

Mayhem 371

Chapter 371 – Sword, and Sword (2)

“This... is my sword.”

“!?”

Mok Gyeong-un’s expression turned strange at Cheong-ryeong’s unexpected words.

He had already been thinking of that old man and Cheong-ryeong when the swordsmanship was said to evoke the moon. Now that Cheong-ryeong herself claimed to be the owner of this sword, even the usually rational Mok Gyeong-un couldn’t help but show interest.

“Then... are you the female swordswoman Master Ou mentioned?”

“.....”

Cheong-ryeong gave no answer to Mok Gyeong-un’s question.

Though she remained silent, Mok Gyeong-un’s eyes narrowed at the strangely lingering emptiness.

At that moment, Master Ou Cheonmu pulled out the pure white sword from the wooden box and said:

“The sword’s name is Sunyeon. The female swordswoman named it herself.”

‘Sunyeon?’

It was an unusual name for a sword.

Written out, it meant “yearning”.

Master Ou Cheonmu continued:

“Normally, a masterless sword should be destroyed or buried with its owner, but...”

Flinch

Woong

At that moment, the famous sword Sunyeon in Master Ou Cheonmu’s hand began to tremble faintly.

Ou Cheonmu spoke with a puzzled expression at this phenomenon:

“Why is the sword...?”

It had been left neglected in a wooden box for a full 100 years.

Yet now the sword was trembling faintly and even emitting a sword cry.

It was truly a bizarre occurrence.

Perplexed by this, Ou Cheonmu muttered:

“Sunyeon, is it because you’ve shown yourself to the world after so long? Or...”

Ou Cheonmu looked at Mok Gyeong-un.

As a swordsmith who had been crafting swords for many years, he believed that famous swords had their own will.

That's why he always finished by capturing the sword's spirit.

The reason Ou Cheonmu was looking at Mok Gyeong-un like this was to see if the famous sword Sunyeon was perhaps reacting to seeing its master.

'Even famous swords choose their master.'

Could it be that the masterless famous sword Sunyeon was trying to accept this man as its master?

Flinch

As he wondered about this, Ou Cheonmu suddenly felt a chill run down his spine.

He sensed an eerie cold that was hard to describe, feeling as if something invisible was present before his eyes.

At this,

Swish

As Ou Cheonmu tried to raise his aura,

"It's okay. You don't need to be on guard."

"...You mean this chilling energy?"

"Yes."

Master Ou Cheonmu was a master who had surpassed the Profound Realm.

His energy sense had already transcended the limits of ordinary humans, reaching a realm where he could even detect spiritual energy.

That's why he sensed Cheong-ryeong awakening from the seal of the wooden doll.

Cheong-ryeong, who had emerged like that, reached out her hand towards the sword blade with a somewhat wistful look in her eyes.

The moment her ethereal hand gently touched the blade,

Wooooong

The famous sword Sunyeon emitted an even stronger sword cry, and a brilliant light rose from the blade.

Ou Cheonmu's eyes shook at this incredibly strange phenomenon.

How could a sword that had lost its luster after losing its master show such a display, as if its life had been rekindled?

"To see you like this. Sunyeon."

As Cheong-ryeong ran her hand along the blade, the famous sword Sunyeon trembled.

Could it sense her ethereal presence?

Watching this scene in amazement, Master Ou Cheonmu said to Mok Gyeong-un:

“In all my decades of forging swords, I’ve never seen anything like this. Master... It seems the sword has chosen you as its master.”

At these words, Mok Gyeong-un smiled faintly and replied:

“Perhaps it’s because the real owner is nearby.”

“Owner? What do you mean?”

“Well, maybe it’s because the spirit of that female swordswoman you mentioned is with me.”

“.....”

Master Ou Cheonmu frowned.

How could the spirit of a female swordswoman who died a hundred years ago be with him?

He might have been speaking abstractly about the sword’s reaction.

As he thought this to himself,

“I received sword training from the sword’s owner. You could consider me a disciple.”

‘!?’

For a moment, Master Ou Cheonmu was dumbfounded.

The owner of this sword lost her life just a hundred years ago.

How could he have received sword training from such a person?

“Master, even as a joke, this is...”

“Why would this be a joke?”

“Master, that female swordswoman lost her life a hundred years ago and had no descendants. That’s why the sword has been kept like this until now...”

“The Moon Sword Style. Isn’t that the swordsmanship the sword’s owner practiced?”

‘!!!!’

As soon as those words fell, Master Ou Cheonmu’s eyes widened.

How could he know this?

‘How is this possible?’

Ou Cheonmu was so shocked that he was momentarily speechless.

There was a reason for his reaction.

Their family had a tradition of keeping detailed records of the swords they forged.

When making swords, they would ask about the swordsman’s style to create the most ideal sword for them.

