you’re searching for must be quite important, no?”

-Thud!

As soon as he finished speaking, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander stopped polishing his sword.

He then placed the sword on the table.

Upon seeing this, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo's eyes filled with tension.

That was because the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander who had been at the table had suddenly disappeared.

-Shwip!

Soon, rough hands gripped both of his shoulders.

Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo unconsciously gulped at the hands pressing down on his shoulders.

Although he wasn't part of the field operatives, unlike the Military Commissioner or Deputy Military Commissioner, he had once been a field operative and was a master at the early-stage of the Transcendent Realm.

Even he trembled at the overwhelming prowess of the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander, who had appeared behind him in the blink of an eye.

Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo spoke in a tense voice.

“Haha. Hey. Did I perhaps say something wrong?”

At that question, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander, who had his hands on his shoulders, tightened his grip and spoke.

“Associate Military Commissioner, sir.”

“...”

“What did I say was one of the conditions for helping with what you wanted?”

“...You said not to interfere with your affairs.”

“You seem to know it well. So if someone who knows it so well tries to meddle in someone else’s business with unnecessary meddling, the outcome won’t be very good, will it?”

His voice was laced with a thick killing intent.

This was a kind of warning.

It was pressure telling him not to interfere or unnecessarily get involved in his affairs.

Ordinary people would tremble in fear if warned with overwhelming strength.

However, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo didn’t reach this position for nothing, so he had some guts.

Sang Ik-seo laughed as heartily as possible, trying to appear unaffected, and said.

“Hahahaha. It seems I unintentionally offended you.”

“...”

“But I’m not trying to interfere or get involved in your affairs. I was simply asking out of pure curiosity since you’ve been frequently going back and forth to the underground prison, but it doesn’t seem like things are going well. I absolutely haven’t forgotten our agreement.”

“Is that so? Then you should keep that pure curiosity to yourself.”

“I’ve already kept it to myself.”

At his brazen response, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander snorted.

He was the only one who could walk the fine line and be cheeky every time he tried to intimidate him.

Of course, it was also because he could control his emotions and had good political maneuvering skills that he had chosen him.

-Shwip!

Soon, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander’s figure moved back to the chair at the table.

He picked up the sword he had placed on the table and began polishing it diligently again.

Seeing this, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo inwardly clicked his tongue.

Although they had joined hands because their interests aligned, whenever he experienced this man’s strength, he couldn’t help but wonder about his true identity.

There was no way someone like him hadn’t made a name for himself in the martial world until now.

Perhaps he had quite a reputation or notoriety in the martial world.

Curiosity piqued, the corners of Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo's mouth twitched.

He had never directly asked about this until now, but that man was always brimming with confidence, so he was curious.

‘I’ll get him to speak in a roundabout way.’

With that, Sang Ik-seo opened his mouth.

“Previously, when you suggested bringing Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon to our side, didn’t you say he could sufficiently escape from the grasp of the Northern Pacification Commissioner?”

The Northern Pacification Commissioner of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, Hyeon Soon.

Although his fame was inferior to that of the Southern Pacification Commissioner, who was considered one of the Six Heavens, he was a top master ranked among the top five in the Imperial Palace.

It was said that even if he didn’t have much contact with the people of the martial world, with his level of martial arts, if he were to go out into the martial world, only the elders or leaders of famous martial clans or sects would be able to contend with him.

He brought this up naturally because the one who was implicitly supporting and protecting this prince, Prince Jong, was none other than the Northern Pacification Commissioner Hyeon Soon.

-Shwip shwip!

The Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander replied while polishing his sword.

“…If they properly engage, it’s uncertain, but if Ma Ra-hyeon is determined to escape, even the Northern Pacification Commissioner would have a hard time catching him.”

“Oho. Is Ma Ra-hyeon that formidable?”

“With just his lightness skill, there aren’t many in the Imperial Palace who could catch up to him.”

“Amazing. To think that even the Northern Pacification Commissioner can’t catch up to him, my my.”

“So unless there’s a special mistake or unforeseen variable, it’s unlikely that Ma Ra-hyeon will be caught because of this incident.”

“An unforeseen variable... Do you mean unless someone like you appears?”

“...”

“No, no. Don’t take it that way. I was just reminded of how you easily subdued him.”

He had witnessed the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander subdue Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon right in front of him.

