

## Mayhem 321

### Chapter 321 – Fragments of Truth (3)

[If you don't want to be infected with the Formless Poison, it's best not to come close.]

'Formless Poison?'

At Medicine Immortal Hae Yeong Mun-no's warning, Lee Gwang stopped in his tracks.

Even those unfamiliar with poisons have likely heard of one notorious poison at least once.

That was none other than the Formless Poison.

The Formless Poison, as the name suggests, is a poison without form—colorless, odorless, and tasteless—making it impossible to detect any distinguishing features, thus earning it the title of the king of poisons.

The more potent a poison, the fewer characteristics it possesses, so one may not even realize they have been poisoned until it's too late, and the Formless Poison is the pinnacle of such poisons.

[...Formless Poison? What do you mean by that?]

Lee Gwang asked, puzzled.

After all, the only one known as the Formless Poison throughout the Central Plains was the Emperor's Primal Poison, also called the Ultimate Poison, of the Sichuan Tang Clan.

The Emperor's Primal Poison was created by Tang Hyeong-won, the patriarch considered as the founder of the Tang Clan.

As the king of poisons who had reached the realm of the Ten Thousand Poisons Body, his poison-crafting techniques were unparalleled and innate. On his deathbed, he had condensed all the poison energy he had accumulated throughout his life to create this Emperor's Primal Poison.

This poison, called perfection itself, was a legendary poison that even the Tang Clan's generations of poison masters could not analyze or recreate, no matter how hard they tried.

Nowadays, only a tiny amount of this poison remains, and the people of the Central Plains refer to it as the Formless Poison. Due to its extremely dangerous nature, it has been designated as an absolute taboo through the Righteous Sects' Great Assembly.

[Surely you're not talking about the Formless Poison you know?]

[Cough, cough... Is there any other Formless Poison?]

'!?'

What is this nonsense?

Then does that mean Medicine Immortal Hae Yeong Mun-no has been poisoned by the Formless Poison?

In a brief moment, several assumptions formed in Lee Gwang's mind.

However, among those assumptions, one that was particularly incomprehensible was that Ghost Blade couldn't possibly use poison techniques.

'That can't be.'

Ghost Blade takes immense pride in his own swordsmanship.

Thus, he would never use any weapon or martial art other than his sword.

Lee Gwang's gaze turned to the traces around him.

He had found it strange that there were no sword marks at all.

This meant...

'...He didn't fight Ghost Blade.'

These were traces of a fight with someone else.

Then why did Ghost Blade hurriedly leave this place?

Unusually for him, he had rushed away without even surveying his surroundings, as if being chased... No, that's not it.

'He wasn't being chased, but trying to chase someone?'

That's right.

That's it.

Ghost Blade had hastened as if pursuing someone's tracks.

The one he was chasing was none other than the person who had gravely injured Medicine Immortal Hae Yeong Mun-no to the point where he could barely stand.

Having confirmed all the circumstances, Lee Gwang spoke as if finding it ironic:

[Mun-no. Who exactly did you fight?]

[...]

Despite his question, Medicine Immortal Hae Yeong Mun-no gave no answer.

Instead, he was silently regulating his breathing.

With each exhale, beads of sweat trickled down, and faint wisps of haze rose above his shoulders.

[Huff... huff... Cough, cough.]

He looked to be in immense difficulty.

The Mun-no known to the world, along with Medicine King Hua Tuo, was said to possess the greatest medicinal knowledge and medical expertise of the era, earning him the title of Medicine Immortal.

However, his hidden side was that of a supreme master who had reached a level of poison arts on par with the renowned poison clans—the Tang Clan, the Guyang Clan, and the Baek Clan.

His prowess was such that he had even defeated the First Realm's Ghost Blade in the past.

Who could have appeared and defeated him?

-Sssss!

The haze escaping from his body...

No matter how one looked at it, it seemed to be dispelling the poison energy.

Two names came to Lee Gwang's mind.

Guyang Sa-oh, the Clan Leader of the Guyang Clan who had reached the pinnacle of poison arts, known as the Eight Poison Snake Staff, and Tang In-hae, the Clan Leader of the Sichuan Tang Clan, one of the Seven Great Clans, known as the Thousand Poison Hand.

'If that really is the Formless Poison...'

Then the one who fought him was a master of the Sichuan Tang Clan.

And that person even had the authority to boldly use the Formless Poison, which the righteous martial world had designated as an absolute taboo.

In the Sichuan Tang Clan, the one capable of such a thing was...

'The Thousand Poison Hand?'

Lee Gwang couldn't help but feel doubtful.

Although he couldn't be certain it was definitely him, the probability of it being Tang In-hae, the Thousand Poison Hand, was currently the highest.

But why did Tang In-hae come all the way here to confront Mun-no?

No, it was hard to even consider it a confrontation.

From the moment he used the Formless Poison, it was clear he had desperately tried to kill his opponent.

However, it didn't make sense.

'Why? The Sichuan Tang Clan has no reason to hold a grudge against Mun-no.'

No matter how much he thought about it, that was the case.

Mun-no's identity known to the world was that of a Medicine Immortal who was highly respected by all.

Unless his hidden identity was revealed...

'Ah!'

Lee Gwang spoke as if he finally understood.

[The Sichuan Tang Clan found out that you are a member of the Fire Faith Order?]

Otherwise, there would be no reason for them to come and kill him while he was in seclusion.

Despite his confident question, Mun-no remained silent, spending time dispelling the poison and recovering.

At this...

-Swish!

Lee Gwang drew the black sword he had sheathed at his waist.

Since he kept avoiding conversation, it seemed he had no choice but to resort to force.

However, if he was truly poisoned by the Formless Poison, approaching him closely should be avoided.

Even though he could control his true energy as if breathing after surpassing the barrier, he had to be cautious of the Formless Poison, known as the king of poisons, as it followed a different path.

-Woong!

Unleashing his sword energy, Lee Gwang aimed it at Mun-no and spoke:

[If you continue to keep your mouth shut about what happened, I won't ask any further. However, I must know where you hid that thing from the prophecy.]

[...]

[In your current state, unable to even properly dispel the poison, I can easily kill you with mere sword techniques. So speak.]

Lee Gwang threatened him, urging him to talk.

Then, Mun-no, who had been silently focusing on circulating his energy, opened his mouth:

[Haa... haa... You people know nothing.]

[...What nonsense are you spouting? Do you think I can't kill you? The order has already been given to end your life if it comes to this.]

[That's not important. Cough, cough. But you people must know the truth.]

[You're not making any sense. If you continue like this...]

[The prophecy was wrong.]

'!?'

Lee Gwang, who was about to take action, paused for a moment.

What is this old man saying now?

The prophecy was wrong?

He had already found it strange when he heard the news that Mun-no had suddenly disappeared with that thing from the prophecy 17 years ago.

[...What are you talking about?]

Does this old man know something about the prophecy?

If that's the case, he needed to hear him out first.

[Mun-no. If you want to survive, speak clearly.]

[The sacred flame... shall be tainted by black evil... Beware the incarnation of Ahriman who will appear in this world.]

That's right.

That prophecy.

The moment the Holy Fire Priestess made that prophecy and Medicine Immortal Hae Yeong Mun-no betrayed them and fled 17 years ago, the relationship between the organization and Fire Faith Order had reached a catastrophic point.

[As a Guardian, you were right by her side when she made that prophecy, so why did you do such a thing? Your brothers and sisters paid the price for the sin you committed.]

[That was not my sin. Haa... haa... Her interpretation lost its direction.]

[Direction?]

What does he mean by her interpretation losing direction?

Is he referring to the Holy Fire Priestess?

As he pondered this, Mun-no continued:

[That is not an incarnation to be wary of, as she interpreted it.]

[What nonsense are you...]

[Cough, cough... The coins of the Western Regions have different patterns on the front and back, but whichever side you look at, it is ultimately one.]

Lee Gwang clicked his tongue.

He couldn't comprehend what Mun-no was saying at all.

Had he gone mad while living in seclusion all this time?

Saying that the incarnation of evil should not be feared?

Is this why?

Perhaps this old man Mun-no had gone insane and become tainted by the incarnation of evil.

He may have been so deeply immersed in evil that he turned his back on everyone and fled.

The order from above to eliminate Medicine Immortal Mun-no if he didn't reveal anything seemed to be because of this.

Either way, it seemed unlikely to extract any information from him in this state.

[You old man seems to have gone completely mad, tainted by evil, but I'll give you a chance for old times' sake.]

[...]

[That thing from the prophecy, no, where did you take the incarnation of Ahriman? Even if it's not you, once we capture that old woman Holy Fire Priestess, we'll find out soon enough.]

At his words, Mun-no chuckled.

[You're laughing?]

[She has lost her qualification.]

[What are you saying?]

[What my words mean... Cough, cough... Your great master knows even better.]

The moment the word “master” was mentioned, Lee Gwang’s eyes changed.

To him, that person was his lord, whom his clan had served for generations, and a being to be worshipped like a god.

How dare he bring up that person?

[Are you, the sinner who stole the incarnation, trying to blaspheme against that person now?]

[It’s truly regrettable. Mok-gan, that man, is the one who blinded her eyes and caused all this...]

[Shut up!]

-Swish swish swish!

Before Mun-no could even finish his sentence...

Unable to contain his anger, Lee Gwang unleashed a barrage of his most powerful Bullet Sword Techniques along with a shout.

-Whoosh!

Although Mun-no couldn’t control his body due to the Formless Poison, he tried to move to avoid the attack.

However, it seemed his body was already too damaged to move as he wanted.

-Swish swish swish!

The first Bullet Sword Technique he had launched sliced through Mun-no's waist as he leaped up, and the following techniques shredded his falling lower body into pieces.

-Thud thud thud!

Amidst the severed chunks of flesh that were once his lower body, Mun-no fell.

-Thump!

With only his upper body remaining and his organs spilling out, his appearance was utterly gruesome.

Although it was already difficult to survive in this state, Lee Gwang's fury had not subsided, and he attempted to launch another sword technique at the fallen Mun-no to finish him off.

[You brought this upon yourself, old...]

It was at that very moment.

-Flinch!

'What?'

A tremendous energy was felt, sending a chill down his spine.

It was an energy that could instantly put even someone like him, who had surpassed the barrier, on guard, forcing him to halt his attack.

'Has Ghost Blade returned?'

If that's the case, he needs to leave quickly.

He had to carry out the task discreetly, without Ghost Blade's knowledge.

In any case, now that Mun-no, that old man, had been poisoned by the Formless Poison and lost his lower body, he would definitely not survive.

With this in mind, Lee Gwang didn't hesitate and launched himself in the opposite direction.

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"I... I did contribute to Mun-no's demise in the end, but he was going to die from the Formless Poison anyway..."

-Squish! Squish! Crunch!

As Lee Gwang was recounting the events as if reminiscing, he couldn't continue his words.

The reason was that the air was becoming so heavy with each word he spoke that it was difficult to breathe.

But that wasn't the end of it.

The ground around him trembled violently and then cracked, and even...

-Whoooosh!

The pouring rain was flowing in reverse.

The rain flowing backward turned into water vapor as it evaporated, creating an extremely bizarre sight.

Lee Gwang couldn't bring himself to look at Mok Gyeong-un's face.

He had willingly confessed the events of that day in order to seek his own death, but this had brought about an outcome far worse than he had hoped for.

'I... I can't breathe.'

It was as if the area around him and the bastard had become a vacuum.

Just how intense must the killing intent be to materialize to this extent?

"Urk... urk..."

As he retched up blood from the agony, Mok Gyeong-un's voice reached his ears:

"This wasn't a matter to be settled with just you."

What?

This bastard's way of speaking suddenly changed.

With just a change in his manner of speech, the atmosphere had inexplicably shifted, and as Lee Gwang raised his head in bewilderment...

'!!!!'

He saw that Mok Gyeong-un's eyes had turned as black as obsidian.

Chapter 322 – Fragments of Truth (4)

It was an occurrence brought about by an accumulation of killing intent.

Mok Gyeong-un had possessed a strong killing intent since childhood, to the point where it could be considered a murderous nature.

Due to the intensity of this killing intent, his grandfather had advised him to refrain from meeting others.

However, this wasn't the case throughout his entire childhood.

Mok Gyeong-un had learned to control this innate killing intent through acquired means.

His grandfather had taught him to always imagine his state of mind as a tranquil lake, never allowing it to be stirred by turbulence. He had also instilled in him a sense of propriety, ensuring it permeated his daily life.

This had a significant effect.

As Mok Gyeong-un deeply respected the grandfather who had raised him, he eventually reached a point where he unconsciously adhered to those teachings.

However...

-Snap!

When his rage reached its peak and his unleashed killing intent became uncontrollable, something snapped within Mok Gyeong-un's mind, no, his heart.

It wasn't simply crossing a line deep within his heart.

It was as if something he had suppressed was erupting, and at some point, it began to take over his mind and everything else.

“You... those eyes... what the hell?”

Lee Gwang couldn’t hide his bewilderment at Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes, which had turned as black as obsidian.

Just meeting his gaze was enough to overwhelm him with an imposing aura, leaving his mind in a daze.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un scoffed and spoke:

“Thanks to you, I’ve awakened after a long time, but this situation is troublesome.”

“What?”

“I haven’t completely assimilated yet.”

“What are you talking about...”

“Humans are imperfect beings, but they find their path within that imperfection. That’s why I held high expectations for their potential and wanted to harmonize with you all.”

‘!?’

“But it seems you often disappoint me, perhaps because you’re always faced with a crossroads of binary choices.”

Lee Gwang’s eyes trembled violently.

The confidence and majesty filling his voice made it seem as if he was looking at an emperor.

This imposing aura could be described as domination, no, the presence of an absolute being. The moment he felt it, only one thing came to Lee Gwang's mind.

-The sacred flame... shall be tainted by black evil... Beware the incarnation of Ahriman who will appear in this world.

"A... Ahriman?"

Lee Gwang spoke in a trembling voice, looking at Mok Gyeong-un.

At those words, Mok Gyeong-un raised an eyebrow and spoke:

"Ahriman? Yes, I was called that as well."

'!!!!'

It was unbelievable.

He had thought it was simply a prophecy signifying the birth of a great murderous being who would throw the world into chaos.

This monstrous bastard was undoubtedly that incarnation.

But...

'Incarnation? Is this an incarnation?'

Can this even be called an incarnation?

No.

This is the real thing.

“Ahriman!”

As Lee Gwang became overcome with emotion, Mok Gyeong-un chuckled and said:

“Whether you call me Ahriman, Tianzi, a devil, or anything else, it doesn’t matter. Humans are beings that fixate only on the aspects they want to see anyway. However...”

-Swish!

As Mok Gyeong-un extended his hand, Lee Gwang’s body, with only one leg remaining, began to tremble violently.

Under the influx of black energy, his body not only shook but also swelled as if it would burst.

“You were prepared for the consequences when you killed him, weren’t you?”

“Kuuuuuh.”

It was too agonizing.