The records left by his great-grandfather clearly stated:

[Sunyeon. Moon Vein. Moon Sword Style.]

Moreover, this sword style was so exceptional that his great-grandfather had recommended memorizing it as one of the sword styles.

It was right then.

Swish swish

Mok Gyeong-un gripped the sword stance paper and took the basic stance of the Moon Sword Style.

Then he lightly demonstrated an abbreviated form of the Moon Sword Style's initial moves.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh swoosh swoosh

Master Ou Cheonmu, who had learned countless sword techniques and possessed outstanding insight, recognized it at a glance.

What shocked him even more was,

'The sword form... has been perfected.'

The Moon Sword Style left by his great-grandfather was certainly an outstanding sword technique.

However, being an ancient style, it had some issues and vulnerabilities in certain sequences, but all of those had been addressed and improved.

Seeing this, Ou Cheonmu became truly convinced.

'So Master is the successor of the lost Moon Sword Style?'

He couldn't tell if Mok Gyeong-un was a descendant.

His great-grandfather had clearly stated that the female swordswoman had no offspring.

But what was certain was that Mok Gyeong-un had inherited the Moon Sword Style.

'Ah, so that's why.'

Ou Cheonmu nodded as if he finally understood.

He had found it strange that Mok Gyeong-un knew about the original sword of that blade, but now that mystery seemed to be solved.

Whether or not they were related by blood, he seemed to know because he was the successor.

'...Is this fate?'

An exclamation escaped Ou Cheonmu's lips.

From the return of his ancestor Gu Ya-ja's demonic blade at the moment their clan's long-cherished wish was fulfilled, to the current owner being the successor of the Moon Sword Style?

How incredibly coincidental this all was.

This was too deeply connected to be dismissed as mere chance.

Speechless with amazement, Mok Gyeong-un stopped his abbreviated demonstration of the Moon Sword Style and said:

“Please continue the story you were telling.”

“Pardon?”

“You stopped in the middle of talking about the masterless sword. How you came to see that original sword.”

“Ah, yes, of course.”

Right, he had been in the middle of the story.

At that moment, Cheong-ryeong, who had been caressing the blade of the famous sword Sunyeon while claiming it as her own, hastily turned to Mok Gyeong-un and said:

“Wait, stop. Mortal.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Just... can we stop this story here...”

She had meant to ask if they could stop, but she halted mid-sentence.

“Here?”

“.....”

She didn’t want the story to continue much further.

That was because she was the subject of the female swordswoman story Master Ou Cheonmu was about to tell, and because of this incident, she had become a wandering spirit in this world for a hundred years.

Of course, Master Ou Cheonmu's great-grandfather wouldn't have known the exact details.

He would have only witnessed the aftermath.

But just hearing it from someone else's mouth was inevitably unpleasant.

However, the reason she stopped speaking was for one reason only.

'What exactly is this original sword?'

Mok Gyeong-un had spoken about the ink-black sword made by Master Ou Cheonmu as if he knew something.

As if that sword had an original version.

But according to the records left by Master Ou Cheonmu's great-grandfather, that original sword was related to the tragedy of that time.

'What exactly did you see in your mind's eye? Mortal?'

Because of this, Cheong-ryeong was filled with questions.

If the original sword of that blade was related to the tragedy of that time, she became curious if it had any connection to 'him'.

That's why she had hesitated for a moment before stopping her words.

"Cheong-ryeong?"

"Haa. It's nothing."

"....."

At her reaction, Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue softly.

Having been with her for a long time, he could roughly guess what she was trying to say from her tone.

She had clearly meant to tell him to stop here, but she gave up on that.

It didn't seem to be simply out of resignation.

Cheong-ryeong also seemed to have something she wanted to know.

It was then.

Thud

Master Ou Cheonmu put the famous sword Sunyeon back into the wooden box and spoke.

"Connections truly are strange things. It's fascinating to see how everything is linked in some way or another."

"....."

As Mok Gyeong-un silently looked on, Ou Cheonmu took a deep breath and began his story.

“To keep his promise to the female swordswoman, my great-grandfather headed towards the border of Guangxi and Guangdong provinces, timed with her Society Leader enthronement ceremony.”

“Society Leader enthronement ceremony?”

Mok Gyeong-un looked at Cheong-ryeong, who was sitting on the table smoking a long pipe.

Society Leader enthronement ceremony?

“.....”

Cheong-ryeong silently turned her head, avoiding his gaze.

He had guessed she wasn't of ordinary status from her crown-wearing appearance and her habit of referring to herself as 'this master', but a Society Leader enthronement ceremony...

As he pondered this, Master Ou Cheonmu, thinking Mok Gyeong-un's question was directed at him, said:

“You didn't know?”

“Huh?”

“Ah. It seems you didn't know this even though you inherited the Moon Sword Style.”