It had been settled in just a few moves.

At this question, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander stopped polishing his sword and stared intently at Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo, saying:

“What are you trying to say?”

“No. Since you easily subdued Ma Ra-hyeon, I was just thinking that if you were to step up later, you might be able to contend with the Northern Pacification Commissioner.”

“...”

“Is it perhaps difficult?”

Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo deliberately pricked at his pride a little.

Martial artists had a unique sense of pride as warriors.

He wasn't sure if it would work on this man, but if he took the bait, he might be able to gauge his level to some extent.

At that moment, one of the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander's eyebrows raised.

‘…Did I say something unnecessary?’

Seeing that, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo flinched and considered slowly backing out.

But then, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander opened his mouth.

“The expression ‘contend’ is used when both sides have equal skills.”

Inwardly relieved, Sang Ik-seo let out a sigh of relief.

He had been worried that the man would read his intentions and be displeased, but fortunately, it seemed he had properly provoked his pride.

“Then if you were to step up, you could sufficiently subdue the Northern Pacification Commissioner?”

“It might take some time, but it's not a very difficult task.”

“My my. If you can subdue the Northern Pacification Commissioner, then even the Chief Eunuch of the Eastern Depot or the Chief Eunuch of the Inner Court Administration wouldn’t be a match for you.”

At that moment, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander’s eyes sharpened.

Then he lowered his voice and said:

“…Don’t tell me you’re asking these questions to gauge my martial arts right now?”

At that question, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo hurriedly waved his hands and replied:

“No. How could I try to gauge you with such a thing? I was just thinking that I need to know to what extent you can deal with top masters...”

-Thud!

Before he could even finish speaking, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander rose from his seat.

Then he extended one hand and used profound internal energy to suck the scabbard lying on the floor into his grasp.

Sang Ik-seo couldn’t help but admire the skill of plucking an object from thin air.

As if he had intended for this, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander inserted the polished sword into the scabbard he had sucked into his hand.

And then he said:

“Let me make this clear.”

“What do you mean?”

“Here in the Imperial Palace, the only one I can’t handle is the Southern Pacification Commissioner alone.”

The Southern Pacification Commissioner, Gu Seong-baek.

Known as the Northern Blade King, he was the pinnacle of the current martial world and one of the Six Heavens.

Although the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander Gyeom-chang had great confidence in his own martial arts, the only one he acknowledged as unapproachable in the Imperial Palace was none other than Gu Seong-baek, one of the Six Heavens.

That’s how insurmountable the wall of the Six Heavens was.

However, other than that, he was confident that no one else in the Imperial Palace could be his match.

That included the Northern Pacification Commissioner and the three Chief Eunuchs of the Inner Palace.

“So I hope there won’t be any more attempts to gauge me with such trivial matters.”

-Woooosh!

With those words, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander Gyeom-chang revealed his energy towards Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo.

Sang Ik-seo trembled at the suffocating aura.

He could instinctively tell.

This man was definitely a master of the Transformation Realm who had crossed the threshold.

Just as he had boasted, there was absolutely no one in the Imperial Palace who could subdue him except for the Southern Pacification Commissioner Gu Seong-baek, who was known as the strongest master in the Imperial Palace...

-Thud!

At that moment, the door to the office suddenly opened.

And someone entered with a smile on their face.

Seeing that face, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo furrowed his brows and spoke.

“Lord Eunuch Ho?”

The one who had suddenly barged into his office was none other than the supervisor of the Western Depot, Chief Eunuch Ho.

Sang Ik-seo couldn't hide his bewilderment at the unexpected appearance of this person.

Outside the office, there were guards from the Imperial Guard standing watch.

Yet not a single one of them reported that the supervisor of the Western Depot had come here, and they didn't even notice when he opened the door.

‘Don't tell me he came here in secret?’

There was no other way he could have entered someone else's office so recklessly.

Although he, someone with one of the top martial arts in the Imperial Palace, failed to detect the presence of Chief Eunuch Ho, the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander, no, Gyeom-chang must have definitely noticed...

-Shwip!

At that moment, Gyeom-chang's hand was already gripping the hilt of his sword.

Seeing this, Sang Ik-seo's eyes flickered with surprise.

That was because Gyeom-chang, who had boasted that no one except the Southern Pacification Commissioner could be his match, was showing strong wariness towards the supervisor of the Western Depot.