It felt as if every drop of blood was suffering.

It was a pain he had never experienced before, making him feel like he would die, unable to endure it.

“S-stop...”

Mok Gyeong-un whispered to the anguished Lee Gwang:

“With this level of power, I can not only shred your physical body but also your soul, annihilating it completely.”

“S-soul?”

“What do you think it means for a soul to vanish?”

“W-what...”

“It means your very existence will be erased, regardless of reincarnation or anything else.”

-Shudder!

Amidst the pain, Lee Gwang was gripped by a fear that made him suddenly alert.

“I... I...”

“Do you want to at least keep your soul intact? Then tell me. Where is the one who ordered you to kill him, no, Mun-no?”

“T-that person... kuuuuh.”

-Crack crack crack!

As he spoke, cracks began to appear on his swollen body.

As the cracks formed, the sensation wasn't pain but a gradual loss of all feeling.

It was as if nothing existed.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un grinned eerily and said:

“What should I do? It seems best to hurry. Your soul is already being torn apart.”

It was truly bizarre.

He was someone who had stubbornly clung to his loyalty to that person, even prepared to face death.

However, when the being before him said his soul would be erased and his existence would vanish, he was overcome with extreme fear and found himself speaking without realizing it.

“Ghost Blade... only the deputy leaders of the First Realm can directly contact that person.”

“How can I meet this human called Ghost Blade?”

“Ghost Blade... kuuuuuh.”

“The time is approaching.”

“Ghost Blade will definitely appear if... if the Heaven and Earth Society Leader summons him. P-please spare me. I... I don't want my existence to disappear.”

“Alright. I'll do that.”

“R-really?”

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, Lee Gwang’s face lit up despite his agony.

Having experienced all sorts of bizarre things while serving that person, he believed in the existence of the soul and reincarnation.

Thus, he wanted to avoid having his existence erased at all costs.

To him, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said:

“But while I may do that, the ‘Right’ doesn’t want it.”

“What?”

“We’re still separate entities, you see.”

“H-hey, that’s different from what you promised. What are you talking about... urk!”

-Crack crack crack!

Lee Gwang’s swollen body crumbled into pieces, scattering like ashes.

The only part that remained was his head, but even that cracked and crumbled.

The shattered dust seeped into the rainwater pooled on the ground, fading away as if it had never existed in the first place.

Looking down at this with an indifferent gaze, Mok Gyeong-un spoke:

“If you’re awake, get up on your own, old woman.”

-Flinch!

At those words, the Holy Fire Priestess, who had been lying face down a short distance away, trembled.

Although she had fainted during Lee Gwang’s torture, she had woken up midway and heard their entire conversation.

‘Ahriman, he said? How could this happen...’

She couldn’t hide her shock.

Something that should never have happened had occurred.

That prophecy was originally...

-Wooooosh!

“Huk!”

At that moment, Holy Fire Priestess’s body rose from the ground.

Her body, now upright, directly faced Mok Gyeong-un.

Seeing the black energy flowing from his entire body and his obsidian-like eyes, she was so shaken that she lost her words.

As she stood there, shocked and at a loss, Mok Gyeong-un spoke:

“Although you have already strayed from my path, you sure made good use of the mission given to you. How does it feel to have lost the price you paid?”

At that question, the Holy Fire Priestess’s eyes widened as if they would burst.

Others might not understand if they heard it, but she knew what those words meant.

“Y-you are...”

“This is me, and that is also me. You know that well, old woman.”

“I...”

“Saying you have already paid the price cannot undo everything. I am not one to forgive.”

-Thud!

The moment he finished speaking, the Holy Fire Priestess fell to her knees and prostrated herself on the ground.

Then, she cried out in a pleading voice to Mok Gyeong-un:

“If you say you will punish my sins, I will gladly accept it. But I had no choice. I couldn’t lose what I had left. My one and only... urk!”

She clutched her chest, unable to finish her sentence.

Her heart was beating so violently that it felt like needles were stabbing it.

It was so painful that even breathing was difficult.

As Mok Gyeong-un made a gesture of clenching something with his hand, blood spurted from her mouth.

“Puh!”

Coughing up blood, she gasped in agony.

“Kuuuuuh.”

“I don’t give a damn about your pathetic circumstances.”

“Kuuuh... p-please...”

“Because of your foolishness, the ‘Right’ lost something that shouldn’t have been lost, and I too had to experience the same pain as back then.”

“Spare...”

“Your words are meaningless. I am no longer a merciful being. So I will erase everything related to the seeds you sowed and that being to whom you wagged your crafty tongue...”

-Crack!

It was at that moment.

Something shattered within Mok Gyeong-un’s chest, and something revealed itself.

It was none other than Cheong-ryeong.

‘Huh?’

Holy Fire Priestess’s eyes, which had been gasping for breath due to the pain in her heart, trembled.

The pain had suddenly ceased.

Could it be that he was showing mercy?

As she raised her head in confusion, she saw Mok Gyeong-un staring into empty space, as if looking at nothing.

Why was he acting like that?

-...You mortal, no, what the hell are you?

Cheong-ryeong, who had forcibly broken free from the wooden puppet’s seal, parted her lips as she gazed at Mok Gyeong-un, whose eyes had turned as black as obsidian.

At her question, the obsidian-like eyes took on a strange look.

Cheong-ryeong’s eyes wavered as she watched this.

-Those eyes...

It was the moment she approached him, about to say something.

-Sssss!

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

Then, as if experiencing an extreme headache, he clutched his head with one hand and staggered, his expression contorting.

Seeing this, Cheong-ryeong furrowed her brow and spoke:

-What are you doing now? Are you alright?

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un slowly raised his head.

'!?'

As his eyes and expression returned to their usual state, she couldn't hide her bewilderment.

Just a moment ago, Mok Gyeong-un had definitely become a completely different being.

He couldn't even hear her voice from inside the wooden puppet.

That's why she had finally intervened, but what the hell was going on?

She asked:

-...Is it really you, Immortal?

At her question, Mok Gyeong-un silently nodded.

-Do you remember what just happened?

At that question, Mok Gyeong-un held his forehead.

Then, with an expression of incomprehension, he communicated via voice transmission:

-It's strange.

-What?

-I clearly had consciousness and memory, but I spoke and moved against my will.

-You remember?

-...Yes.

He remembered clearly.

He was aware of what he had said and the situation he was in.

He even felt the emotions and feelings with which he had spoken those words.

Yet all of this was unrelated to his own will.

It felt as if another being within him had shared a single body and carried out everything.

'What the hell is this?'

For the first time, Mok Gyeong-un had questions about himself.

There was definitely another being within him that he hadn't been aware of.

But this feeling wasn't uncomfortable or foreign. It felt so natural, as if they had been one from the beginning, making it incomprehensible to him.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un looked at Cheong-ryeong.

'What kind of feeling was that?'

Although it had been unrelated to his will, since the emotions and feelings of that moment had been fully shared, it was difficult to forget the last part.

It was close to an indescribable sense of nostalgia.

Chapter 323 – Fragments of Truth (5)

Mok Gyeong-un had felt this emotion before.

Whenever he thought of his grandfather, he would miss him.

Naturally, a sense of wistfulness was mixed into that feeling of longing.

'What could it be?'

Mok Gyeong-un had strong doubts about the emotions held by this being that existed independently of his will.

He didn't know how long this being had been inside him, but the feeling of wistfulness similarly arose from longing.

Cheong-ryeong was a spirit who had died long ago, so why did he feel such an emotion toward her?

He was only just turning 18 years old.

So how could he feel that way about Cheong-ryeong...

'Could it be?'

A thought occurred to Mok Gyeong-un.

Could it be that a high-level spirit was possessing his body?

If it could seize control of his body when he was unconscious, it might be a spirit so powerful that even Cheong-ryeong couldn't handle it.

However, according to Cheong-ryeong, once one surpassed the barrier, both the mind and soul would become stronger, making possession by spirits nearly impossible. Was that true?

The more Mok Gyeong-un thought about it, the more complicated his mind became.

Then...

-Mortal.

Cheong-ryeong approached Mok Gyeong-un and spoke.

-Yes?

-That being inside you... It doesn't seem to be simply a matter of personality.

-What do you mean by personality?

-Have you ever heard of the term “split personality”?

-No.

It was the first time he had heard of it.

-In the past, there was a peculiar individual among the executives of the Heaven and Earth Society. Two different personalities existed within one person. Of course, it wasn't a case of possession or anything like that. But what was strange was that both personalities had completely different ways of speaking, behavior, and traits.

-So it was called a split personality because there were two personalities?

-Yes. But in your case, it seems quite different. You said things that were completely incomprehensible as if you had become a divine being. Calling it a split personality doesn't seem to capture the vast difference in the range of experiences.

-Could there be a possibility of possession?

-Possession? Absolutely not. No matter how high-level a spirit is, it's impossible for them to seize your body. From the moment you surpassed the barrier, not only your body but also your soul became stronger.

-Then what could this thing inside me be?

-...

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, Cheong-ryeong's eyes took on a strange look.

Those eyes as black as obsidian.

The moment she saw those eyes, she was confused.

It was because a very old memory faintly came to mind.

However, since that memory was from the fleeting moment right before her death, it was hazy like a dream rather than clear.

In that hazy memory, she saw 'him' roaring.

While everyone was afraid and terrified of his roaring appearance, to her, that sight was more sorrowful than angry.

But why did that vague and inaccurate memory come to mind the moment she saw Mok Gyeong-un's obsidian-like eyes?

-Cheong-ryeong?

Mok Gyeong-un called out to her.

At Mok Gyeong-un's expression, which seemed to be asking her to tell him if she knew anything, Cheong-ryeong suddenly became sulky.

Why was she suddenly feeling upset with this guy?

She snapped at him:

-I don't know! Do you think there's nothing in this world that I, the Venerable One, don't know?

With those words, Cheong-ryeong suddenly flew far away.

Watching her, Mok Gyeong-un shrugged his shoulders and muttered:

“...Well, that’s true. Anyway.”

-Swish!

Mok Gyeong-un lightly stretched out his left hand.

Then, Holy Fire Priestess’s body, which had been strenuously moving about twenty steps away in the direction Mok Gyeong-un had pointed, stiffened as if caught by something.

“Huk.”

“Where are you going?”

At that question, a chill ran down the Holy Fire Priestess’s spine.

She didn’t know why, but Mok Gyeong-un’s demeanor had returned to normal, and he was staring at the empty space in front of her like a madman, behaving strangely, so she had attempted to flee.

From the beginning, there was no hope that she could actually escape.

She had not learned martial arts, and her body was elderly, so she had moved with the desperate mindset of grasping at straws.

“I-I was just...”

-Swish!

“Eek!”

As Mok Gyeong-un made a pulling motion, the Holy Fire Priestess's body rose and was forcibly pulled forward.

With no martial arts training, she had no strength to resist this.

Having been pulled right in front of him and forced to kneel, the Holy Fire Priestess trembled in fear.

To her, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said:

“You have a lot to feel guilty about, so you’re trying to run away, right?”

“N-no, that’s not it.”

“Don’t deny it. What kind of mess did you create with that prophecy?”

“What?”

The Holy Fire Priestess made a puzzled expression.

Just moments ago, when Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes had turned black like obsidian and he had displayed an absolute demeanor, he spoke as if he knew everything.

But looking at his attitude now, it seemed like he knew nothing.

‘What’s going on?’

Come to think of it, the atmosphere had changed as well.

When his eyes were black, he exuded majesty and resembled an absolute ruler, but now, there was a contradictory brutality and madness hidden within his usual politeness.

The Holy Fire Priestess was bewildered by this.

‘Is he the incarnation rather than the being itself?’

If he were the being itself from the beginning, there would be no reason for him to show such completely different aspects.

Rather, it could be because he was an incarnation that he displayed an imperfect appearance.

In that case, could this be the only chance to save her life?

Observing his reaction, she cautiously opened her mouth:

“Listen...”

-Swish!

-Thud!

The Holy Fire Priestess’s face contorted in pain.

Her left ear had been cut off and fallen to the ground.

Although she didn't scream, she clutched her bleeding ear and writhed in agony. Mok Gyeong-un spoke to her in a dry voice:

"Cut the nonsense and answer what I'm asking."

At those words, Holy Fire Priestess raised her reddened face, gritted her teeth, and said:

"Uuugh... You can't kill me, young man."

"I can't kill you?"

"If you kill me, it will be troublesome for you, who needs to take me to the Heaven and Earth Society Leader, as well searching for the sacred orb."

It wasn't yet certain whether Mok Gyeong-un was a supreme being or an incarnation.

However, she also had her own insight.

Judging from his conversation with Lee Gwang and the situation so far, Mok Gyeong-un needed her, if only for his relationship with the Heaven and Earth Society Leader.

She had to make that clear to protect herself from him.

But it was at that very moment.

-Swish!

'!!!!'

-Splash!

Something with a different weight than before fell into the puddle of rainwater.

It was none other than...

“Aaaaaah!”

Holy Fire Priestess let out a scream that sounded like a wail.

She had endured the numerous tortures in the underground prison with strong perseverance.

However, the torture and interrogation in the imperial palace could be said to have been carried out at a lower intensity, taking into account that she, an elderly woman, could potentially die.

Of course, that didn't mean it was very mild.

At the very least, whipping and beating on the back were basic, and there were levels of piercing with needles and pulling out fingernails.

But having an intact arm severed was a pain of a different dimension.

It was beyond what she could endure.

“Kuuuuuh...”

In too much pain, she clutched her chest and gasped for breath.

The great shock had caused paralysis in her heart.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un kicked her chin with his foot.

And he stepped on her chest as she fell backward.

-Thump!

At a glance, it looked like he didn't care whether she lived or died, but soon, Holy Fire Priestess's gasping breath stabilized.

It was because the stiffness had been relieved as Mok Gyeong-un injected energy into her heart along with a strong impact.

“Cough, cough...”

-Tap tap tap!

And thanks to him pressing her bleeding points, the bleeding from her arm stopped as well.

It felt like he was inflicting injury and then treating it, but there was a strong sense that he had intervened right before she lost her life.

“I-if you kill me, what you want...”

“Don't try to bargain with useless things.”

“It's not useless...”

“I don't think the Heaven and Earth Society Leader needs you anymore.”

“He told you to bring me, so how can you arbitrarily...”

“Is it you that the Heaven and Earth Society Leader needs, or is it your prophetic ability?”

“All the more so...”

“It’s not because you lack the sacred orb that you can’t make prophecies, right?”

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s sharp remark, the Holy Fire Priestess’s eyes trembled like crazy.

Does this bastard possess the memories of him as an incarnation of that being?

-Thump!

Mok Gyeong-un pressed down even harder on her chest and said:

“From the moment you lost your prophetic ability, you became a useless old hag.”

Although he had temporarily lost control of his body, he had been observing the entire situation, so he could easily infer her circumstances.

“And I don’t think it’s a good idea to provoke me any further.”

-Whoooosh!