“.....”

“It’s been largely forgotten over the long years, but the Heaven and Earth Society that currently divides the martial arts world into three factions was originally called the Heaven-Earth Moon Society when it was first established. It became Heaven and Earth Society after that tragedy.”

“Heaven-Earth...Moon Society?”

“Yes, according to my great-grandfather’s diary, the origin of Heaven and Earth Society came from the union of three main veins.”

Three main veins.

He remembered hearing about this briefly from Cheong-ryeong.

She had said that the three main veins – Heaven Vein, Earth Vein, and Moon Vein – had joined forces to create it.

After saying this, Master Ou Cheonmu sighed and continued:

“It was truly a tragic incident. My great-grandfather, arriving late to the enthronement ceremony that was supposed to take place at noon, hurriedly headed for the main hall.”

“.....”

“As he approached the main hall, my great-grandfather sensed something was amiss.”

Despite it being the Society Leader’s enthronement ceremony, there was no sign of people, and instead, the air was thick with the smell of blood.

Moreover, not a single person could be seen near the main hall.

Finding this strange, Master Ou Cheonmu’s great-grandfather rushed towards the main hall.

“Upon reaching the main hall, my great-grandfather was shocked beyond words. The place was filled with blood and corpses.”

Swoosh

Mok Gyeong-un glanced at Cheong-ryeong.

The smoke rising from her long pipe was enveloping her surroundings, and he could feel the air around them becoming intensely cold.

Flinch

‘The ominous energy has grown stronger.’

Sensing this, Master Ou Cheonmu paused in his speech and instinctively tried to look at the table where Cheong-ryeong was sitting, but,

“...Don’t mind it and continue with the story.”

“But...”

“There’s no need to pay attention to it.”

Swish

Mok Gyeong-un gripped the sword stance paper and formed a small hand seal.

Immediately, Cheong-ryeong’s spiritual energy that had been filling the workshop was cut off from Master Ou Cheonmu.

'The energy has disappeared.'

"Now, please continue."

Though Ou Cheonmu found this puzzling, he yielded to Mok Gyeong-un's urging and resumed his story.

"In the center of the grand hall stained with blood, he found the female swordswoman, or rather, the first and last Society Leader of Heaven-Earth Moon Society, Ryu So-wol, who had died with her heart ripped out."

'!!!!'

For the first time, Cheong-ryeong's real name was revealed.

However, rather than learning her name this way, Mok Gyeong-un's eyes grew cold as he learned of Cheong-ryeong's final moments.

Chapter 372 – Sword, and Sword (3)

An old man with a grizzled face and gray beard gazed at something with a look of disbelief in his eyes.

The old man's name was Ou Moon-hyeok.

He was renowned as a master swordsmith.

'What in the world has happened here?'

The main hall, which he had expected to be bustling and grand for the enthronement ceremony, was completely covered in blood, with dismembered corpses piled up everywhere.

There were nearly hundreds of them.

What on earth could have happened?

‘What has transpired here, Lady Ryu?’

As Ou Moon-hyeok looked around the hall in shock at the tremendous tragedy, his eyes widened.

He hurriedly ran towards a certain spot.

In the center lay a beautiful woman in a bright red ornate dress, her face pale and eyes closed.

She was none other than,

[Lady Ryu!]

The female swordsman he had been looking for,

Ryu So-wol of the Moon Vein, who was supposed to have her Society Leader enthronement ceremony today.

Ou Moon-hyeok bent down and quickly checked the pulse of the fallen woman.

His face soon hardened as he felt for her pulse.

‘This... this can’t be.’

There was no pulse, and her body had already grown cold.

Judging by the stiffness of her body, rigor mortis had already set in.

Ou Moon-hyeok stared at the lifeless Ryu So-wol in shock, his gaze eventually moving towards her chest.

‘Her heart?’

He hadn’t noticed at first due to all the blood, but when he slightly lifted her clothes, there was a hole in the center of her chest.

It seemed her heart had been ripped out entirely.

Clench

Ou Moon-hyeok’s fists tightened.

How could this have happened?

Aside from being a woman, Ryu So-wol was one of the most skilled swordsmen he knew among the countless martial artists.

Hadn’t she even surpassed the Profound Realm?

How could such a person have lost her life so tragically?

‘Lady Ryu...’

Woong woong woong

The wooden box he was carrying on his back along with his bundle began to tremble.

At this, Ou Moon-hyeok muttered:

[...Have you sensed it too?]

Thud

Ou Moon-hyeok set the wooden box down on the floor.

When he opened the lid, a pure white sword, newly forged and brimming with vitality, revealed itself.

This was her sword, Sunyeon.

Ryu So-wol had named it herself and asked him to bring it when it was completed, in time for her enthronement ceremony.

'I completed the finest sword...'