‘Is it because he suddenly barged in?’

But this wasn't the time for that.

No matter how abruptly he had barged in, the other party was the supervisor of the Western Depot and a close confidant of Prince Gyeongjin, one of the four powers in the Imperial Palace.

He couldn't be treated carelessly.

So Sang Ik-seo tried to make him back off.

“Hundred-men Commander Gyeom. Put away your sword...”

“Associate Military Commissioner. Step back.”

At Gyeom-chang's words, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo furrowed his brows.

Gyeom-chang's attitude was odd.

Since he had been in the Imperial Palace for quite some time, he should know who the person in front of him was, but his current appearance was revealing hostility beyond mere wariness.

-Thud!

Gyeom-chang even took a sword stance.

Then, in a low voice, he spoke to Chief Eunuch Ho.

“Who the hell are you?”

‘Who are you?’

What kind of nonsense was this?

Anyone could see that it was Chief Eunuch Ho, the supervisor of the Western Depot.

Yet, ignoring Gyeom-chang, who had taken a sword stance towards him, Chief Eunuch Ho looked at Sang Ik-seo and opened his mouth.

“Judging by the Command Gu in your body, you must be the Associate Military Commissioner.”

‘!?’

At those completely unexpected words, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo's expression stiffened.

The very instant he heard about the Command Gu, Gyeom-chang, who had been gripping the sheath, moved his hand.

It was so fast that it was like a flash.

-Ching!

The moment he heard about the Command Gu, he judged the other party to be a definite enemy and tried to behead the person in front of him with a sword technique that had reached the pinnacle of swiftness.

No, before the guy could even realize it, his sword would have already sliced through the guy's neck...

-Thud! Clang!

At that moment, something fell to the floor.

It wasn't just one sound of something falling.

Something was strange.

Unconsciously, Gyeom-chang's eyes turned downward.

'This... What the...'

What had fallen to the floor was none other than his own right hand, which had been gripping the sword.

Chapter 259 – The Mark (6)

Last night.

-Plop! Plop!

Seeing the pieces of skin falling from Mok Gyeong-un's body, Cheong-ryeong was flabbergasted.

She had guessed that absorbing some of the demonic power of Nine-Tailed Fox, one of the Six Demons closest to the Divine Beasts, would advance his energy when internalized.

However, this wasn't just advancement.

Mok Gyeong-un's body, his muscles and bones, had once again reconstructed and evolved.

‘Metaphormosis[1]...’

This was called metamorphosis.

To think she would witness him achieve a second transformation right before her eyes.

This wasn't simply about expelling impurities from the body.

His body had transformed into the optimal state to handle that energy.

-Woooosh!

The vast demonic energy emanating from Mok Gyeong-un had already reached the pinnacle-stage, no, surpassed the Transformation Realm.

She herself had also crossed the threshold before her death.

However, she had never crossed the threshold of thresholds or actually seen it.

Thus, it was difficult to precisely judge the level Mok Gyeong-un's energy had reached, but...

‘…In terms of energy alone, wouldn't he be infinitely close to the Profound Realm?’

The Profound Realm.

It referred to the realm beyond the threshold of thresholds.

It was a realm surpassing the Transformation Realm, where controlling true energy was as natural as breathing, and it could be said to be the highest domain a martial artist could reach.

However, what was incomprehensible was that Mok Gyeong-un hadn't gained the enlightenment to cross the threshold of thresholds.

Is rebirth possible without enlightenment?

This was practically impossible.

‘Yet how is this possible?’

A second transformation.

Usually, energy that one couldn't handle would escape the body.

There was a saying that too much was worse than too little.

Thus, the body would release the excess energy that could become poison, regulating itself.

However, Mok Gyeong-un managed to internalize it all.

Everything became his own.

‘It’s different from the concept of evolution. It’s as if this guy’s body is adapting to extreme situations... Ah!’

Yes.

That expression was fitting.

His body was constantly adapting.

That adaptability was so unbelievably high that it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say it had surpassed human limits.

Clicking her tongue like that, Cheong-ryeong inwardly affirmed.

‘With his current state, he could sufficiently contend with the Eight Stars.’

The Six Heavens and Eight Stars, known as the pinnacle of the current martial world.

She was convinced that while Mok Gyeong-un’s martial power hadn’t reached the Six Heavens yet, he could definitely match the Eight Stars below them without being inferior.