A tremendous murderous intent rose, causing the surroundings to tremble.

Even Lee Gwang, who had surpassed the barrier, and Guyang Sa-oh, the Eight Poison Snake Staff of the Guyang Clan, couldn't withstand Mok Gyeong-un's murderous intent.

Naturally, there was no way the Holy Fire Priestess could endure it.

Her eyes reddened, and even vapors rose from her crotch.

The elderly woman couldn't bear the fear any longer and had wet herself.

“I-I...”

“Ah, come to think of it, you said you had a connection with the Tang Clan’s leader and entrusted your granddaughter to him, right? What a coincidence. It seems that the Tang Clan’s leader used something called the Formless Poison on my grandfather.”

“J-Guardian Jang is your real grandfather...”

“It would be so delightful to tear off all the limbs of the Tang Clan’s leader and your granddaughter right in front of you.”

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un grinned eerily.

Seeing this up close, the Holy Fire Priestess’s face turned deathly pale.

Mok Gyeong-un whispered into her ear:

“So don’t test my patience and tell me. What was the real prophecy?”

Trembling at Mok Gyeong-un’s words, which were full of oppressive force despite his whisper, Holy Fire Priestess finally opened her mouth:

“The true... master of the sacred flame... shall appear in this world... On the day when... new wings sprout from... his torn wounds... all shall... worship him...”

\*\*\*

Around the same time, in a hall filled with darkness.

-Crack!

A faint sound of cracking can be heard.

At that moment, the being shrouded in shadows, seated on the top seat of the platform, opened his eyes.

The being who had opened his eyes looked at the wall where six candles were lit.

In front of the last candle, there was a jade tablet with a red thread wrapped around it, and a crack had formed in its center.

The shadowy being stretched out his hand.

-Pak!

Then, the round jade tablet flew and landed in his hand.

The being holding the jade tablet was about to examine it.

-Crack crack crack!

The cracked jade tablet shattered, turning into powder.

At the same time, the head of the shadowy being suddenly tilted back.

The being slowly brought his tilted head back to its original position.

Something sticky flowed down from the being's forehead.

Then, the being's eyes sharpened, and...

-Crack crack crack!

As his forehead split open, a third eye filled with bizarre red spots was revealed.

The being who had opened his third eye crushed the armrest he was holding with his left hand, and...

-Crunch!

As soon as that sound was heard, a voice echoed from the ceiling.

-My lord, what has happened?

In response to that question, the being who had opened his third eye removed his hand from the shattered armrest and spoke:

“Summon all the deputy leaders of the First Realm that you can gather.”

-What? Why is that?

At the cautious question, the being who had opened his third eye spoke in a meaningful tone:

“What we feared has occurred.”

-Could it be?

“I felt ‘his presence’.”

#### Chapter 324 – To Sichuan Tang Clan (1)

In a hall filled with darkness.

Three figures wearing extraordinary-looking masks entered.

The three figures naturally strode forward and knelt on one knee in front of a platform shrouded in shadows, paying their respects.

As they knelt, a voice rang out from the platform.

“Only Destruction Emperor and Ghost Blade haven’t come?”

At that question, the slender masked man on the far right spoke:

“As far as I know, Destruction Emperor is on an important mission assigned by Mok-gan. Ghost Blade’s whereabouts have been unknown since those orders were given. Perhaps you, sir...”

-Swish!

Before he could finish speaking, the person right next to him stretched out his hand, stopping him from continuing.

The slender masked man couldn't hide his bewilderment.

Then, the one in the middle spoke:

"Chunchu. You should stay out of Ghost Blade's affairs."

At his words, which sounded like an order, the slender masked man replied, sounding displeased:

"...Ghost Blade has been missing for over half a year. I was just asking because one of our kind has disappeared, but Kang Yeom, do you find that so objectionable?"

"Have you forgotten that Mok-gan told us not to get involved with Ghost Blade and that person?"

"But this time is different. Ghost Blade has been missing for over half a year. The last place he was seen was the Sichuan Tang..."

"Enough."

At that moment, a majestic voice echoed from the platform.

The two people, who had been growling at each other, hurriedly lowered their heads.

As they fell silent, the voice from the platform continued:

"Let me get straight to the point. Lee Gwang is dead."

"What?"

“What happened to Lee Gwang?”

At those words, all three of them couldn't hide their surprise, though they didn't raise their heads.

Among them, the one in the middle named Kang Yeom spoke in bewilderment:

“Didn't Mok-gan bestow upon Lee Gwang an artifact made from the scales of the Dragon Demon King?  
If he used that, even formidable masters...”

“At the moment of Lee Gwang's death, I felt 'him'.”

‘!!!!’

At those words, all three of them simultaneously raised their heads.

Among them, the masked man on the far left, who had been silently keeping his mouth shut, spoke:

“...That can't be possible.”

“What can't be possible?”

“It was said that 'he' had completely lost his power. Even if he managed to survive by luck, he should only be able to maintain his form at best, so how...”

“Are you saying I was mistaken?”

“...”

The masked man promptly fell silent.

It was difficult to deny, as Mok-gan had barely moved from this place, as if taking root, and had solely devoted himself to sensing 'his' energy.

When everyone was convinced of 'his' complete annihilation, only Mok-gan had denied it.

If Mok-gan had felt it, then it was certain.

'Is this why he summoned everyone?'

If 'he' had truly been revived, the time had come for all the forces of the organization to mobilize.

\*\*\*

Outside the dark hall, two masked individuals emerged first.

-Pak!

One of them, with a slender build, removed his mask as if feeling stifled.

As the mask was removed, the face was revealed—a beautiful woman with a mysterious aura, her hair a mix of white and black.

The woman, her face now exposed, glared at the much larger masked man beside her with an irritated expression and said:

"There's definitely something in the Sichuan Tang Clan. But why are we told not to touch that place? Could it be that he's afraid of mere poison experts?"

At the woman's question, the masked man, no, Kang Yeom, muttered as if fed up:

“You’re really something.”

“It’s not just something. Ghost Blade also disappeared after being last seen there, and even Mok-gan knows that the old hag Holy Fire Priestess is definitely connected to the Sichuan Tang Clan, so why is he telling us not to touch that place...”

“Hey, Chunchu.”

“What?”

“You’ve been imprisoned for a long time, so you may not know, but there are always reasons why we’re told not to touch certain things.”

“So what’s the reason?”

The man in the mask sighed at her irritated attitude and then whispered:

“There is a hidden power protecting the Tang Clan.”

“A hidden power? What is it?”

“I don’t know exactly either. I only know that this power has existed for quite a long time and is extremely dangerous.”

“Ha! No matter what, they’re just mere humans...”

“Watch your mouth. Even that Dragon Demon King, who had regained his power, was defeated by a mere human. No, calling him a mere human would be an understatement. He’s a monster that even the Six Demons couldn’t easily approach.”

At his words, Chunchu furrowed her brow.

The Six Demons were kings of spiritual beasts, said to be infinitely close to divine beasts.

They were transcendent beings that even they themselves couldn't control.

If there was a human that such beings couldn't easily approach...

"...Could you be talking about the one who is said to have surpassed the wall of realms?"

"Yes. If 'he' had been there, Mok-gan wouldn't have been able to paint the picture he wanted on the day of the great calamity."

"You think there could be another exceptional case like that?"

"Who knows? That's why Mok-gan wants to make sure of it. If you want to fulfill his will, stop arguing and follow his orders."

"...Hmph."

Chunchu let out a small snort.

Then, without hiding her dissatisfaction, she disappeared on the spot.

Sensing her lingering resentment, Kang Yeom showed eyes filled with concern.

Although not as much as Ghost Blade, she was the most emotional and uncontrollable among the deputy leaders of the First Realm.

So he was worried that she might ignore his warning and take action.

“Phew.”

Heaving a long sigh, he soon moved his feet.

To carry out Mok-gan’s new orders.

\*\*\*

Heaven and Earth Society Inner Palace Main Building, Abandoned Room.

-Creak!

The tightly closed door of the abandoned room slowly opened, revealing someone’s figure.

It was a handsome man with chiseled features, his body covered in solid muscles despite his tattered clothes.

One peculiar thing was that he wore a leather eyepatch over his right eye. As soon as he opened the door and came out, someone called out in a bright voice as if they had been waiting:

“Young Master!”

The one who called him was a man in his early thirties with a small build.

As soon as he saw the man with a voice that sounded like he hadn’t gone through puberty yet, the handsome man spoke:

“Moyak.”

The identity of the handsome man was none other than Na Yul-ryang, the chief disciple of the Heaven and Earth Society Leader.

Moyak, who remembered Na Yul-ryang's appearance before he entered seclusion with severe injuries, spoke as if overwhelmed with emotion:

"You are truly amazing. Not only have you recovered..."

His energy seemed to have become much more refined than before.

He hadn't been in seclusion for very long, so could it be that he had gained high enlightenment?

Curious about this, he was about to ask...

-Swish!

Na Yul-ryang looked to the side and spoke first:

"Who is that person?"

He couldn't identify the person's identity because their face was covered with a mask.

But what was even more irksome was...

"You. You're no ordinary fellow."

-Swish!

Na Yul-ryang's figure disappeared as if dispersing, then reappeared behind the unknown masked person.

Na Yul-ryang reached out his hand toward the right side of the person's head.

At that moment, the masked figure tilted his head to the side, lightly dodging it, and then...

-Tak!

He grabbed Na Yul-ryang's wrist.

Na Yul-ryang's right eyebrow shot up.

Although he hadn't used his full power, he thought it would be difficult to sense his presence after using the high-speed movement technique of the exclusive Myeonghyeon Suweol-bo.

But not only did this person accurately discern his location, he even caught his attack.

'Look at this guy.'

-Tremble tremble tremble!

The hand grabbing Na Yul-ryang's wrist began to tremble.

At the same time, cracks appeared on the ground where the two were standing.

-Crunch!

Realizing that a confrontation of martial power had begun, Moyak hurriedly shouted:

"Young Master, please stop! That person has come to help you."

“What?”

At his words, Na Yul-ryang lowered the martial power he had been raising.

The masked figure also withdrew his martial power accordingly.

As they both retracted their martial power, the masked figure cupped his hands in salute to Na Yul-ryang and greeted him:

“It’s amazing. I have heard much about Young Master’s reputation, but it seems that your martial power after completing your seclusion is not inferior to the Eight Stars, who can be considered the top masters of the martial world.”

At his polite attitude, Na Yul-ryang spoke with an expressionless face:

“Who are you?”

“I am a messenger sent by the Elder Hall I belong to.”

“Elder Hall?”

At those words, Na Yul-ryang couldn’t hide his bewilderment.

The Elder Hall was where retired executives of the Heaven and Earth Society resided, so it could be considered a hidden power.

But he had never expected that among those old men, there would be a supreme master with this level of skill.

Staring intently at the masked man who said he was from the Elder Hall, Na Yul-ryang spoke:

"Then remove your mask."

At his order, the masked man promptly lowered his head and said:

"I apologize, but my face is utterly hideous due to burns, so I am embarrassed to show it."

"It doesn't matter. Show me."

"If you insist, I have no choice."

The masked man carefully lifted the mask he was wearing.

A face covered in burn scars, gruesome to the point of being pitiful, was revealed.

Seeing this, Na Yul-ryang's sole eye narrowed.

He had no particular thoughts about the hideous appearance of the burn scars, but perhaps because of the burns, the man had no eyes.

'He caught my attack just by sensing my presence despite having no eyes?'

Na Yul-ryang's eyes sparkled with interest.

He prided himself on the fact that no one could match him except for his master, the Heaven and Earth Society Leader, no, the Great Monk called the Six Heavens, and those who had reached their realm after gaining great enlightenment in seclusion.

But he had a strange feeling that he wouldn't be able to defeat this person easily.

Seized by a strong desire to test his skills, a fierce competitive spirit welled up within him.

“You...”

-Swish!

Before Na Yul-ryang could say anything, the man with the burned face stretched out his hand.

Then, something like a wooden box floated up from a short distance away, as if lifted by an invisible force, and landed in his hands.

Seeing this, Na Yul-ryang asked in bewilderment:

“What is that?”

The size of the wooden box was quite small.

But the surface of the box was densely covered with red inscriptions.

It looked like incantations or spells.

The man with the face full of burn scars revealed his yellowish teeth and said:

“I heard you injured your eye.”

As soon as he finished speaking, Na Yul-ryang’s left eye turned sharp.

Only three people knew that he had injured his eye, and none of them would have divulged this information.

No, the only person who might have revealed it had already been beheaded.

So how did this person from the Elder Hall know about his eye injury?

But then...

"Young Master, please let go of your guard. If you want to properly gather the group now, you will have many things to do. Do you need to waste your energy on such a trivial matter?"

"Deciding whether to waste my energy or not is not up to the likes of you. I cannot tolerate anyone from the Elder Hall trying to act above me."

-Click!

At his words, the scarred man silently opened the lid of the wooden box.

-Whoosh!

-Flinch!

At that moment, Moyak, who had been peering from behind to see what was inside, involuntarily took a step back, feeling something eerie.

As Moyak opened his mouth, cold breath flowed out.

Frost had filled the surroundings without him noticing.

‘What the hell is this?’

As he wondered, Na Yul-ryang approached the wooden box that the scarred man had opened.

As soon as the box was opened, an eerie energy was revealed along with a chilling cold.

The identity of that eerie energy was none other than...

‘An eye?’

It was an eyeball.

The moment he saw this eyeball, which was close to a golden color with a pupil as small as a dot, he felt the ferocity of a fierce beast.

This was clearly not a human eye.

To Na Yul-ryang, who couldn’t take his sole eye off it, the scarred man spoke with the corners of his mouth lifted:

“This will become Young Master’s new eye.”

\*\*\*

Near a cliff with treacherous terrain, not far from Zaoyang in the north of Hubei Province.

Numerous swordsmen lay there, bleeding, and the flag of a renowned martial arts family was broken and stuck in the ground.

[Namgoong]

It was the flag of the Namgoong Clan.

Among them, a middle-aged man leaning on a cracked sword like a cane stared at someone with an unbelieving gaze.

‘Just what kind of monster is he?’

He had defeated the ultimate masters of the Emperor Sword Style with a mere simple routine.

No, it wasn’t just a simple routine.

It was because he had performed the routine in a way that was impossible with ordinary muscles and joints.

‘How is that possible?’

He couldn’t understand it at all.

Unable to withstand the shock, he finally couldn’t hold back and coughed up blood.

“Kuak.”

-Thud!

The middle-aged man, who had coughed up a mouthful of blood, knelt on one knee on the ground.

In front of him, someone shrouded in shadows approached with an arrogant face, hands clasped behind his back.

Feeling humiliated by this sight, the middle-aged man gritted his teeth.

He prided himself on being one of the Eight Stars, considered the strongest in the world except for the Six Heavens, so how could he be defeated by an unknown young man like this?

His identity was none other than Namgoong Jin, known as the Azure Heavens Sword Emperor, one of the Eight Stars.