It was a masterpiece, one of the best among the numerous swords he had crafted.

For Ou Moon-hyeok, who had come expecting to see her joyful face upon completing the sword, this was utterly disheartening and bitter.

The owner had departed this world without even touching the sword.

Woong woong woong

As if sensing this, a faint sword cry could be heard.

Ou Moon-hyeok bit his lower lip hard with trembling eyes.

Though in the martial world, where dozens or hundreds die every day, no one could guarantee tomorrow, this was simply incomprehensible.

‘Who could it be?’

Who on earth could have done this?

Ryu So-wol was one of the top masters of her time, and considering the scale of Heaven-Earth Moon Society, to commit such a tragedy would require a force of comparable size.

Ou Moon-hyeok stood up and examined the corpses in the hall.

His clan had been demanding to know the sword techniques of the sword owners for generations when crafting swords, so he prided himself on his unparalleled knowledge in this area.

‘Most of the wounds on these corpses were inflicted by swords, so if I examine them closely, there might be some clues.’

It was likely to be an organization that could stand against Heaven-Earth Moon Society.

Most probably one of the Nine Major Sects...

‘!?’

At that moment, Ou Moon-hyeok frowned.

This was because as he examined the sword wounds on the corpses, he found that many of them didn't show signs of any special sword techniques.

'...This can't be.'

Ou Moon-hyeok, who had been examining the corpses with disbelief, was shocked beyond words.

He had naturally assumed it was a battle between organizations, but most of the corpses seemed to be the work of a single person.

What was even more surprising was that no special sword techniques were used.

They were simply slashed with a sword.

'Overwhelming power. Overwhelming sharpness...'

That's what these sword wounds showed.

The sword had simply been swung, yet nothing could stop it.

If any weapon had tried to block it, both the weapon and the wielder were cut down.

Most of the sword wounds were decisive blows, cleaving both weapon and body in two with a single swing.

'...A monster.'

The phrase "unstoppable force" seemed fitting here.

Even if Ryu So-wol was a prodigy with the sword, she couldn't have withstood such a monster.

It was someone so strong that even he wouldn't want to face them.

But then,

'Hm?'

His eyes narrowed as he examined the traces.

Some of the corpses...

Boom! Rumble rumble rumble!

Just then, Ou Moon-hyeok turned his gaze at the sound of a huge roar.

As if an earthquake had struck, the main hall shook, and sounds echoed from outside.

Could the perpetrator of this tragedy still be here?

After hesitating for a moment, Ou Moon-hyeok raised his energy to his Yongcheon point.

Pat!

His body shot up from the ground.

Though he had felt a moment of fear towards the one who had created these sword wounds, he soon calmed his mind.

Even if he couldn't face this monster-like being, he felt he should at least identify who the culprit was, if only for the sake of his friendship with Lady Ryu.

As Ou Moon-hyeok emerged from the main hall, his expression immediately darkened.

Shiver

'...What in the world.'

His reaction was due to a chilling energy that went beyond stimulating his senses to completely overwhelming them.

The more skilled a martial artist is, the easier it is to sense such energy when it's released.

But this ferocious and evil energy wasn't confined to a single space; it was overturning everything around, and its scale was hard to fathom.

It seemed to fill tens or hundreds of miles.

How could a human possess such tremendous energy?

He was on the verge of trembling all over, overcome by the pressure.

[Haa... haa...]

Ou Moon-hyeok's breathing became ragged.

No matter how much he tried to calm himself, it was difficult to regain his senses amidst this ferocious energy filling everything around him.

He could tell where this energy was emanating from, but his feet wouldn't move.

The moment he entered this monster's sight, he might die before he even realized it.

But then, something caught Ou Moon-hyeok's eye.

'Ah?'

The ferocious energy that had been dominating the surroundings suddenly subsided.

What could have happened?

At this, he wiped his sweat-soaked forehead with his sleeve and darted towards the source of the energy.

It wasn't too far from here.

About two li northwest of Heaven-Earth Moon Society's main complex,

'!!!!'

Ou Moon-hyeok's eyes widened as he arrived at the spot.

The sky was covered in dark clouds, with a large hole torn through them, and a crimson light, reminiscent of sunset, poured down to illuminate the ground.

Even more bizarre were the several severed mountain peaks and giant shattered rocks floating here and there in the sky, making the entire area feel like a place not of this world.

What on earth had happened here?

Ou Moon-hyeok, who had been staring at this tremendous sight in a daze, soon discovered something.

‘Ah?’

It was someone standing on top of one of the giant rocks floating in the air.

A man with long hair, wearing a fluttering black robe, held a sword in his hand.

It was an ink-black sword, and the moment Ou Moon-hyeok saw it, his mouth fell open.

Being a craftsman, he couldn’t help but be captivated when he saw an excellent weapon, even unintentionally.