-Thud! Clang!

The right hand gripping the sword fell to the floor.

Unconsciously seeing this, the eyes of the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander Gyeom-chang trembled.

He had unleashed a sword technique that could be called extremely swift.

Yet, without even blinking an eye, that guy's wrist had been sliced off.

‘Didn’t he say no one could match him except the Southern Pacification Commissioner?’

It was ridiculous how this happened not long after he had said that.

Of course, that didn’t mean he thought Gyeom-chang was bluffing.

Having actually witnessed his martial arts, he realized that the opponent was a tremendous monster.

‘Just what is his true identity?’

Both his martial arts and his knowledge of the Command Gu’s existence.

When the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander Gyeom-chang first brought a pair of Gu Poisons, he had said:

[When this is settled inside the body, it doesn’t harm the host at all. Rather, it survives on the impurities and waste in the organs, benefiting the body.]

[It's peculiar for something called a Gu Poison.]

[That's the advantage of this. When it's inside the body, it doesn't harm the host, and after a certain period, the organs no longer recognize it as a foreign substance.]

[What does that mean?]

[Even though it's inside the body, if it's not recognized as a foreign substance, it means that whether it's a physician or whoever, they can't detect the existence of the Gu Poison in the belly.]

[Ooh!]

Gyeom-chang had confidently asserted that no one could detect either the Gu Poison or the Command Gu.

He had stated that with such confidence, so how did this person find out?

As the puzzled Gyeom-chang, whose right hand had been cut off, extended his left hand...

-Woosh!

Strong energy coalesced on his left hand, forming the shape of a blade.

As a master of the Transformation Realm, he could freely control true energy like no other, so this wasn't a difficult task.

However...

“Huff... Huff...”

He couldn't move recklessly, knowing that the opponent was no ordinary master.

The fact that he had sliced off his wrist despite unleashing an extremely swift sword technique first clearly meant that the opponent was a step above him.

At that moment, Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo carefully opened his mouth.

“Who are you?”

At that question, the unknown person wearing the human skin mask of Chief Eunuch Ho, the supervisor of the Western Depot, smiled and replied.

“As you can see, I'm Chief Eunuch Ho.”

“...”

Did he think they would believe that now?

But the unknown person wearing Chief Eunuch Ho's human skin mask looked at Gyeom-chang, who had formed a sword stance and was ready to respond at any moment, and said:

“You should have sufficiently recognized the difference by now.”

“Huff... Huff...”

“If you want your remaining arm to stay intact, just step aside.”

At his arrogant attitude, Gyeom-chang gritted his teeth.

It was infuriating, but someone with this level of martial arts had every right to say that to him.

However, there were situations where one had to back down when the opponent was a step above, and there were situations where one didn't, and this was clearly the latter.

Glancing sideways at the Associate Military Commissioner, Gyeom-chang opened his mouth.

“Huff... Huff... I don't know your true identity, but since you mentioned the Command Gu, you must be related to Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon, right?”

“Who knows.”

It was neither an affirmation nor a denial.

However, even with this ambiguous answer, Gyeom-chang could be certain of the relationship.

“Is that so? Then do you also know that if the host of the Command Gu is in danger or their life is at risk, it can cause problems for both sides later on?”

“Both sides?”

“If the host dies, the Command Gu also dies. In that case, the parasitic male Command Gu inside the host also dies while harming the host. Do you understand what that means?”

It meant that Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon, who was hosting the parasitic type, would also die.

“...”

At this, Mok Gyeong-un showed no particular reaction.

However, seeing his lack of response and the disappearance of his smile, it seemed he understood the implication.

Here, Gyeom-chang spoke to drive his point home.

“It’s best not to move. Even if threatened, it’s also possible to kill the Command Gu internally. If that happens, Ma Ra-hyeon dies too.”

Thinking he had gained the upper hand, Gyeom-chang issued a warning.

As if his threat had worked.

The expression of the unknown person wearing Chief Eunuch Ho’s human skin mask had stiffened quite a bit.

His gaze had also lowered, but...

‘Below?’

Where was he looking now?

His gaze, which had been directed at Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo until just now, had suddenly shifted downward.

It was towards the severed right hand lying on the floor.

Why was he staring at that?