“Cough, cough...”

The man with his hands clasped behind his back approached him as he coughed up blood and spoke:

“The title of Emperor is not something to be casually attached to swords.”

“Haa... haa...”

“Only the blade can be called Emperor, no, God.”

“Arrogance... beyond... conceit...”

“Whether it’s conceit or arrogance, everything stems from strength. Swordsman of the Namgoong Clan.”

“Cough, cough.”

It was frustrating, but he had lost, so he had nothing to say.

To the humiliated man, the man with his hands clasped behind his back asked:

“More importantly, have you really never heard of it?”

At this question, Namgoong Jin struggled to raise his head and answered:

“Haa... haa... I have never heard of such a title, no, even the name.”

“Are you certain?”

“I told you I haven’t. Cough, cough... I have roamed the martial arts world for fifty years, but Cheonma...”

-Swish!

Before he could finish speaking...

Blood spurted from his neck as Namgoong Jin’s head was severed and fell forward, rolling on the ground.

-Tak!

The man lightly stepped on his head and muttered:

“Is it still too soon?”

-Squish!

Chapter 325 – To Sichuan Tang Clan (2)

“The true master of the sacred flame shall appear in this world, and on the day when new wings sprout from his torn wounds, all shall worship him?”

Mok Gyeong-un's expression turned strange.

This was completely different in nature from the original prophecy.

[Beware, for when the heavens open, the incarnation of Ahriman shall appear in this world and taint the sacred flame with black evil.]

The altered prophecy was almost like a warning, but the original prophecy didn't have that feeling.

However, there was one similarity: someone would appear in this world.

'...The incarnation of Ahriman... The true master of the sacred flame...'

What were these beings?

Why did the Holy Fire Priestess change the prophecy?

It was utterly incomprehensible.

Everything was too ambiguous.

Staring intently at the agonized Holy Fire Priestess, Mok Gyeong-un spoke:

"Why did you change the prophecy?"

"Haa... haa... That's..."

As she hesitated, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said:

“Keeping your mouth shut won’t do you any good if you know what I’m going to do next.”

At these words, Holy Fire Priestess’s face turned deathly pale as she trembled, and she soon opened her mouth:

“...My granddaughter... My only granddaughter... I had no choice... if I wanted to save her.”

“You wanted to save your granddaughter? So you manipulated the prophecy because of that...”

“I... I...”

“Cut the crap about your circumstances or excuses. The one who threatened you with your granddaughter was that person from the organization, right?”

At this question, the Holy Fire Priestess nodded with difficulty.

The events of that time flashed through her mind.

\*\*\*

18 years ago, in the Sacred Hall of Fire Faith Order.

In the center of the hall was a platform, and on it stood an ornate staff with a blue-glowing sacred orb embedded in it.

The sacred orb always emitted a brilliant light.

But something strange happened to this sacred orb.

-Woooong!

A strong tremor and resonance spread from the sacred orb, making the surroundings tremble.

The one who noticed this bizarre phenomenon was a middle-aged man in neat attire who was in the hall.

He was known as Medicine Immortal Hae Yeong in the Central Plains, but here in the Fire Faith Order, he was called Guardian Jang.

[What's happening?]

Surprised by the strange phenomenon occurring with the sacred orb, Guardian Jang approached it.

A strong light was emanating from the violently trembling sacred orb.

Drawn to it unknowingly, Guardian Jang reached out his hand toward the sacred orb.

At that moment...

[Ah!]

Guardian Jang's eyes turned black.

As if seeing some kind of vision, Guardian Jang's expression became one of shock, and he soon startled and removed his hand from the sacred orb.

[What... what is this?]

Staring at the sacred orb with trembling eyes, Guardian Jang hurriedly tried to call for the Holy Fire Priestess.

But before he could even leave the hall, as if by coincidence, the Holy Fire Priestess and someone wearing a bamboo hat and mask entered.

Noticing the golden scabbard at the waist of the man in the bamboo hat, Guardian Jang could guess who he was.

[Holy Fire Priestess! Mok...]

[How long has it been like this, Guardian Jang?]

Surprised by the sight of the sacred orb emitting a bright light while resonating, the Holy Fire Priestess interrupted him and asked.

Guardian Jang answered:

[I don't know. I just entered the hall, and suddenly the sacred orb began trembling and emitting light.]

[For the sacred orb to resonate like this, it's no ordinary matter.]

She spoke in a voice filled with delight.

Bewildered by this, Guardian Jang questioned:

[What do you mean by no ordinary matter?]

[Holy Fire has delivered a revelation. Guardian Jang, go and summon the Reverend immediately.]

[Understood.]

While Guardian Jang went to call the Reverend, the Holy Fire Priestess approached the sacred orb, which was trembling even more intensely.

Even she had never seen such a sight before.

She had been guarding the sacred orb as Holy Fire Priestess for several decades, but it had never emitted such resonance and light to this extent.

Could it be that something unusual was about to happen?

As she was about to reach out her hand toward the sacred orb...

-Crack!

[What?]

The staff shattered, and the sacred orb suddenly shot upward.

The sacred orb that had shot up was about to pierce through the ceiling of the hall, but someone caught it just in time before it reached the ceiling.

-Pak!

It was none other than the man in the bamboo hat.

The man in the bamboo hat landed on the floor, holding the sacred orb, and paused for a moment.

Holy Fire Priestess approached him and extended her hand.

[Secret Master, thank you. Please give me the sacred orb.]

[...]

[Secret Master?]

[Ah!]

At her repeated call, the man in the bamboo hat, no, the one called Secret Master, came to his senses and handed the sacred orb to Holy Fire Priestess.

The moment the Holy Fire Priestess received the sacred orb, she experienced a vision.

It was a scene of the sacred flame going out and falling to the ground.

'How... how could this happen?'

For her, who had thought it was just a revelation, this scene was a shock in itself.

Holy Fire was a symbol of the Fire Faith Order.

The sight of Holy Fire's flame going out and falling might not just be a simple revelation for the order but a tragic news heralding its downfall.

However, the vision didn't end there.

The extinguished Holy Fire turned to ashes, but at some point, it began to burn brightly again, illuminating its surroundings brilliantly.

[Aaah!]

She exclaimed.

She had thought it was the final revelation signaling the downfall of the Fire Faith Order.

But this was a trial.

If they could find the spark to reignite the Holy Fire to overcome this trial, it would burn brightly again, enough to illuminate the world once more.

-Tak!

Removing her hand from the sacred orb, she began to organize the scenes she had witnessed.

Then, someone placed a hand on her shoulder and said:

[Don't convey what you saw as it is.]

'!?'

Startled, she turned her head.

The one who said this to her was none other than Secret Master.

[Secret Master, how could you...]

[I won't say it twice. Forget what you just saw.]

[What are you talking about now? Secret Master, could it be... You saw a revelation from the sacred orb?]

She couldn't hide her surprise.

Only the chosen ones could directly receive the revelation from the sacred orb.

It should have been impossible without the power of resonance, so how could the Secret Master see the vision of the revelation?

As she wondered, Secret Master spoke:

[The ancient Holy Fire has set, and it will be replaced by a new flame. Therefore, the revelations shown by the sacred orb are no longer meaningful.]

[Secret Master, I don't know what you saw, but your words are too much! This is ultimately the...]

-Swish!

Before she could finish her sentence, Secret Master lifted the mask covering his face.

She had never seen the Secret Master's face before.

But when she saw that face, she couldn't hide her shock.

'E-eyes?'

The moment she saw the third eye on the Secret Master's forehead, filled with red spots, she was gripped by fear and couldn't say a word.

To her, Secret Master grinned eerily and said:

[The time has finally come. The Holy Fire you have revered will completely set. A new era has arrived.]

[W-what are you...]

[Don't question it. You have only one thing to do. Deliver a revelation to welcome the new era... No, that's not it. Yes, there is a need to ensure the fading flame as well.]

[What are you saying now?]

[Deliver the revelation.]

[Revelation?]

[It will be pulled down by those who believed and extinguished by the hands of those who worshipped. How wonderful.]

The Holy Fire Priestess's eyes trembled violently.

What did this person see?

What did he see to think that the Holy Fire would be completely extinguished?

The Holy Fire will burn again.

Even more brilliantly than before.

[Holy Fire will not be extinguished, Secret Master. I don't know what your intentions are in saying such things, but Milhoe (Secret Society) is the shadow and bronze mirror of the Fire Faith Order. How could you...]

-Pak!

[Urk!]

[Didn't I tell you? I have been waiting for this moment.]

[I... I can't breathe...]

[You'll feel suffocated. But I won't kill you now. You have something to do.]

[I... I will follow...]

[You have to follow. If you don't want to lose what's precious to you, that is.]

'Precious?'

In her mind, the face of only one person, no, one child came to mind.

It was her only remaining blood relative, her granddaughter.

\*\*\*

"Ah, how cliché."

Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue after hearing the Holy Fire Priestess's words.

Unable to overcome the threat, she had spoken a false prophecy.

In the end, she had chosen her blood relative over being a member of the Fire Faith Order.

However, through her recollection of the past, he had learned two facts.

One was the relationship between the organization and the Fire Faith Order.

They were called Secret Society and were not a completely separate group from Fire Faith Order but had a very close connection.

And the second was his grandfather.

‘Did Grandfather also see something through that sacred orb?’

Listening to the story, it seemed that all the members of the Fire Faith Order believed in the Holy Fire Priestess’s false prophecy.

Even the leader of Shadow Clan Master, Hwan Ya-seon.

But both the members of the Fire Faith Order and this organization spoke as if his grandfather had ignored the prophecy and done something.

That meant there was a high probability that his grandfather knew the truth, not the false prophecy.

That’s why he would have disobeyed the false prophecy and revelation.

‘...’

Mok Gyeong-un suddenly remembered something.

The scene of falling from a high sky and his grandfather prostrating before him.

When he first recalled this, he had thought of it as a dream since it was a scene he had never seen before.

But suddenly, a thought occurred to him.

‘The true master of the sacred flame... Could it be that the person mentioned in that prophecy is me?’

It was hard to believe, but all the circumstances were pointing to him.

Even though it was his infancy, he was someone who remembered everything he had seen, heard, and smelled.

But for some reason, he couldn’t remember his early childhood.

As if the memories of that part had been cut out.

‘What the hell am I?’

The unknown being inside him and his own existence latent in his missing memories.

All of these things were intertwined in a complex way, adding to the questions about himself.

Lost in thought, Mok Gyeong-un opened his mouth:

“The deeper I dig, the more complicated everything becomes. I just wanted to deal with the one who killed my grandfather, that’s all.”

“...”

“One thing is certain: I can’t deny that I’m closely related to that prophecy. Isn’t that right?”

At that question, the Holy Fire Priestess lowered her head.

She couldn't tell for sure if the person in front of her was an incarnation or the being itself.

However, it was certain that the being definitely existed within him.

"That's..."

As she tried to say something, Mok Gyeong-un waved his hand as if annoyed.

"Forget it. Let's put this aside for now. Because right now, what I want to do takes precedence over knowing who I am."

"If you're talking about what you want to do..."

"Didn't I tell you? I said I would erase from this world everything related to my grandfather's death."

-Shudder!

At Mok Gyeong-un's murderous words, the Holy Fire Priestess felt a chill down her spine for a moment.

If this person was truly the master of the sacred flame mentioned in the prophecy, he possessed both sides of the coin.

She recalled a part of the doctrine that the previous generation's Holy Fire Priestess had spoken of.

[Ahura Mazda is a two-sided Mainyu, so he can be both Spenta (good deity) and Ahriman, that is, Angra (evil deity).]

'!!!!'

'Could he become... a calamity?'

Her eyes trembled like crazy as she looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

She suddenly had a thought.

Her false prophecy, whether intentionally or not, may have truly brought about a calamity.

"Come to think of it, there was something quite interesting among the things you said."

"What do you mean by interesting?"

"You said that Secret Master person had an eye on his forehead, right?"

At Mok Gyeong-un's question, the Holy Fire Priestess swallowed dryly and nodded.

She still couldn't forget that ominous and eerie appearance.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un, who had been stroking his chin, spoke as if he had realized something:

"Ah, I get it now."

'!?'

"It was simpler than I thought. The third Mok-gan."

"The third Mok-gan?"

The third Mok-gan.

That's what they called the leader of the organization.

At first, Mok Gyeong-un didn't understand what this meant.

But it was unexpectedly simple.

“Mok and Gan are not separate but ultimately one. The eye... The third Mok-gan actually means the third eye.”

Chapter 326 – To Sichuan Tang Clan (3)

“Mok and Gan are not separate but ultimately one. The eye.... The third Mok-gan actually means the third eye

‘Ah!’

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the Holy Fire Priestess's eyes trembled.

She had also heard that the subordinates of Secret Society's leader, Secret Master, called him Mok-gan.

She had simply dismissed it as a peculiar name, but hearing Mok Gyeong-un's words sent chills down her spine.

‘The third eye...’

She had seen the third eye on that person's forehead up close.

It was so terrifying that it was deeply engraved in her memory.

Then, Mok Gyeong-un spoke:

“I thought there might be another third eye, but I didn’t expect that other third eye to have such a close relationship.”

“What do you mean by another third eye...”

“It’s none of your business, but it seems there’s more than one third eye... !?”

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un furrowed his brow.

It was because he suddenly remembered the Assassin King of the Sea, the monstrous raccoon dog sealed in the report scroll.

The first one to mention the existence of the third eye was none other than that monstrous raccoon dog.

The bastard had said that it was the third eye that sealed him in the scroll.

‘Could this third eye be... that third eye?’

Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes sharpened as he furrowed his brow.

If the existence of this third eye was truly the same third eye that sealed the Assassin King of the Sea, it would be quite troublesome.

If it possessed the power to seal a being like the Assassin King of the Sea, one of the Six Demons infinitely close to divine beasts, it meant that it possessed strength beyond that level.

‘...’

Even now, having rapidly grown stronger, he wasn't confident that he could face the Assassin King of the Sea's monstrous raccoon dog or the White-Faced King, the Golden Nine-Tailed Fox he had encountered in the imperial palace of Kaifeng.

If the third Mok-gan, that is, the third eye, possessed strength surpassing the Six Demons, the path to revenge might still be distant.

“Hmm.”

However, it was still difficult to make a definitive conclusion.

If there was more than one third eye, there could be two or even three.

Therefore, it was still uncertain whether the third eye that sealed the Assassin King of the Sea and the third Mok-gan, the leader of the organization, were the same being.

‘But it's unexpected.’

The existence of the third eye was hard to consider as human.

It was no different from a high-level malevolent spirit parasitizing a human body.

To think that such a being was the leader of the organization related to his grandfather's death, everything was becoming more complicated.

‘...What is their purpose?’

The mastermind behind the false prophecy and the being that might have the closest connection to his grandfather's death.

He became curious about this being's true purpose.

Mok Gyeong-un turned his head and looked at the Holy Fire Priestess.