‘...It’s perfect.’

The moment he saw the ink-black sword, Ou Moon-hyeok was instantly captivated by its form.

The shape of that sword was ideal beyond comparison to any sword he had ever conceived as a craftsman.

Who on earth could have made such a sword?

As he was lost in all sorts of imaginings while looking at the sword, Ou Moon-hyeok suddenly slapped his own cheek.

Slap!

What was he doing?

This was no time to be captivated by a sword.

He needed to memorize that man's face in detail so he could at least seek revenge for the unjustly killed Lady Ryu So-wol.

But then,

Whirr!

An astonishing sight unfolded.

The sword the man was holding disassembled itself, transforming into a ring-like shape and settling on his arm.

Ou Moon-hyeok's face was filled with shock.

What was happening?

How could a perfectly normal sword disassemble and turn into a ring-like shape?

How was such a thing possible?

Despite his family having been craftsmen for generations, this was a technique he couldn't comprehend no matter how much he pondered.

As he was wondering about this,

Swish

Flinch

Ou Moon-hyeok unconsciously took a step back in surprise.

This was because the man turned his head and looked directly at him.

He had been hiding while suppressing his energy as much as possible, so this was utterly baffling.

Was he going to die at this man's hands?

As he hesitated on what to do, it happened.

Boom!

An unbelievable, tremendous sight unfolded before his eyes.

A dazzling beam of light poured through the hole in the dark clouds, striking down towards the ground.

The light was so bright that he had to close his eyes for a moment.

Kwaaaaang!

With a thunderous roar, his body, eyes still closed, was thrown backwards.

Ou Moon-hyeok, who had raised his protective energy thinking he needed to shield his body, crashed into various places chaotically.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

[Kugh!]

After colliding several times, he was finally able to stop, seemingly as the aftermath subsided.

Opening his eyes, Ou Moon-hyeok had a dazed expression.

He seemed to have been thrown back nearly a hundred meters, and looking towards where the beam of light had struck in the distance,

“There was nothing there, he said.”

“Nothing at all?”

“Yes, my great-grandfather rushed to that spot, but the floating rocks and severed mountainsides had disappeared, and the surrounding area had become like a plain. It was truly a bizarre occurrence.”

It was enough to make ghosts wail.

Master Ou Cheonmu’s great-grandfather, Ou Moon-hyeok, said he felt as if he had been dreaming when he saw this.

Neither the crimson hole torn through the dark clouds nor any of the floating objects were visible anymore.

To this, Mok Gyeong-un asked:

“What about that man?”

The man Mok Gyeong-un inquired about was the long-haired man who had been holding the ink-black sword.

According to the records left by Master Ou Cheonmu's great-grandfather, he was likely the culprit who had ripped out Cheong-ryeong's heart and caused that tragedy.

"He vanished."

"Vanished?"

"Yes, my great-grandfather mobilized even the surviving members of Heaven-Earth Moon Society to search for traces of that man. They searched the surrounding area for three days and nights but found nothing."

"...Did they only search the immediate area?"

"No. My great-grandfather drew a sketch of the man's appearance from memory and passed it around. For a while, Heaven-Earth Moon Society also tried to find the identity of this unknown person suspected to be the true culprit..."

-That's not true!

Crash crash crash crash crash!

Before he could finish his sentence.

Along with a piercing cry that could burst eardrums, numerous objects in the workshop shattered as if exploding.

At this sight, Mok Gyeong-un turned his head to look at Cheong-ryeong.

Mok Gyeong-un's brow furrowed as he gazed at her.

This was because the area around where Cheong-ryeong had been was becoming stained with blood, and her spiritual energy was rising to a chilling degree.

"What on earth?"

Master Ou Cheonmu looked towards where she was with a perplexed expression.

Though he didn't have the eyes to see spirits, perhaps due to the rapidly surging spiritual energy, Ou Cheonmu, who had noticed something flickering, had already drawn his sword.

Shing

At this, Mok Gyeong-un held out his palm towards him as if to stop him and spoke to Cheong-ryeong using sound transmission:

-Cheong-ryeong. Let's calm down for now.

-Without knowing anything... Who... who are you calling the true culprit?

Crack! Crack!

The wooden floorboards were torn up, rising like thorns.

It was as if they were reacting to her vengeful spiritual energy.

A strange light flashed in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

This was because in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes, which had opened his spirit vision, he could see her surging spiritual energy gradually turning purple.

Chapter 373 – Sword, and Sword (4)

Various ancient books on spiritual arts describe it like this:

As a vengeful spirit with deep grudges passes through many years without being exorcised or leaving this world, its rank rises.

The ranks start with Red Spirit, the state of a newly formed vengeful spirit; Orange Spirit, which has enough power to possess or afflict others; Yellow Spirit, considered dangerous enough to require exorcism due to its harmful effects on humans.