While Gyeom-chang was puzzled, the person wearing Chief Eunuch Ho's face, no, Mok Gyeong-un, suddenly reached out his hand towards it.

At that moment...

-Whoosh!

The right hand, no, the unique saber Gyeom-chang's right hand had been gripping, the Lipyeongdo, rose from the floor and was sucked into Mok Gyeong-un's hand.

Why did he take his saber?

As Gyeom-chang was questioning this...

-Pak!

Mok Gyeong-un, who had dropped the right hand gripping the saber, stared intently at the tip of the scabbard.

Seeing this, Gyeom-chang's eyes soon widened.

‘No way?’

It was right then.

-Shwip!

Mok Gyeong-un's figure vanished and suddenly reappeared behind Gyeom-chang.

-Flinch!

‘Fast.’

Gyeom-chang, who had been focusing and on alert, was startled by the incredibly swift movement and hastily tried to launch his body forward to gain some distance.

However, the moment he kicked off the floor...

-Slash!

Something sharp brushed past his left shoulder, where he had formed a sword stance.

It was none other than his unique saber, the Lipyeongdo.

Soon, his severed left arm fell to the floor, and just as he was about to lose balance, Mok Gyeong-un grabbed his head and smashed his face into the floor.

-Bam!

“Ugh.”

It didn’t end there.

Still gripping his head, Mok Gyeong-un pushed his face towards the edge of the floor.

-Skid skid skid!

The force was so brutal that a grotesque scream burst out from Gyeom-chang’s mouth as his face was completely torn off.

“Aaaaagh.”

-Crack! Squish! Crunch!

His teeth were all broken, and wooden splinters and stone fragments were embedded in his eyeballs.

It was so painful that he felt like he would lose consciousness.

As he was suffering like that, his hair was eventually pulled, and his face was tilted upward.

‘Eek!’

Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo was at a loss for words at the bloodied and horribly disfigured face.

To think he would do this even after the warning, did he not care about Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon’s life at all?

Then, Mok Gyeong-un smiled so eerily that the corners of his mouth nearly reached his ears and spoke.

“I finally found it.”

At the tip of the scabbard held in Mok Gyeong-un’s left hand, filled with exhilaration, was a strange pattern engraved.

It was a mark identical to the scar left on his deceased grandfather.

Chapter 260 – The Mark (7)

It looked like writing, yet it wasn’t.

It was a mark with a single line vertically penetrating the center of the character 二 (two).

As it didn't exist as a written character, it was closer to a kind of symbol.

Mok Gyeong-un had spent a long time searching for this scar-like mark that had been left on his deceased grandfather's body.

And the first time he found someone with an identical mark was the scar on the side of Mok In-dan, the leader of the Yeon Mok Sword Manor.

Leader Mok In-dan had said that the one who left this scar was Ghost Blade, one of the Eight Stars.

Since Ghost Blade had left this mark on the leader, Mok Gyeong-un was convinced that he was either the same person who killed his grandfather or was related to him, so he had been searching for clues about him.

And now, another trace had finally been discovered.

It was different from before.

That was because...

‘It wasn't a scar, but deliberately engraved.’

This was semantically different.

The marks left on his grandfather and Yeon Mok Sword Manor's leader Mok In-dan were scars forcibly carved by someone else.

However, the mark engraved on the tip of the scabbard wasn't a trace of being subjected to something.

It was nothing more than a mark meant to be seen.

“Ugh...”

Mok Gyeong-un pulled back even harder on the hair of the Embroidered Uniform Guard Hundred-men Commander Gyeom-chang, whose face was completely torn and suffering, and said:

“You have no idea how long I've been searching.”

“Whaa... aaa... yuu... uugh.”

Gyeom-chang's pronunciation was slurred as all his teeth were broken.

In fact, not just his teeth or face, but with his right wrist cut off and his left arm severed up to the shoulder, it wouldn't be strange if his life ended at any moment.

-Tap tap tap!

As if aware of this condition, Mok Gyeong-un pressed the acupuncture point on his left shoulder to stop the bleeding.

Then the gushing blood quickly ceased.

Of course, even so, he had already lost so much blood that his complexion was beyond pale and extremely serious.

“Uuugh.”

“I got a bit rough without realizing it. But it’s okay. You’re still alive, aren’t you?”

-Tremble tremble!

As he nonchalantly said those chilling words with a smile, Gyeom-chang convulsed.