Her condition seemed quite poor, her face deathly pale and her breathing gradually weakening.

Mok Gyeong-un said:

“Rest for a bit...”

-Thud!

At that moment, the Holy Fire Priestess's eyes rolled back, and she collapsed forward.

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-Sssssh!

Black haze rose from Seop Chun's entire body as he focused on circulating energy with his eyes closed.

The black haze differed in nature from the usual internal energy.

Mok Gyeong-un placed his palm on Seop Chun's back, assisting his energy circulation as a change occurred in his internal energy.

After a while, Mok Gyeong-un removed his palm.

-Tak!

Eventually, Seop Chun, who had been concentrating on circulating energy, opened his eyes, unable to hide his surprise.

As this ferocious and dark energy was added to the internal energy circulating within his body, its nature underwent a change.

‘It’s a strange energy. Despite being completely opposite to purity and possessing a destructive nature, its purity is high. It’s almost like primordial energy.’

Originally, this energy was not the type that could be mixed with internal energy.

However, as Mok Gyeong-un overlaid this energy as if painting a coat, the internal energy was completely transformed.

‘Not only has the energy changed, but it has also become stronger.’

It was difficult for a martial artist to completely entrust their body to others, even in a master-disciple relationship.

However, Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak considered this a kind of loyalty test, so they entrusted their bodies.

But the result was quite unexpected.

Seop Chun knelt on one knee before Mok Gyeong-un, joined his hands in salute, and said:

-Pak!

“Thank you, my lord.”

“There’s no need to thank me. Focus on embodying the demonic energy to the fullest.”

“Demonic energy... It’s demonic energy. I will keep that in mind.”

Seop Chun seemed to be in high spirits, feeling chosen after receiving the energy, to the point where even hearing Mok Gyeong-un’s voice made him excited.

“Then go ahead.”

“Yes, my lord.”

As Seop Chun left, a voice echoed in Mok Gyeong-un’s ear.

-It’s truly remarkable. To think it actually worked.

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

Mok Gyeong-un shrugged and said:

-Indeed. Unlike the energy of the dead, the death energy, the demonic energy can be assimilated.

Assimilation.

It literally means being eroded like a silkworm eating mulberry leaves.

Noticing the increased loyalty and rapid improvement in capabilities of Ma Ra-hyeon after embodying the demonic energy, Mok Gyeong-un had infused demonic energy into Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak.

Originally, internal energy could be slightly different in nature depending on the differences in energy circulation techniques, leading to rejection phenomena. However, under the premise that the other party completely entrusted their body, remarkable results occurred.

-You have created your own subordinates, you bastard.

-Useful subordinates, that is.

Cheong-ryeong didn't deny Mok Gyeong-un's words.

In the case of complete demonic energy, it goes beyond assimilating the other party's body and destroys all internal energy, so Mok Gyeong-un lowered the purity of this energy before injecting it.

However, even this alone gave birth to beings possessing energy similar to Mok Gyeong-un's.

-If it's not that unique energy-circulating constitution of that baldy, you can use the demonic energy to create your own loyal subordinates, you brat.

The baldy Cheong-ryeong mentioned was the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong.

In Ja Geum-jeong's case, he had tried to infuse demonic energy, but it had leaked out of his body, making it impossible to assimilate.

It was probably due to the Supreme Power's Qi circulation technique

The Shaolin's energy circulation technique itself contained Buddhist enlightenment, so it was impossible to suppress the thorough rejection phenomenon.

-Well, as long as it's not a case like this, there shouldn't be any problems.

-I don't know what kind of ambition has taken hold of you, but seeing you expand your own loyal subordinates, are you trying to properly establish your own forces?

-Who knows? Properly skilled individuals would be more useful than a bunch of nobodies.

Properly skilled individuals...

This guy is gradually changing, and it can be felt.

The subordinates he had mentioned before were truly just subordinates.

They were literally subordinates that could be used and discarded at any time. But now, he was truly trying to build his own forces.

Although Cheong-ryeong didn't dislike this change, the being latent within the guy continued to bother her.

‘…Black eyes.’

Why did the memory of that time keep lingering?

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Seop Chun, who had received the demonic energy, approached Mong Mu-yak, who was sitting cross-legged next to the encampment.

He thought Mong Mu-yak was immersed in energy circulation, but he opened his eyes midway.

Seop Chun said to him:

“Have you fully embodied the energy received from our lord?”

“…You received it just half an incense stick before me.”

It wasn’t energy that could be embodied in a short time.

However, as they both possessed the same energy, the demonic energy, the increase in energy was clearly felt, as if reading the other person through energy perception.

‘The energy has become stronger.’

Seop Chun inwardly clicked his tongue.

After absorbing the Shaolin’s Small Returning Pill and beginning to embody the demonic energy, Mong Mu-yak’s energy had reached the peak of the Transcendent Realm, and it was no exaggeration to say so.

It wasn’t just Seop Chun who had this thought.

Mong Mu-yak also felt that Seop Chun’s energy had become significantly stronger after receiving the demonic energy from their lord.

However, the real monster was someone else.

Mong Mu-yak clicked his tongue as he looked at Ma Ra-hyeon, who was sitting far away from the campfire.

‘…He has definitely surpassed the wall.’

Ma Ra-hyeon had gained enlightenment but had not fully internalized it.

However, it seemed that he had recently completely embodied that enlightenment after absorbing the Small Returning Pill, as his energy had become properly stabilized.

To this extent, he had definitely crossed the threshold of the Transformation Realm.

Just how much enlightenment had he gained to experience such a rapid increase in capabilities?

As Mong Mu-yak clicked his tongue, he glanced at the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who was sitting in front of the campfire, drinking from a gourd.

‘That masked guy is no pushover either, but that baldy is also not to be taken lightly.’

Perhaps due to his unique energy circulation technique, his capabilities were utterly unreadable.

He clearly didn’t seem to have surpassed the wall, but why couldn’t he gauge the extent of that guy’s energy?

Why does he seem to keep getting stronger even though he doesn’t particularly cultivate?

He was even more incomprehensible than the masked guy.

‘I can’t let my guard down.’

From his perspective, the four people here had a high probability of becoming their lord’s closest confidants in the future.

If he, himself fell behind at this time, he might be assigned the lowest rank among the closest confidants.

‘I need to become stronger.’

Mong Mu-yak's fighting spirit soared.

Of course, the same went for Seop Chun.

Without further conversation, they immersed themselves in energy circulation, focusing on embodying the demonic energy bestowed upon them by his lord.

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‘Huh?’

The Holy Fire Priestess, who had regained consciousness, looked around.

Where the hell was this place?

She had lost consciousness during the conversation with Mok Gyeong-un, who might be the incarnation of that being, probably due to severe bleeding from her severed arm.

With her old body and lack of internal energy cultivation, it was a situation she couldn't endure.

As she looked around, she couldn't help but be surprised.

It was dark, probably nighttime, so she didn't know where she was, but she could feel the sensation in her severed arm.

So, with a doubtful heart, she felt her arms, and the severed arm was attached.

‘What the hell is this?’

What was going on?

Was she dreaming?

Her arm had definitely been cut off, so why was it intact?

As she wondered, she touched her ear with a doubtful heart.

But...

‘...’

The severed ear was gone.

The arm was attached, but the ear was still cut off.

What the hell was going on?

As she was baffled, a creaking sound was heard in front of her, and the dark space split open as a door opened.

‘Gasp!’

The faint light from the campfire pouring in.

The silhouette of a man casting a shadow against that light.

It was none other than Mok Gyeong-un.

The moment she saw Mok Gyeong-un, the Holy Fire Priestess was gripped by fear and involuntarily flinched, moving her body backward.

-Thud!

However, she couldn't move any further as her back was blocked.

Thanks to the light, she could see her surroundings, and the place she was in was...

‘A carriage?’

It was definitely a carriage.

What had happened while she was unconscious?

As she wondered, Mok Gyeong-un entered, closed the carriage door, and said:

“I opened the door because your breathing seemed to have changed, and indeed, you’re awake. Are you feeling better now?”

“H-how long was I unconscious?”

“I even infused internal energy, but perhaps due to severe blood loss, you didn’t wake up for nearly a day. I thought you might die if it couldn’t be helped, but fortunately, you woke up.”

A day?

She had been unconscious for that long?

No wonder her entire body felt weak.

But did he just say fortunately?

“It would be troublesome if you died already when I still have more questions and uses for you.”

“...”

Right.

Of course.

There was no way this demonic bastard would spare her life out of goodwill.

As this thought occurred to her, the Holy Fire Priestess suddenly felt dejected and sorrowful.

How did it come to this?

To the depressed her, Mok Gyeong-un said:

“Do you know where this place is?”

At that question, she made a puzzled expression.

How could she know where this place was when she had been unconscious for a day?

Then, Mok Gyeong-un smiled and said:

“It’s Guangyuan.”

‘G-Guangyuan?’

The Holy Fire Priestess’s eyes widened.

Guangyuan was a small county located at the northern entrance of Sichuan Province.

The Sichuan Tang Clan was located in Chengdu, the center of Sichuan Province, so if they traveled diligently by carriage, they could arrive within ten days.

Chapter 327 – To Sichuan Tang Clan (4)

In a lavish room, a beautiful woman with an enigmatic aura, dressed in an alluring outfit that revealed her shoulders and cleavage, gently stroked the head of a scarred middle-aged man lying with his head on her milky white thighs.

As if enjoying this, the middle-aged man closed his eyes and hummed a tune.

While humming, the man reached out and caressed the woman’s hair.

Peculiarly, half of the woman’s hair was black, and the other half was white.

However, it did not seem to be due to aging; rather, it exuded a mystical atmosphere, almost like silver hair.

-Swish!

“The harmony of your black and white hair is a delight to the eyes.”

“You are the only one who would say such a thing while looking at my hair, my lord.”

“That’s because they don’t know your true worth.”

“Is that so?”

-Smooch!

The woman kissed the forehead of the scarred middle-aged man.

As if accustomed to it, the scarred middle-aged man grabbed her cheeks, pulled her face down, and kissed her lips.

The two people, indulging in each other, seemed to have gotten heated up as they let out rough breaths.

“Haa... haa...”

“Beautiful.”

The woman’s body, half-naked with her shoulders exposed, was nothing short of perfect.

The scarred middle-aged man traced his fingertips down her naked body as if tickling her.

“Aah.”

A soft moan escaped the woman’s lips.

At her moan, the man tried to strip off the rest of her clothes.

At that moment,

-Tak!

The woman grabbed the man's hand.

The black and white-haired woman looked at the man and shook her head.

It wasn't a forceful gesture, but when his wrist was grabbed, the man removed his hand from the hem of her lower garment that he had been holding.

Then, the man laughed and said,

“You’re really sharp. Is there no intimacy without a price?”

“Are you disappointed?”

“What an obvious thing to say.”

“But there must always be a price.”

“Yes. I must give you what you want to have you, the ultimate flower. You are truly an addictive woman.”

At the man's words, the woman smiled and placed her hand on his chest.

Then, she whispered in his ear,

“The more beautiful a flower is, the more thorns it has and the harder it is to obtain.”

“Thorns... Even if that path is filled with thorns, it’s worth taking. Alright. What do you want this time? I’ll give you whatever you desire.”

At the man’s confident voice, the black and white-haired woman curved her lips and said,

“Is anything truly possible?”

“They say a man’s word is worth a thousand gold pieces. How could I say it lightly? Do I, Seok Pae-ung, the Green Forest Fighting King, seem to lack such capability?”

Green Forest Fighting King, Seok Pae-ung.

He was one of the Eight Stars, the leader of the Green Forest Alliance, and one of the top experts in the evil path.

He was also a monster who had received the title of Eight Stars solely based on his external martial arts.

“Ah, how manly.”

The woman then seductively licked the man’s ear with her tongue.

“Mmm.”

Seok Pae-ung swallowed his saliva, unable to hide his excitement.

As if enjoying Seok Pae-ung’s desperate state, the woman stopped tickling him with her tongue and said,

“Bring me a woman from a certain martial arts family.”

“A woman? From where do you want me to bring her?”

“The Tang Clan.”

At those words, Seok Pae-ung instantly furrowed his brows.

“The Tang Clan... You don’t mean the Sichuan Tang Clan, do you?”

It was natural for Seok Pae-ung to show this troubled expression.

The Sichuan Tang Clan was one of the Seven Great Families of the righteous martial arts world and a martial arts family known as the Overlord of Sichuan.

Of course, in terms of scale, the Green Forest Alliance could be considered superior, but the Sichuan Tang Clan belonged to the Righteous Alliance, so if they were not careful, the matter could escalate.

“This isn’t just a thorny path.”

“Could it be that even with my lord’s power, it’s difficult?”

“Difficult? Do you think I would be afraid of those who merely use poison or hidden weapons?”

“Then there shouldn’t be any difficulty.”

“...That’s not the problem. The problem isn’t defeating them, but if we do, the entire Righteous Alliance behind them might rise up.”

Seok Pae-ung spoke honestly.

No matter how strong his pride was, he was not someone who lacked discernment.

Even if he wanted to have this woman, known as one of the Four Beauties of the Central Plains, he had no choice but to avoid an all-out war with the Righteous Alliance.

To him, the woman touched his chest with her finger and said,

“What if there was a justification that the Righteous Alliance couldn’t intervene in?”

“Justification? For me, the Overlord of the Green Forest, to step in and for them to remain still, it would have to be no ordinary justification.”

“What if the Tang Clan was protecting a member of the Fire Faith Order?”

“Fire Faith... Order member?”

At these words, Seok Pae-ung’s expression changed.

The perception of the Fire Faith Order among the people of the Central Plains, regardless of righteous or evil, was not very good.

Who could possibly like a cult organization that the country suppressed for deceiving and misleading the people?

Seeing his reaction, the black and white-haired woman raised the corners of her mouth sardonically.

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Not long after the Green Forest Fighting King Seok Pae-ung hurriedly left, a hunched old woman with a cane appeared beside her.

The old woman spoke to the black and white-haired woman in a respectful manner,

“He fell for it, Lady Chunchu.”

At the old woman’s words, the black and white-haired woman, or rather Chunchu, smiled radiantly and said,

“When given the right justification and desire, there is nothing easier to manipulate than a man.”

“Hohoho. Indeed. It seems that once a man falls for Lady Chunchu’s charm, he can never escape, regardless of who he is.”

“Naturally.”

Chunchu took pride in her beauty.

She believed that no woman could match her appearance, and no man could escape from desire once he laid eyes on her.

With her beauty, she had made many slaves.

Among them, the Green Forest Fighting King was a pawn she had truly invested a lot of time and effort into making.

As she took off her crumpled clothes and threw them aside, she gazed at her beautiful naked body reflected in the bronze mirror with a deep look in her eyes and muttered,

“Do you think they’ll just watch because I told them not to touch it? Hmph.”

-Swish!

She covered her face reflected in the bronze mirror with her hand and whispered,

“They’ll soon find out how tremendous that hidden power is.”

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“It’s Guangyuan.”