Green Spirit, which has existed for decades and can even influence surrounding objects.

Blue Spirit, which has existed for over a hundred years and can affect a wide area, causing auditory and visual hallucinations.

Indigo Spirit, which has existed for over three hundred years and is difficult to subdue even with dozens of exorcists working together.

Finally, Purple Spirit, which has crossed into the realm of disaster-like evil spirits due to grudges so deep that even after hundreds of years, they remain unresolved in any way.

Groooooowl

'Purple?'

A strange light flashed in Mok Gyeong-un's eyes.

After overcoming several crises together, Cheong-ryeong had also surpassed her original rank and reached Indigo Spirit (nam-ryeong), and now her spiritual energy had become close to Purple Spirit.

However, since even various ancient texts including the Shan Hai Jing didn't properly describe this being, no one knew if it truly existed.

'Is the spiritual energy itself changing?'

Mok Gyeong-un let out a hollow laugh at the spiritual energy turning purple.

In the end, does the rank of a vengeful spirit change depending on how strong its grudge becomes?

But then,

"Blood?"

Master Ou Cheonmu couldn't hide his bewilderment.

This was because blood was gushing out from various places in his workshop, staining the floor red from bottom to top.

'What kind of bizarre occurrence is this?'

Ou Cheonmu's energy sense, which had surpassed the Profound Realm, felt the surroundings being covered by an eerie energy.

If that's the case, this must be in the realm of illusion, not reality.

If so, unless one's sixth sense awakens beyond the five senses, it would be difficult to escape this illusion.

“Huu.”

Master Ou Cheonmu focused his mind as he drew up his true energy.

‘It’s different.’

Mok Gyeong-un turned his head at his appearance.

It was an unnecessary concern.

As expected of a peerless master at the level of a great patriarch with deep enlightenment, he had immediately grasped the Ghost Intent Realm and was calmly responding to it.

The Ghost Intent Realm is created by the strong will of a high-ranking vengeful spirit.

‘Blood Realm.’

This phenomenon unfolding before his eyes was Cheong-ryeong’s Ghost Intent Realm – Blood Realm.

However, this wasn’t intentionally created, but rather was unfolding due to her anger.

Crack! Crack!

Thorns sprouted from the blood-stained surroundings, closing in on them.

At this, Mok Gyeong-un looked at Cheong-ryeong and sent a sound transmission:

-Cheong-ryeong... Let’s calm down.

-Move aside.

Her anger had reached its peak, and it was directed at Master Ou Cheonmu.

Sensing this, Ou Cheonmu,

Woong

Raised his sword energy.

The areas stained with blood rippled around where the blue sword energy rose.

The Blood Realm created by spiritual energy seemed unable to withstand the strong energy.

However, the fact that it was withstanding to the point of merely rippling against the energy of a peerless master who had reached the Profound Realm seemed to confirm that Cheong-ryeong's spiritual energy had surpassed its original limits.

"Master, there's an unknown presence in the direction you're looking. Are you sure you're alright?"

Master Ou Cheonmu asked again for confirmation.

Mok Gyeong-un held out his palm as if to say it was fine and not to interfere, but killing intent could be felt so strongly it seemed to touch the skin.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un was also aware of this, so,

Swish

“It might be better if you step out for a moment.”

Mok Gyeong-un waved his hand.

Then, a profound true energy pushed back the blood behind where Master Ou Cheonmu was standing, creating a temporary space for him to escape through.

“Please go now.”

“Master, are you sure...”

“Let’s go.”

“Alright...”

Rustle

It was at that moment.

Before Master Ou Cheonmu could exit through the space Mok Gyeong-un had created, Cheong-ryeong rose from the blood on the floor.

“You?”

Master Ou Cheonmu frowned at the materialized form of Cheong-ryeong.

Who wouldn’t be disturbed by the appearance of a being that clearly didn’t look human emerging from the blood?

“You’re making this quite difficult.”

Mok Gyeong-un clicked his tongue as he watched this.

‘...Did she move through the blood?’

Mok Gyeong-un, with his Ghost Eyes , could detect spiritual energy.

But this was different from the usual Blood Realm.

If the usual Blood Realm merely amplified Cheong-ryeong’s power and allowed her to materialize hallucinations and illusions with spiritual energy at will,

‘Has she become the Blood Realm itself?’

It felt as if this realm was Cheong-ryeong herself.

That’s why she might have transcended space as the blood melted away before their eyes.

In the meantime,

Pak!

As Cheong-ryeong stretched out her hand, blood thorns surged up, targeting Master Ou Cheonmu.

Of course, Ou Cheonmu wasn’t the kind of person to be easily caught by this.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh swoosh swish!

As Ou Cheonmu lightly swung his sword in a circle, all the blood thorns were cut down.

However, the cut thorns were literally liquid.