Although his vision was dyed red and he could barely see due to the wooden splinters and fragments embedded in his eyes, he could definitely feel the malice in Mok Gyeong-un’s voice.

Amidst the pain, Gyeom-chang’s mind became confused.

Who the hell was he?

He had clearly reacted after seeing the mark engraved on his scabbard.

At this point, it was safe to say that almost no one could recognize this mark...

“St- stop.”

At that moment, someone shouted at Mok Gyeong-un.

It was none other than the Embroidered Uniform Guard Associate Military Commissioner Sang Ik-seo.

With a tense expression, he had called out to Mok Gyeong-un with a certain determination.

However, Mok Gyeong-un didn’t even turn his head, as if he had no interest.

‘Tsk.’

Did he not even care about him?

So Sang Ik-seo placed a palm on his abdomen and said:

“If you try to kill that person, I will also eliminate the Command Gu in my belly.”

-Shwip!

Only then did Mok Gyeong-un’s gaze turn towards him.

Seeing this, Sang Ik-seo hoped that his gamble would work.

Although he had attacked Gyeom-chang as if it didn’t matter, there was no way it was actually fine.

The reason that guy had come here was definitely related to the Command Gu inside his body.

If not, there would be no reason for him to come.

“You’ll eliminate the Command Gu?”

“That’s right. I don’t know what your true identity is or what you really want, but you can’t deny that one of your purposes for coming here is related to Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon, right?”

“So?”

“…I won’t say it again. Release that person right now. And leave.”

“If I don’t leave, you’ll eliminate the Command Gu?”

“That’s right.”

At his words, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

“Do as you wish.”

‘!?’

Sang Ik-seo furrowed his brows at those words.

What kind of reaction was this?

Do as he wished?

“You don’t care what happens to Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon?”

“No. So do as you wish. Instead, since you threatened me, I’ll make sure you pay the price for it.”

-Shiver!

Those words sent shivers down Sang Ik-seo’s entire body.

No, he made eye contact with Mok Gyeong-un, who was staring at him with an expressionless face, and in that moment, he even saw a hallucination of his entire body being sliced and torn apart.

‘D- damn it...’

In an instant, Sang Ik-seo’s forehead was drenched in cold sweat.

He had tried to create an opportunity for negotiation, but nothing worked.

He was at a loss for what to do, but...

-Shwip!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un's figure disappeared before his eyes.

‘Huh? No way?’

But then...

-Tap tap tap tap! Thud!

Feeling the blood splatter from behind, Sang Ik-seo immediately lost consciousness.

Mok Gyeong-un, who had knocked him out by striking his blood acupoints, snorted and looked at his abdomen as he lay there.

“Well, a promise is a promise.”

Through Mok Gyeong-un's right eye, which had activated the power of the Third Eye, it was visible.

The female Gu Poison Command Gu, curled up in a corner of Sang Ik-seo's abdomen, lying still as if dead.

-Shwip!

Mok Gyeong-un slightly cut his index finger with his energy.

Then a drop of blood started to form on his finger.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un brought his finger with the blood droplet towards the location of the female Gu Poison Command Gu.

And then...

-Stab!

He inserted his finger, penetrating Sang Ik-seo's abdomen.

Although unconscious, as if his body instinctively sensed that something had entered it, his body twitched.

Regardless, Mok Gyeong-un slightly moved the tip of his inserted finger.

Then...

-Pak!

Something was felt sticking to the wound on his finger.

In sync with this, Mok Gyeong-un pulled out the finger he had penetrated.

Then, a grotesque insect was seen wriggling and sticking to the wound on his finger.

‘Simple.’

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled.

Those who didn't know much about Gu Poisons would agonize over how to remove it, using drugs or devising ways to eliminate it from inside the body.

However, surprisingly, if one utilized the nature of Gu Poisons, it was possible to easily extract it.

That was because Gu Poisons were drawn to stronger poisons.

Since it was born from the combination of numerous poison bugs, poison plants, and things related to poison, Gu Poisons were keenly responsive to new poisons.

-Slurp slurp!

Mok Gyeong-un's blood was nothing short of a deadly poison.

Thus, the Gu Poison was naturally drawn to it and was desperate to consume it.

'What the hell is that...'

Seeing this with his faintly remaining vision, Gyeom-chang's expression stiffened.

If carelessly extracted, the Command Gu would burst and die on its own.