‘Gua- Guangyuan?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the eyes of the Holy Fire Priestess widened.

Guangyuan was a small county at the northern entrance of Sichuan Province.

The Sichuan Tang Clan was located in Chengdu, which could be considered the center of Sichuan Province, so if they traveled diligently by carriage, they could arrive within ten days.

‘They’ve already come this far.’

She was utterly perplexed.

[Ah, come to think of it, you said you had a connection with the head of the Tang Clan and entrusted your granddaughter to them, right? What a coincidence. It seems that the head of the Tang Clan used poison on my grandfather.]

[G-Guardian Jang’s your grandfather...?]

[It would be so delightful to tear apart the limbs of the head of the Tang Clan and your granddaughter right in front of you.]

She had not forgotten those words Mok Gyeong-un had said.

This fellow would really do it if he said he would.

‘…Can the head of the Tang Clan deal with this guy?’

Originally, she did not fully trust Mok Gyeong-un.

That's why she thought that if she went to the head of the Tang Clan, who was taking care of her granddaughter, she could receive protection.

However, after witnessing Mok Gyeong-un's strength, her thoughts changed.

She realized that even the head of the Tang Clan might not be able to protect her and her granddaughter.

With this, the Holy Fire Priestess hurriedly prostrated herself before Mok Gyeong-un with her body that did not move well.

“Please... Please at least spare my granddaughter's life.”

Mok Gyeong-un looked down at her pleading with an indifferent gaze.

Then, he lifted her head, smiled brightly, and said,

“Now that you're this desperate, it seems you're ready to faithfully answer what I want to know.”

At Mok Gyeong-un's words, the Holy Fire Priestess swallowed her saliva and nodded.

Nothing else mattered.

If she could save the life of her only blood relative, her granddaughter.

Mok Gyeong-un asked her,

“There’s one thing I’ve been wondering about since hearing from that man named Lee Gwang.”

“What is it that you’re wondering about?”

“They say the Formless Poison belongs to the Sichuan Tang Clan, so why was my grandfather addicted to that poison? Did they have a grudge against him or something?”

This was Mok Gyeong-un’s question.

He had also heard about the Formless Poison from his grandfather.

It was said to be the most perfect poison among all existing poisons.

The remarkable thing about this poison was not only its colorless and odorless nature but also the fact that when the addicted person lost their life, the poison components would completely dilute and disappear.

No physical evidence would be left behind.

That’s why his grandfather had highly praised it and told him to be cautious of the Formless Poison, even if he had a strong resistance to poisons.

[Don’t... come... closer. Stay... away.]

‘So that’s why.’

His grandfather had prevented him from touching him in his final moments.

At first, he wondered why.

But now that he knew the truth, it made sense.

It was probably to prevent him from directly coming into contact with the Formless Poison and becoming addicted.

Mok Gyeong-un coldly stared at the Holy Fire Priestess and asked again,

“Since you have a connection with the head of the Tang Clan and said that my grandfather was a guardian of the Fire Faith Order, you should know well, right?”

“Th- That’s...”

“Don’t try to think too hard and just answer as soon as you remember. Unless you want the arm that was reattached to be cut off again.”

‘He reattached the arm?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s words, the eyes of the Holy Fire Priestess widened.

She had been wondering why her severed arm had returned to normal, but she never thought the answer would be this person.

Just how far did this person’s abilities extend?

-Tak!

When Mok Gyeong-un placed his hand on her shoulder, the startled woman quickly opened her mouth.

“I- I don’t know.”

“I don’t like this answer very much.”

-Squeeze!

“It’s true. I also don’t know why Guardian Jang was addicted to the Formless Poison. He was a branch family member of the Tang Clan, just like me.”

‘!?’

Mok Gyeong-un, who was about to apply force to the shoulder he was grasping, raised one eyebrow.

What did she mean?

What did she mean by his grandfather being a branch family member of the Tang Clan?

“What do you mean by a branch family member of the Tang Clan?”

“It’s exactly as I said. Although not to the extent of being an external branch like me, Guardian Jang, no, Jang Mun-no, was also a branch family member and was even taught by the previous head of the Tang Clan in recognition of his talent.”

The Sichuan Tang Clan focused on cultivating the art of poisons, so they could be considered a bloodline-centered family.

Therefore, unless it was an exceptional case, for the sake of future generations of their bloodline, they would often marry within close branch families.

“…What? So you’re saying my grandfather was from a branch family of the Tang Clan and was harmed by them?”

“Hmm, there could be a conspiracy. Since branch families are ultimately no different from blood relatives, it’s impossible for the Tang Clan to harm Guardian Jang.”

“Impossible?”

-Crack!

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

With the sound of bones breaking, the Holy Fire Priestess’s shoulder twisted.

“Argh!”

“It’s something that has already happened, so do you think saying it’s a conspiracy is an excuse? Then, my grandfather was betrayed by people who were essentially his blood relatives, whether they were branch family members or not?”

As Mok Gyeong-un’s voice grew colder, the complexion of the Holy Fire Priestess darkened rapidly.

She herself did not know the details of Guardian Jang’s death.

However, the hidden relationship between Guardian Jang and the Sichuan Tang Clan ended up provoking Mok Gyeong-un’s anger.

About 4 ri (approx. 2 kilometers) away from Chengdu.

There, a manor boasting a considerable scale that could be called a small village was located.

This place was none other than the Sichuan Tang Clan.

An emergency arose in the usually quiet Sichuan Tang Clan's manor.

It was due to an unexpected visitor arriving at noon when the sun was high in the sky.

The visitor, wearing ordinary martial arts attire, had a disturbing aura with scars all over his exposed body parts.

Sensing wariness towards this man, the warriors guarding the entrance of the Tang Clan asked about his identity.

“Who are you, sir, who wishes to meet the Patriarch without any prior appointment?”

In response to the warrior's polite question, the man briefly revealed his identity.

“Seok Pae-ung.”

“Seok... Pae-ung?”

That name sounded very familiar.

It was a name he had heard many times and was definitely...

“Th- The Green Forest Fighting King?”

“Gasp!”

Green Forest Fighting King, Seok Pae-ung.

He was one of the Eight Stars, the leader of the Green Forest Alliance, and one of the top experts in the evil path.

The warriors, upon realizing his identity, couldn't hide their perplexity.

The lord of the Green Forest, who held a significant position in the evil path, had come alone to the Sichuan Tang Clan, which held a corner of the righteous path.

With his appearance, the Tang Clan was thrown into chaos.

All the forces guarding the Tang Clan's manor were gathered, and they were ready for battle at any moment.

In the guest hall of the Tang Clan.

More than five hundred warriors of the Tang Clan surrounded the area.

-Tak!

Someone set down a teacup inside the guest hall.

Two middle-aged men were sitting facing each other across a round table.

They were the evil path's master, Green Forest Fighting King Seok Pae-ung, and the head of the Sichuan Tang Clan, who also held the title of Eight Stars, Thousand Poison Hand Tang In-hae.

Seok Pae-ung, who had set down the teacup, spoke first.

“What a grand welcome. To think that so many people would gather for this Seok...”

Seeing Seok Pae-ung's relaxed demeanor despite being in the heart of enemy territory, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae clicked his tongue inwardly and then said,

“All of this is not because we acknowledge you, Warrior Seok.”

“Warrior... Hearing those words from Brother Tang's mouth doesn't feel bad.”

“A hero like Warrior Seok should rightfully be called warriors.”

“To call someone who walks the path of evil and leads a group of mere bandits warriors is not unpleasant, but even a passing dog would laugh at it. There's no need to flatter me like that.”

At his straightforward way of speaking, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae's eyes narrowed.

As Seok Pae-ung himself said, he was not someone who should be called warriors.

His martial prowess was certainly worthy of recognition, but he was merely the leader of mountain bandits and deserved to be condemned.

Nevertheless, the reason for treating him cautiously was because his ulterior motive was unknown.

‘Why did this guy come here?’

Broadly speaking, the righteous and evil paths were naturally hostile towards each other.

However, strictly speaking, the Green Forest and the Sichuan Tang Clan had no particular connections or clashes.

Yet, this guy appeared out of the blue.

In the case of Sichuan, there were also the Emei Sect, Qingcheng Sect, and others, so it could be considered the territory of the righteous path. His boldness in coming alone was concerning.

What ulterior motive did he have for visiting this place?

“Hah. There’s no other way.”

Tang In-hae, judging that it was meaningless to beat around the bush, spoke straightforwardly.

“Warrior Seok... What business brings you to our family?”

“Nothing much.”

“What do you mean by nothing much?”

“As you can see, the reason I came here unarmed and without subordinates is not particularly to fight.”

“Not to fight?”

‘Does he expect me to believe that?’

Those from the evil path were cunning enough to say one thing and mean another.

Until their true intentions were understood, they couldn't be trusted.

Then, Seok Pae-ung laughed and got to the point.

“There’s no need to beat around the bush, so I’ll just say it. After all, it’s not my style to rack my brain.”

“…Speak.”

“I heard that the Tang Clan is keeping a woman.”

“What do you mean by a woman?”

“There’s no need to play dumb. I’ve already obtained the information.”

At these words, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae scoffed and replied,

“Warrior Seok. This Clan Leader has no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Ah. You don’t know? Then how about if I say a member of the Fire Faith Order?”

‘!?’

As soon as he finished speaking, Tang In-hae’s expression instantly hardened.

However, Tang In-hae quickly relaxed his expression and played dumb.

“What are you talking about now?”

“It’s no use pretending. This information comes from a reliable source.”

“...”

“The reason I came here is simple. Hand over that woman from the Fire Faith Order.”

At his demand, Tang In-hae spoke with a stiffened face.

“Warrior Seok, I don’t know where you heard such information, but coming to our family and demanding someone be handed over out of the blue is truly rude.”

“Rude? What is? Asking you to hand over a member of the Fire Faith Order?”

“My goodness, Warrior Seok!”

“If rumors spread that the great Sichuan Tang Clan is protecting a member of the Fire Faith Order, who deceive and mislead the people, do you think you can handle it?”

“You’re going too far!”

“Too far? If there’s no member of the Fire Faith Order, you can just deny it, right? Why are you only talking about rudeness and such?”

At these words, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae strongly denied it.

“...Of course, it’s impossible. How could there be a member of the Fire Faith Order in our family?”

“Are you certain there isn’t?”

“That’s right.”

“Since you’re so confident, there shouldn’t be a problem. Then let me search the Tang Clan’s manor.”

-Bang!

As soon as he finished speaking, Tang In-hae slammed the table hard.

With his strike, the table split in half.

As the split table fell to the floor, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae frowned fiercely and raised his voice.

“You dare to say you’ll search our family?”

“If there’s nothing to hide, is there a reason to refuse?”

“Refuse? How utterly rude. A mere bandit from the Green Forest dares to barge into our family, which holds a corner of the Righteous Alliance, and wants to conduct a search? Are you not afraid of death?”

Tang In-hae gave up on showing courtesy any further.

From the moment Green Forest Fighting King Seok Pae-ung said he would search the family, he had crossed the line, and his anger had reached its peak.

Even if he was one of the Eight Stars, he himself was also one of the Eight Stars.

“Do you wish for the title of Eight Stars to change to Seven Stars here today?”

“It seems the Tang Clan Leader is very displeased.”

-Gulp!

Seeing Seok Pae-ung drinking tea, Tang In-hae’s eyes flashed with surprise.

‘!?’

He hadn’t noticed, but before the table was split, Seok Pae-ung had retrieved the teacup on top of it.

This alone showed that he was no ordinary person.

At this, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae raised the poisonous energy within his body.

‘If I let this guy leave alive today, there will be great repercussions.’

Anyway, from the moment he entered the Tang Clan, the worst-case scenario had been considered.

He didn’t know where he had obtained such information, but the bastard had made a serious mistake.

If he wanted to pressure the Tang Clan by mentioning a member of the Fire Faith Order, he shouldn’t have entered the Tang Clan alone and provoked them.

If it were him, he would have at least brought the Green Forest bandits or moved public opinion outside in advance...

-Tap tap tap!

Right at that moment.

“C-Clan Leader, it’s an emergency!”

Hearing the Deputy Clan Leader’s voice from outside, Tang In-hae asked with a puzzled expression.

“What’s the commotion?”

“Right now, the Green Forest bandits have surrounded the area around our family.”

“What?”

“They’ve piled up a bunch of oil barrels and are aiming fire arrows while surrounding our family.”

At this, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae frowned and glared at Green Forest King Seok Pae-ung.

Then, Seok Pae-ung smiled brightly and said,

“I don’t know much, but I’ve heard that fire attacks are strong against poison techniques.”

“Seok Pae-ung!”

This bastard was bait.

Bait to keep all the Tang Clan’s attention focused on one place.

‘Ha!’

It was absurd.

He thought a bandit's scheme wouldn't amount to much, but he didn't expect the leader himself to become bait and concentrate all the attention in one place.

Thanks to that, his excitement subsided, and Tang In-hae spoke with a calm face.

"You came prepared. But do you think you can get away with this unscathed? Fire attacks may be a way to counter poison, but Sichuan is no different from the territory of the righteous path. Do you think other righteous people will let the evil path's group roam free here?"

At his words, Seok Pae-ung crossed his arms, raised the corners of his mouth, and replied,

"Normally, that would be the case."

"Normally?"

"What do you think I did on my way here? The rumor that the Tang Clan is protecting a member of the Fire Faith Order is probably spreading throughout the vicinity."

'!!!!'

-Clench!

Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae clenched his fists tightly.

'...We've been tricked.'

This guy wasn't just an ordinary bandit.

He knew how to employ proper strategy.

If rumors spread that the family was protecting a member of the Fire Faith Order, the Righteous Alliance and other righteous factions would have no justification to help hastily.

Seok Pae-ung, seeing his perplexed state, extended his fingers and said,

“Tang Clan Leader. I didn’t come here to wage war either. If the Tang Clan and the Green Forest were to fight, there would be great sacrifices on both sides, and this could become the cause of another righteous-evil war. That’s why I want to make a peaceful proposal.”

“A peaceful proposal? Ha!”

“I’ll give you four days. Within that time, choose one of the two options. Either bring the members of the Fire Faith Order you’re protecting obediently, or let me search the Tang Clan. You’ll have to decide.”

“...”

“Only four days.”

-Tak!

With those words, Seok Pae-ung rose from his seat.

Then, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae spoke in a low voice filled with murderous intent.

-Rumble!

“Do you think I’ll let you go easily?”

“It seems you’ve gathered all the Tang Clan’s forces around the guest hall... If the two of us, who hold the title of Eight Stars, were to fight right now, where do you think the damage would go?”

-Grind!

At Seok Pae-ung’s triumphant words, Tang In-hae gritted his teeth.

“Do you think this Clan Leader lacks the resolve to do that?”

“Tang Clan Leader. Come to your senses. Are you willing to tarnish the great Tang Clan’s honor and risk sacrifices just to protect a single member of the Fire Faith Order?”