The thorns regrew and targeted Ou Cheonmu again.

Swoosh!

At this,

‘Is that blood-soaked woman the main body?’

Pat!

Ou Cheonmu jumped up to avoid the blood thorns and quickly closed the distance, attempting to cut down Cheong-ryeong with his sword energy.

However, before he could,

Swoosh

Cheong-ryeong’s body melted away into blood once again, and,

Swoosh

She appeared behind Ou Cheonmu as he swung his sword energy, trying to cut his back with a sword made of blood.

‘Oh?’

Ou Cheonmu hastily withdrew his sword energy and darted forward, avoiding her sword.

But it didn't end there,

Swoosh!

The moment Cheong-ryeong swung her sword, the blood created a blade-like formation as if shooting sword energy, chasing after Ou Cheonmu.

At this, Ou Cheonmu regained his posture and raised his sword energy again to cut it down, but,

Swish!

At that moment, Mok Gyeong-un intervened,

Swish!

With a sharp energy raised from his sword stance paper, he split Cheong-ryeong's blood sword (hyeol-geom).

At this, Cheong-ryeong consecutively launched sword techniques made of blood.

Of course, Mok Gyeong-un easily cut them down.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh swish!

Cheong-ryeong, angered at being interrupted, shouted with blood-red eyes.

-Move aside! Mortal!

-It doesn't seem like you'll listen even if I tell you to calm down.

Mok Gyeong-un sighed lightly and quietly moved his left fingers.

Pak! Pak! Pak!

Soldier! Fight! Split! Formation!

It was the hand seal of the Nine Characters Vivification Technique.

Despite losing her reason to anger, Cheong-ryeong seemed to be observing Mok Gyeong-un's every move, as she snorted.

-Do you think that will work on this master?

She knew almost all the spiritual techniques that Mok Gyeong-un frequently used.

That's why she immediately recognized that those hand seals were for the Four Peaks Linking Technique (Sa-bong Yeon-chae-sul).

Rustle

At this, she hid her body in the blood of the Blood Realm.

As her spiritual energy surged, she had instinctively grasped new ways to utilize the Blood Realm.

'How will you trap me like this?'

This Blood Realm itself was her.

But then,

Pak!

The place Mok Gyeong-un pointed at after forming the hand seal was none other than,

Paaaa!

Four invisible pillars rose around Master Ou Cheonmu.

‘!?’

Cheong-ryeong, who could see this despite hiding her body in the blood, was dumbfounded.

What Mok Gyeong-un had trapped was none other than Master Ou Cheonmu.

The pillars erected around him gradually thickened, then surfaces appeared, creating walls to prevent entry.

Realizing that invisible something had created walls around him, Ou Cheonmu asked in bewilderment:

“Master, what is this?”

“Please stay still in there for a moment. I’ll resolve this soon...”

Aaaaaaaargh!

Just then, a scream that could tear eardrums echoed all around.

Along with it, the space filled with blood shook, creating waves like ripples.

Then the blood rose like a tidal wave, surging towards Mok Gyeong-un and Master Ou Cheonmu inside the Four Peaks Linking Technique.

Swoosh!

The momentum was extraordinary.

Purple spiritual energy was contained in the blood, looking as if it would sweep away everything before it.

Watching this, Mok Gyeong-un spoke as if whispering:

“If you don’t want to get hurt, stay right in the middle of where I’m looking.”

Groooooowl!

At that moment, as Mok Gyeong-un made a gesture of gripping a sword in the air, space rippled and something faintly took the form of a sword.

It was none other than,

“Invincible Sword!”

Ou Cheonmu exclaimed in recognition.

The realm where even energy (gi) forms a sword, said to be achievable only by those who have reached true sword extremity (geom-geuk).

That was the Invincible Sword.

Mok Gyeong-un, gripping the Invincible Sword, held it in reverse and struck it down into the blood-red floor that was heaving like waves.

Swish!

At that moment, centered on where the Invincible Sword struck, blood surged in all directions, revealing the floor beneath.

From the exposed floor, eight strands of sharp, formless energy rose up.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh swoosh swoosh swoosh!

It was the Eight Immortals Sword Competition (Pal-seon-do-gyeong), one of the extreme sword techniques used by swordsmen.

Mok Gyeong-un had embodied this technique into swordsmanship and was now deploying it with the Invincible Sword.

Its power was incomparable to the original.

In an instant, the eight strands of energy spread throughout Cheong-ryeong's entire Blood Realm, splitting the whole space.

Crack!

As the blood-red space split, the Blood Realm eventually shattered into pieces.

Seeing this sight, Ou Cheonmu inwardly marveled and felt that his choice had been correct.

The Master was truly a monster.

If he had competed with him for the sake of pride earlier, he would have surely lost his life.