Yet it was sticking to that person's finger, refusing to let go.

What the hell was going on?

As he was puzzled, at that moment, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth and tossed the Gu Poison hanging from his finger into his mouth.

‘Huh?’

And with that, Mok Gyeong-un chewed on the female Gu Poison Command Gu as it was.

-Crunch!

-Squeal squeal squeal!

Although he had closed his mouth and was chewing, the sound of the Command Gu screaming inside could be heard.

‘!!!!!!’

Seeing this, Gyeom-chang was flabbergasted.

Although born as a pair, the Command Gu itself was as deadly as the parasitic type.

Yet he was directly chewing and eating this lump of deadly poison?

Putting aside disgust, it was a truly insane act.

‘Is he trying to kill himself?’

But eventually, after chewing for a while, Mok Gyeong-un gulped it down.

Having eaten the female Gu Poison Command Gu as it was, Mok Gyeong-un pressed the acupuncture point on the Associate Military Commissioner’s punctured abdomen to stop the bleeding and walked back to Gyeom-chang.

Seeing this, Gyeom-chang couldn't understand.

‘Why is he unharmed?’

The poison of the Gu Poison was so toxic that the esophagus should have melted.

Yet Mok Gyeong-un was perfectly fine.

As he was puzzled with a dumbfounded face, Mok Gyeong-un smiled nonchalantly and said:

“You must be wondering why I’m unharmed, right?”

“Hoo... juss... how...”

“It’s because the poison in my body is stronger than the Gu Poison’s poison, so I’m fine, right?”

‘Poison in his body? Could it be... a Poison Master?’

Gyeom-chang couldn't help but be inwardly shocked at those words.

As far as he knew, in all of the Central Plains and beyond, there were only two people who had reached the level of a Poison Master.

It was only Guyang Sa-oh, the Head of the Guyang Family, who guarded the entrance to the Western Depot and wielded the Eight Poison Snake Staff, and Dang Inhae, the Head of the Sichuan Dang Family, one of the Seven Great Families, who possessed the Thousand Poison Hands.

But was this person saying he was a Poison Master?

‘Is he one of those two?’

It was highly likely.

However, he definitely wasn't Guyang Sa-oh of the Eight Poison Snake Staff.

No, in the first place, he couldn't even be here and wouldn't interfere with their affairs.

Then that meant...

‘The Thousand Poison Hands?’

If it wasn't him who had reached the level of a Poison Master, he wouldn't be able to withstand the Gu Poison.

Convinced that Mok Gyeong-un was Dang Inhae, the Head of the Sichuan Dang Family and the Thousand Poison Hands, Gyeom-chang spoke in an uncomprehending tone:

“Withstannng... the poosn... tha's one thing... buh... why... did yoo... eat it? If the Spiwit Dwum... dies... the othew... paiw... of Pawasitic Poosn also...”

“It seems you surprisingly don't know much about Gu Poisons.”

“Huh?”

“Gu Poisons aren't simply made by gathering poison bugs and selecting the most toxic ones. In the first place, the fact that a pair is made to influence each other also contains a kind of sorcerous power.”

“Sowcewy?”

“If a being that has overcome all poisons and become a commander is defeated by another poison and consumed, what would happen to the hierarchy?”

‘!?’

At those words, Gyeom-chang’s eyes, reddened with wounds, trembled.

It was because he understood what Mok Gyeong-un had said.

‘Is that really possible?’

It was a part he had theoretically understood but doubted if it was actually possible.

If the Command Gu was eaten by a poison bug with a stronger poison, it was possible for that poison bug to become the new Command Gu.

However, it was unknown whether it would be possible if it was a Poison Master, not a poison bug.

As he was puzzled, Mok Gyeong-un approached, grabbed his hair, and said:

-Grab!

“Well... if Thousand-men Commander Ma Ra-hyeon is alive, I would have become the Command Gu, and if not, it was just bad luck.”

At those words, Gyeom-chang inwardly clicked his tongue.

Didn’t that mean he had gambled on something he himself couldn’t be certain of?

As he was dumbfounded by this...

-Bam!

“Ugh!”

Mok Gyeong-un slammed his face onto the floor and said:

“Rather than that, wouldn’t it be better for you to focus on your own situation? From now on, I’m going to count how many times the words ‘please kill me’ come out of your mouth.”