“...”

At these words, Tang In-hae couldn’t say anything more.

The bastard had already blocked all his escape routes.

As he said, if they engaged in a fight here, even if they were lucky enough to defeat Seok Pae-ung and the Green Forest, the damage would be beyond imagination, and the Tang Clan would be stigmatized for trying to protect a member of the Fire Faith Order.

“Four days.”

With that, Seok Pae-ung confidently left the guest hall.

Not long after he left, Deputy Clan Leader Tang Cheol-young entered and said,

“Clan Leader!”

At Tang Cheol-young's call, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae slumped into a chair as if drained of energy and said,

“I need some time to think.”

“Clan Leader. This isn't a matter of thinking. If rumors spread that we were keeping that wench, it will be difficult to handle the situation compared to fighting the Green Forest bandits.”

“Didn't I say I need time to think!”

“…Don't tell me you still have lingering attachments to that so-called precognitive ability or whatever?”

“…”

At his question, Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae closed his mouth.

Then, Tang Cheol-young clicked his tongue and said,

“Clan Leader. It's time to let go of your attachments. Even if Song-ah, that wench, inherited her grandmother's ability, she is thoroughly a member of the Fire Faith Order. Do you think such a child, regardless of being a branch family of our family, would use her power for the Clan Leader's sake?”

“…”

Deputy Clan Leader Tang Cheol-young, who had approached the Clan Leader, who still remained silent, let out a sigh.

Just what kind of precognitive ability was it that the Clan Leader showed such lingering attachments even in the face of a family crisis?

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At the same time.

Deyang, a city about two days away from the northeast of Chengdu.

In an inn there, a group was having a meal.

They were none other than Mok Gyeong-un's party.

They had been traveling without rest, and as they entered the plains, they stopped by a village to have a quick meal.

-Tak!

Mok Gyeong-un put down his chopsticks while eating meat noodles.

Seeing the bowl of noodles, not even half-eaten, Seop Chun asked with a puzzled expression,

“My lord. Is the noodle soup not to your liking?”

At his question, Mok Gyeong-un shook his head.

Then, he licked his lips and said,

“There's no time to enjoy a leisurely meal. We need to hurry a bit.”

“Pardon? What do you mean by that?”

Mok Gyeong-un glanced at the group on the second floor of the inn, whispering to each other while carrying weapons, and then stood up from his seat.

Rising from his seat, Mok Gyeong-un raised the corners of his mouth sardonically and said,

“The mountain bandits are eyeing my prey.”

‘!?’

#### Chapter 329 – Sichuan’s Upheaval (2)

On the second floor of the inn.

A group of men carrying weapons were having a secret conversation in whispers.

“Those damned mountain bandits must be crazy. To think they would dare to come to Sichuan, which can be considered the territory of the righteous path, and cause such trouble.”

“Senior Brother. Are you just going to sit back and watch? Shouldn’t we step in and help the Tang Clan?”

“Calm down, Junior Brother Bo. Don’t you know the rumors going around?”

“Don’t tell me you believe them, Senior Brother. Even so, there’s no way the Sichuan Tang Clan would protect the Fire Faith...”

“Shh. Quiet.”

“...My apologies. Anyway, there’s no way the Tang Clan would do such a thing, right?”

“Even so, the rumors have spread too quickly. It’s probably the work of those Green Forest mountain bandits.”

“Then what should we do? Are you just going to stand by and watch? If the Green Forest and the Tang Clan clash, we of the Qingcheng Sect must help.”

“As much as I want to, we lack justification. If, by any chance, the Tang Clan really did such a thing, they would be condemned by the people of the Central Plains. If we hastily help them, we might get involved as well.”

“Isn’t that why we came without our sect robes?”

“Ha. Junior Brother Bo. Even if they are just a group of bandits, their leader is the Green Forest Fighting King. Do you think a superhuman with the title of Eight Stars wouldn’t be able to distinguish the swords of the Qingcheng Sect?”

“Tch.”

“Junior Brother is right. For now, let’s exercise restraint and observe. I heard they are still in a standoff, so whether it’s true or not will soon...”

At that moment, the middle-aged man called Senior Brother among the group stood up and turned his gaze to the lower floor.

The man beside him asked in confusion,

“Senior Brother, why are you doing that?”

“Look at them.”

At the middle-aged man’s gesture, the group of men looked there.

Someone with two swords at their waist was trying to leave, and people who seemed to be martial artists were following behind them.

Anyone could tell that they were not ordinary martial artists but people from the martial arts world.

However, one person among them particularly stood out.

“Don’t you know who that guy is?”

It was a muscular bald man wearing a tattered cassock with torn sleeves and a broken rosary around his neck.

One of the men who had been staring at him intently spoke up,

“Isn’t that Ja Geum-jeong, one of the Three Madmen?”

“You only recognized him now?”

At his words, the men stirred.

They had been focused on the conversation and sitting on the inner side, so they hadn’t noticed him.

However, their Senior Brother was sitting on the side with a view of the lower floor, so he seemed to have spotted that crazy monk.

Most of those called the Three Madmen were lunatics known as madmen.

Therefore, regardless of their background, most people from the righteous path treated them as heretics.

The same went for Ja Geum-jeong, the expelled monk from Shaolin.

“What is that crazy monk doing here?”

“Shh. Be quiet. They’re still leaving.”

“But Senior Brother...”

“That’s where they were sitting. Look there.”

At the words of the middle-aged man called Senior Brother, everyone looked at the place where the bowls of food were placed.

There, they saw unfinished bowls of food.

Judging from the fact that noodles and food were left in almost all the bowls, it seemed they had gotten up in the middle of their meal.

At this, one man spoke with widened eyes,

“Could it be that they got up in the middle of their meal?”

“I was constantly glancing at them because I had a feeling they were all from the martial arts world, including the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, and they suddenly got up in the middle of their meal.”

“Then does that mean they overheard our conversation?”

“It’s possible.”

At Senior Brother's words, the men couldn't hide their perplexed expressions.

If they had overheard their conversation and gotten up in the middle of their meal...

“Could they be on the same side as the Green Forest bandits?”

“I don't know if they're on the same side, but I can't deny it either.”

“Senior Brother, if that's the case, we can't just leave them be. I heard that the Tang Clan is already outnumbered. If experts from the evil path help the Green Forest in this situation, things could get even worse.”

“I think so too.”

“Then what will you do?”

“Even if we can't directly help the Tang Clan due to lack of justification, we should stop any reinforcements from going to the Green Forest.”

“Yes!”

At his words, all the men rose from their seats.

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Outside the manor of the Sichuan Tang Clan,

Numerous mountain bandits surrounded the large-scale manor.

Just by looking at the number of those surrounding, one could tell that they were nearly three times the number of those guarding the inside of the Sichuan Tang Clan.

They were the Green Forest mountain bandits who had set up oil barrels and braziers and were fully prepared to pull the bowstrings of fire arrows at any moment.

The expressions of the Tang Clan warriors watching this from the walls were not very good.

Although some of them had a lot of combat experience, it was the first time they were in a standoff like a siege against their own family.

As they faced the third day in a state of tension, not knowing when a battle might break out, they couldn't take their eyes off the Green Forest bandits even for a moment.

Among these Tang Clan martial artists, those guarding the main gate were glaring at certain individuals in the distance with eyes full of hatred.

-Munch munch!

The ones they were glaring at were none other than Green Forest Fighting King Seok Pae-ung and the Green Forest executives, who had set up a large tent across from the Tang Clan's gate, about twenty jang away, and were sitting under it with a luxurious feast.

‘Damn those bastard bandits!’

‘Are they trying to provoke us now?’

Anyone could see that it was an act of provocation towards them.

Of course, that was the correct answer.

“Hahaha! Let’s have a drink, everyone.”

“We’re having a real feast after coming all the way to Sichuan.”

The executives showed off, deliberately enjoying themselves noisily while tilting their wine cups and tearing into the meat.

It was to lower the morale of the Tang Clan warriors and provoke them.

Surprisingly, it was quite effective.

Because they had the advantage in numbers, the Green Forest bandits were maintaining the siege day and night through rotation, but the Tang Clan warriors were at a disadvantage in numbers, so they were standing guard all day without getting a wink of sleep.

As a result, fatigue naturally accumulated, and they would also get provoked.

Seeing the haggard faces of the Tang Clan warriors, Hyungtaek, known as the left arm of the Green Forest Fighting King and the Throwing Killing Guest among the executives, said with a grin, revealing his yellowed teeth,

“Hehe. Fighting King. It seems to be working. I wondered why you gave them four days, but it wasn’t just for that. You did it to slowly kill them.”

“It serves multiple purposes.”

“If it serves multiple purposes, do you have another reason?”

“That’s... You don’t need to know.”

With those words, Green Forest Fighting King Seok Pae-ung downed his wine cup.

At that moment, the words 'she' had said suddenly came to his mind.

[It might be difficult to give them a long time, but how about giving them four or five days?]

[Give them time?]

[Yes. Even a cornered mouse being hunted will bite the neck of the chasing cat. So I thought, how about giving them time to think?]

[Giving them time to think is good...]

At first, he thought there was some sense in those words.

The goal wasn't to wage war blindly but to simply take the member of the Fire Faith Order.

But was there really a need to give them four or five days?

If they lacked justification, it would be a different story, but since they had the advantage of the Tang Clan protecting a member of the Fire Faith Order, there was no need to give them a long time.

Rather, it might have been better to give them only half a day to think and push forward without giving them a chance to think.

However, since he had already made such a proposal, it was awkward to change it midway.

He just hoped that the head of the Tang Clan wouldn't make the foolish choice of trying to protect the member of the Fire Faith Order.

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The carriages and horses of Mok Gyeong-un's group, having left Deyang, were heading southwest at a fast pace.

However, just one li (approx. 500 meters) away from the village, their path was blocked by a group of people.

They were thirty masked individuals wearing gray martial arts attire.

Seeing these people, all carrying swords, Seop Chun sighed and said to Mong Mu-yak, who was riding a horse next to him,

“There’s no way there would be mountain bandits on a forest path not far from the village... Are they the ones from the inn?”

“It seems so.”

Mong Mu-yak nodded in agreement.

Although they were wearing masks, they were all wearing similar gray martial arts attire, and since they had rented the entire second floor of the inn, he remembered the whole group.

“Hey, guys. It’s good that you’re hiding your faces, but didn’t you think about changing your clothes and weapons?”

“...”

At Seop Chun’s shout, the men in gray martial arts attire shut their mouths.

This was because they had nothing to say in response.

They had to overtake them with lightness skills before they set off, so they didn't have time to pay attention to their attire.

They had hidden their faces midway, but it was also to prepare for any unexpected situations since it was awkward to officially step forward.

One of the men in gray martial arts attire, who was called Senior Brother, stepped forward and shouted,

“Where are you going?”

To that question, the expelled monk Ja Geum-jeong, who was sipping from a gourd, laughed and said,

“What does it matter to you where others go?”

At those sarcastic words, one of the men in gray martial arts attire flared up and shouted,

“You’re going to help the Green Forest bandits, aren’t you?”

“Green Forest? You mean those groups of mountain bandits?”

“Don’t play dumb. Isn’t it to help the Green Forest bandits and attack the Tang Clan?”

“Help the Green Forest bandits? Ha? That’s quite a refreshing idea.”

Ja Geum-jeong scoffed at their words.

-Creak!

At that moment, the carriage door opened, and someone slightly revealed their face.

It was Mok Gyeong-un.

“What’s the matter?”

To that question, Ma Ra-hyeon, who was guarding the side of the carriage, replied,

“It seems the people from the second floor of the inn have followed us.”

“Ah, those gentlemen.”

“Yes, what should we do?”

To that question, Mok Gyeong-un lightly scanned the men in gray martial arts attire and then casually said,

“We’re in a hurry, so just have one or two people stay behind to deal with them and follow us.”

-Tak!

With those words, Mok Gyeong-un went back into the carriage.

It wasn’t just Mok Gyeong-un’s subordinates who heard those words, so the men in gray martial arts attire were dumbfounded.

‘Huh?’

‘Deal with what?’

Although they were hiding their identities, they were the elite swordsmen of the renowned righteous sect, the Qingcheng Sect.

As those who had been dispatched to assess the situation upon hearing the news of the confrontation between the Sichuan Tang Clan and the Green Forest, they couldn't help but feel their pride hurt by those words.

At this, the Senior Brother stepped forward and showed his anger.

“You are truly arrogant people. I don't know who you think we are to show such confidence, but if you want to leave this place, be prepared...”

The Senior Brother of the Qingcheng Sect, who was speaking, stopped midway.

He was raising his voice and speaking, but none of them were listening to his words.

“The master said to do that, so who will do it? You, do you want to do it? Or should this monk do it?”

“...”

“If you don't want to do it, at least answer. Damn it. Anyway, I don't like it. Just have any two of you stay behind and deal with it. No, is it difficult because of that guy over there? Or both of you deal with it and come back. This monk can't do it because that guy is pissing me off.”

“You're just pushing it away because you're lazy, aren't you?”

“Tsk tsk.”

Seop Chun, who was clicking his tongue, looked at Hyun Mun-ja, the Senior Brother of the Qingcheng Sect swordsmen, and said,

“That guy seems to be somewhat capable.”

Hyun Mun-ja was a renowned swordsman even within the Qingcheng Sect.

Apart from the Sect Leader and the elders, he possessed the highest martial prowess.

‘He has reached the early stage of the Transcendent Realm.’

Mong Mu-yak, who had assessed his skills at a glance, felt a competitive spirit.

He had been wanting to test his rapidly improving martial prowess against a proper expert recently.

Thus, Mong Mu-yak said,

“I’ll deal with that guy. You handle the rest, Seop Chun.”

“What? I was going to deal with that guy.”

This was the same for Seop Chun.

He also had a strong desire to test his increased skills by facing the most outstanding one among them.

At their bickering, Hyun Mun-ja felt genuine anger surging within him.

The only one he was wary of was Ja Geum-jeong, one of the Three Madmen and the Demonic Demon Fist Sage.

But how much did those young-looking fellows among them look down on him to give him such humiliation?

-Shing!

Hyun Mun-ja drew his sword halfway and was about to step forward.

But right at that moment...

-No. I'll just do it myself for the sake of time.

The voice of that young fellow who had said to deal with them or whatnot came from inside the carriage.

Just what kind of person was this guy to spout such arrogant words, even though they had hidden their identities?

It seemed he needed to be taught a lesson...

-Creak!

At that moment.

The carriage door opened, and two swords floated out from inside as if they were alive.

‘!!!!!!’

Seeing this, Hyun Mun-ja's body froze with his sword half-drawn.

Chapter 330 – Sichuan's Upheaval (3)

‘!!!!!’

The moment the carriage door opened, two swords floated out like swimming fish.

Seeing this, Hyun Mun-ja of the Qingcheng Sect, who had half-drawn his sword, froze in place.

The same went for the other Qingcheng Sect warriors.

“Co- Could it be?”

“Qi-controlled swords?”

Any warrior who wielded a sword would recognize it.

It was said that the Qi-Controlled Sword Technique could only be achieved when one's sword reached the realm of perfection and their internal energy was close to the peak of peaks.

Senior Brother Hyun Mun-ja and the other Qingcheng Sect warriors were stirred.

There weren't many swordsmen in the entire martial arts world who could wield the Qi-Controlled Sword Technique.

How could such a supreme expert appear in a place like this?

Moreover, the face they saw earlier looked no older than 17 or 18 years old, let alone a young adult.

‘That can't be. No way!’

At that moment, Hyun Mun-ja thought that the person displaying this rare technique was not that young man.

There must be an extraordinary master inside the carriage...

-Swish!

Right at that moment.

The qi-controlled swords flew towards him at a lightning-fast speed, startling him and making him exert all his strength to dodge.

By a hair's breadth, the swords grazed past his left shoulder.

However,

-Stab!

Although he managed to dodge the qi-controlled swords, the other Qingcheng Sect warriors did not.

Like skewering with a skewer, the swords instantly pierced through the heads and hearts of three Qingcheng Sect juniors.

-Stab stab stab!

“Ack!”

“Urgh!”

Except for the one whose head was pierced, the other two collapsed with dying screams.

As three lives were lost to the qi-controlled swords in an instant, the Qingcheng Sect warriors panicked and broke their formation, scattering in all directions.

“Jong-wan! Junior Brother Bu-hyeon!”

“Ru- Run!”

There was no time to feel anger or grief over the deaths of their martial brothers.

Mok Gyeong-un’s two swords, Evil Commandment Sword and Plundering-killing Sword, pierced through the fleeing Qingcheng Sect warriors at a tremendous speed, as if hunting.

-Stab stab stab!

‘How... How can this be...’

As four more people died in an instant, Hyun Mun-ja’s eyes trembled like crazy.

He had thought that none of them would be very strong since they were all young, except for the expelled monk Demonic Demon Fist Sage Ja Geum-jeong.

But that was a miscalculation.

They had touched something they shouldn’t have.

If someone could freely control two qi-controlled swords and render experts from the first-rate to the early stage of the peak realm so helpless, they could be considered a top expert in the martial arts world, equal to or surpassing the Eight Stars.

They were already beyond their ability to handle.

However,

‘It’s impossible for everyone to escape.’

Nearly a third of them had already been killed.

If he used them as shields, he might be able to save his own life, but how could he abandon his martial brothers and flee?

Moreover,

-Drip drip drip!

The wound on his left shoulder, which had been cut by the sword, was strange.

He had clearly pressed the blood-stopping points and sent true energy to the wound, but it kept bleeding, and the pain was gradually intensifying.

‘A strange sword.’

The wound from the cut wasn’t healing.

Even if he tried to escape, he didn’t know what would happen.

Thus, Hyun Mun-ja made a decision.

-Whoosh!

Hyun Mun-ja launched himself towards the carriage.

Even if it was a supreme expert, if he recklessly charged in with a desperate move, sacrificing his own energy, couldn't he at least buy some time for his martial brothers to escape?

“Se- Senior Brother!”

Seeing his actions, one of the juniors shouted.

Then, Hyun Mun-ja, without stopping his movement, shouted loud enough for everyone to hear.

“Everyone disperse!”

“Senior Brother!”

Hearing that shout, the juniors understood Senior Brother's intention.

They couldn't let Senior Brother's sacrifice go to waste, so they tried to scatter.

However,

-Whoosh!

At that moment, a black qi erupted from the flying swords.

Then, at a speed incomparable to before, Evil Commandment Sword and Plundering-killing Sword began piercing through the Qingcheng Sect warriors.

-Stab stab stab!

“Argh!”

“Ack!”

Hyun Mun-ja, who had tried not to look, couldn’t hide his shock at the sight.

Although it had a completely different glow from ordinary sword qi, it was definitely sword qi.

‘Qi-controlled sword qi?’

He couldn’t believe it.

Even grandmasters who had reached the level of the Eight Stars couldn’t display the divine skill of wielding qi-controlled swords and manipulating qi.

That meant,

‘A... A true grandmaster of the Six Heavens level?’

It was a divine skill that was impossible unless one was at the Six Heavens level, known as the current pinnacle of the martial arts world.

Hyun Mun-ja, who had been launching himself with the resolve to make a desperate move, fell into despair rather than shock the moment he saw the qi-controlled sword qi.

Just who was the person inside that carriage?

At that moment.

-Grab!

Someone grabbed the back of his neck as he was launching himself.

Then, they smashed his face directly into the ground.

-Bam!

“Urgh!”

The one who grabbed him and slammed him down was none other than Seop Chun.

He had quickly caught up and grabbed him because he was trying to target his lord, Mok Gyeong-un, after casually passing by him.

Seop Chun grabbed his hair and lifted him up.

“What’s the use of a pawn trying to capture the king out of the blue?”

“You bastard!”

Hyun Mun-ja tried to shake off Seop Chun’s hand grabbing his hair.

But the moment he grabbed his wrist, he could instinctively tell that Seop Chun’s internal energy far surpassed his own.

‘What?’

Just who are these guys?

This fellow also looked to be no older than a young adult, but how could his cultivation be so strong?

It was unbelievable.

Hyun Mun-ja's eyes trembled violently.

Just what was happening in Sichuan, with the Green Forest bandits surrounding the Tang Clan's manor?

However, he could no longer continue his thoughts.

-Crack!

Seop Chun had snapped his neck.

They had followed them just because they encountered them at the inn, so there was no benefit in leaving loose ends.

Seop Chun, who had killed him, clicked his tongue as if disappointed.

He wondered how it would have been if they had properly fought, considering they seemed to be from a righteous sect.

He had killed him too easily because he was injured and had become impatient.

‘Well, it can't be helped since we're short on time.’

At that moment, someone approached from the side and said,

“Step aside.”

It was Ma Ra-hyeon in a mask.

“Huh?”

“It’s the lord’s order.”

“Ah.”

With that, Seop Chun stepped to the side.

Then, Ma Ra-hyeon picked up the sword of Hyun Mun-ja, who had died with a broken neck, and began carving something on his forehead.

He carved a vertical line through the center of the character “two.”

It was the symbol of a Secret Society where the third wooden slip served as the leader.

“What’s this?”

“Carve it on the bodies of all the dead.”

“Is that also the lord’s order?”

“Yes.”

“Understood.”

At Ma Ra-hyeon's words, he went towards the other dead bodies.

Meanwhile, the Evil Commandment Sword and Plundering-killing Sword, which had been floating in the air and killing all the Qingcheng Sect warriors with the wondrous technique of qi-controlled swords, returned to the carriage.

Seeing the two swords, Ma Ra-hyeon clicked his tongue inwardly.

‘He’s getting stronger and stronger.’

From inside that carriage, without taking a single step, he had discerned the movements of the enemies with just his qi sense and killed them all.

It seemed he had reached a level that was truly difficult to approach, which was both awe-inspiring and admirable.

At this point, even his master So Yerin would probably be no match for him.

‘…He’s truly a monster.’

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On the morning of the fourth day, the last day of the time given by Green Forest Fighting King Seok Pae-ung.

In the rear courtyard of a villa inside the Sichuan Tang Clan's manor.

A woman in her early twenties with a graceful beauty, wearing short hair, stood in front of Tang In-hae, the head of the Tang Clan, with her hands neatly clasped.

Tang Clan Leader Tang In-hae, who had been staring intently at the woman, opened his mouth.

“Song-ah. Have you still not changed your mind?”

At this question, the woman called Song-ah had a peculiar expression.

Her name was Ye Song-ah.

She was the offspring of the Ye Family, a branch family mixed with the blood of the Tang Clan, and the only granddaughter of the Fire Faith Order's Holy Fire Priestess.

“Clan Leader...”

“Today is the last day of the time he proposed. What do you want me to do?”

At Tang In-hae's words, Ye Song-ah recalled the conversation he had four days ago.

[To be honest, our family is facing a crisis.]

[Is it because of those surrounding the manor right now?]

[Of course, with the Fighting King present, they are also a threat. But there's something even bigger.]

[Something bigger?]

[I don't know where the information leaked from, but the fact that we are protecting you is spreading everywhere.]

[Ah...]

[There aren't many ways to handle this.]

[...]

[Although you are also a branch family member and a family we must protect, as the Clan Leader, I have to make choices that prioritize the Tang Clan.]

[...]

Ye Song-ah knew.

Just as she followed the teachings of the Fire Faith Order, the Clan Leader prioritized the interests of the Tang Clan.

If it brought harm to the Tang Clan, he wouldn't forgive even a branch family member.

If it weren't for "that," he probably wouldn't have even had this conversation and would have abandoned her for the sake of the Tang Clan from the start.

The reason he was explaining the situation in detail now was ultimately,

[But if you promise to abandon the Fire Faith Order and use your power for the sake of our family, I, no, the Tang Clan will protect you even if we have to bear everything.]

Yes, that was the purpose.

Her grandmother, the Holy Fire Priestess, had lost her qualification, and her power had been fully passed down to her.

And Tang In-hae, the head of the Tang Clan, wanted it.

He had given her four days to think about it for this reason.

“Now, depending on your decision, I will...”

-Boom!

Before he could even finish his words.

A tremendous boom erupted.

Tang In-hae frowned at the sound that even made the villa building tremble slightly, then stopped what he was saying and went outside.

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Just a moment ago,

Outside the manor of the Sichuan Tang Clan.

Green Forest Fighting King Seok Pae-ung was sitting under a tent with his arms crossed and his legs on the table.

He hadn't expected them to use up the entire given time.

Seeing this, it was clear that the Fire Faith Order member she had mentioned was indeed inside.

Otherwise, there was no way they would have stalled for so long.

However, thanks to this, a question arose.

‘Just what is that Fire Faith Order member that the Tang Clan is trying so hard to protect?’

They were a part of the Righteous Alliance and a member of the righteous path.

For them, the fact that they were protecting a Fire Faith Order member was a fatal weakness and a stain on their honor.

Yet, the Sichuan Tang Clan had been pondering for nearly four days without giving up on the Fire Faith Order member.

Did that mean there was something worth protecting even if they had to bear all of this?

‘Just what is it?’

He had come here and done this because it was her request, but that woman also wouldn’t make a pointless request.

There must be a reason for her request.

Was there something special about that Fire Faith Order member?

As he was pondering,

“Hmm?”

‘!?’

Hearing a voice from somewhere, Seok Pae-ung turned his gaze in that direction.

There, he saw a young man with a troubled expression, also with his arms crossed.

Seok Pae-ung raised one eyebrow.

‘Who is this guy?’

He had never seen this fellow before.

His attire was neat, and his face was very handsome, so he didn’t seem to be one of the Green Forest bandits.

But when did this fellow enter the tent?

‘Wait a moment... Why didn’t I notice this fellow coming so close?’

Something was strange.

He didn’t feel anything special from this fellow in terms of qi sense.

Yet, he hadn’t detected his presence as he approached.

Did that make sense?

He, one of the Eight Stars known as the current top experts of the martial arts world, had failed to detect even the presence of such a young fellow until he was right in front of him?

“…Who are you, young man?”

Seok Pae-ung took his legs off the table, stood up, and spoke.

Then, the young man who had been standing with his arms crossed and a troubled expression opened his mouth.

“It’s strange.”

“What?”

“I came here because I heard the Tang Clan was in crisis, but it doesn’t seem like a crisis at all.”

Seok Pae-ung frowned.

What nonsense was this guy spouting?

Could it be that he had come to help the Tang Clan?

“…Who the hell are you?”

“Me?”

“Yes. Who else do you think I’m talking about?”

“Aha! I see. I am Moo-jin, the eldest son of the Yoo Family.”

“Yoo Moo-jin?”

It was a name he had never heard before.

Then, the young man who had introduced himself as Yoo Moo-jin scratched his head and said,

“It seems to be nothing serious, unlike what I was worried about, so I’ll just leave.”

“Ha!”

At his words, Seok Pae-ung scoffed as if absurd.

“Who do you think you are to come and go as you please?”

“If there’s nothing to see, I’ll just leave.”

“Hah.”

Seok Pae-ung let out a sigh.

And the moment that sigh ended,

-Swish!

His figure blurred, and he instantly reached in front of the young man named Yoo Moo-jin.

Having approached him in an instant, Seok Pae-ung threw a punch towards the fellow’s abdomen.

-Bam!

It was a strike delivered with 5-star power, to properly test him since he had approached without any presence.

However,

“Is this all?”

‘!?’

The eyes of Seok Pae-ung, who had thrown the punch, widened.

It felt like he had hit a thick rock rather than the abdomen.

Of course, even a thick rock would shatter from his punch, but this fellow was looking at him without moving an inch.

Come to think of it, he hadn't noticed because the fellow's clothes were loose, but why was his upper body so thick?

His entire body was a mass of muscles.

At that moment,

-Bam!

“Ugh!”

Seok Pae-ung's body was pushed back five steps by the punch swung by the young man.

-Murmur murmur!

The surroundings stirred.

The Green Forest bandits, who had been watching what the Fighting King was doing at the sudden commotion, couldn't hide their surprise.

It was the first time they had seen the Green Forest Fighting King being pushed back.

The person involved, Seok Pae-ung, was equally surprised.

-Throb throb!

His abdomen throbbed violently, and nausea welled up.

‘What kind of punch does this bastard have...’

Even without internal energy, the impact shook his entire body, pushing him back.

At this, Seok Pae-ung's wariness seemed to have risen, and he properly assumed a stance.

He was also confident that he wouldn't lose to anyone in terms of strength, having secured a seat among the Eight Stars solely with his external martial arts.

As he assumed his stance,

“Oh. You’re strong. With this level, you must belong to the quite powerful group in the martial arts world.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I thought five stages would be enough, but it seems I’ll need to go to four stages.”

“What?”

What was this bastard saying?

As he was puzzled, he saw Yoo Moo-jin fiddling with a golden ring-like object on his right arm.

He turned it,

-Clink clink clink!

That sound was grating.

Feeling a strange sense of foreboding, Seok Pae-ung made the first move.

-Whoosh!

If it was 5-star power until now, this time he drew out 10-star power in an instant.

This punch contained enough power to blow away a small hill.

However,

-Grab!

‘No way?’

Yoo Moo-jin, the young man, lightly caught his punch with one hand.

But that wasn’t the end.

-Sizzle!

The biceps and forearm muscles of the fellow's right arm swelled up distinctly, turning red and emitting white steam.

Seok Pae-ung's eyes trembled at the extremely bizarre sight.

Then, Yoo Moo-jin, the young man, grinned and said,

“It's better to bite down hard.”

“Wait a moment...”

-Boom!

Before he could even speak.

At that moment, a fist struck his face, and his body was hammered into the ground.

The power was so strong that the ground instantly caved in nearly five jang (approx. 16.5 meters), and fragments flew in all directions.