Moreover, he wouldn't have seen such an incredible sword technique.

Crack crack crack!

In the center of the shattering blood-red fragments of the Blood Realm, someone could be seen shedding tears of blood with a sorrowful face.

It was Cheong-ryeong.

Only the spot where she stood was unharmed, untouched by the Invincible Sword's cuts.

Mok Gyeong-un called out to her.

-Cheong-ryeong.

-.....

Swish!

Cheong-ryeong, shedding tears of blood, glanced at Mok Gyeong-un, then bit her lower lip hard and flew away, passing through the ceiling of the workshop.

Seeing this, Mok Gyeong-un said to Master Ou Cheonmu with a hardened expression:

“Let’s continue our conversation later.”

Pat!

Boom!

Mok Gyeong-un smashed through the ceiling where Cheong-ryeong had passed and left.

Master Ou Cheonmu stared blankly at this, then lowered his gaze to look at the workshop.

His workshop, split into eight parts all the way to the interior, was swaying and barely holding up.

“.....”

Deep wrinkles formed between Ou Cheonmu’s brows as he looked at the workshop, passed down for generations, which seemed about to collapse at any moment.

On a mountain peak not far from Spiritual Sword Sanctuary.

Cheong-ryeong stood on the peak, gazing with sad eyes towards the west, which had turned red as the sun was setting.

Mok Gyeong-un quietly approached behind her.

At this, she spoke without turning her head, still looking at the setting sun.

“...Leave me alone for a while.”

Mok Gyeong-un stopped in his tracks at her trembling voice.

He had felt her grudge before, but he had never seen her look sad or struggle like this.

Staring at her like this, Mok Gyeong-un eventually spoke.

“Are you having a hard time?”

“...If it looks that way, can't you just leave me alone?”

Cheong-ryeong was rejecting his continued approach.

To her, Mok Gyeong-un said:

“You've been alone all this time.”

“...You!”

“I just... I just can't leave you alone.”

“What?”

Step step step

Mok Gyeong-un, who had stopped, walked to where she was.

As he tried to face her to see her face, she sharply turned her face away, avoiding it.

She bit her lip and held back the emotions welling up inside her.

Mok Gyeong-un, watching her trembling shoulders, eventually embraced her from behind.

‘!?’

At Mok Gyeong-un’s action, the emotions she had been holding back burst forth like a dam breaking.

With a tearful face, she shed tears of blood and spoke:

“It’s hard... It’s so hard.”

A hundred years as a vengeful spirit.

Her grudge was deep to the point of being piercing, but she was also piercingly lonely.

She had endured the long years with the sole determination to somehow resolve her grudge, if only for the sake of the Moon Vein members who had died following her.

But... But... Why are you shaking me like this when I’ve endured only for this purpose?

Chapter 374 – That Day (1)

Long ago,

More than a hundred years before the present.

On the north, east, and west sides of a large training ground sat three extraordinary middle-aged men, each guarded by what appeared to be their escorts.

These three middle-aged men were swordsmen from the Three Veins that had branched off from a single origin long ago.

To the north was the Heaven Vein, to the west was the Earth Vein, and to the east was the Moon Vein.

They had been periodically meeting every year to exchange martial arts through sparring matches, and today was that day.

Crack!

The sound of something breaking echoed throughout the training ground.

It was the sound of a wooden sword shattering.

At this, Ryu Gang, the head of the Moon Vein sitting on the east side, frowned.

This was because there was a beautiful young woman holding the broken wooden sword, and she was his only heir.

[Damn it!]

A harsh sound burst from the woman's lips.

Hearing this, Ryu Gang, the head of the Moon Vein, raised his voice while remaining seated:

[Ahem!]

[I was just unlucky. If only the wooden sword hadn't broken...]

The woman, who appeared to be around eighteen years old, spoke as if complaining but then stopped mid-sentence.

Her gaze was fixed on the tip of a wooden sword touching her neck.

The handsome young man holding this wooden sword,

He was Bi Yong-heon, the heir of the Heaven Vein.

Bi Yong-heon grinned mischievously, in contrast with his handsome face, and said:

[Luck is also a skill, isn't it?]

[...You're really annoying.]

[A win is a win, so you'll keep your promise, right?]

[Hmph, who said I wouldn't?]

Pak!

The woman snorted and then threw the broken wooden sword to the ground.

Seeing her behavior, Ryu Gang, the head of the Moon Vein, rubbed his forehead as if he had a headache and shook his head.

[Growing up like such a tomboy...]

She had grown up like a real tomboy, even without a mother.

Of course, he had raised her that way.

After his firstborn son and younger brother died of an unknown illness, the only one who could succeed him was his sole daughter, Ryu So-wol.

So he raised her more like a man than a woman.

At that moment, Yu Soon, the captain of his guard sitting to his right, smiled and said:

[Hehe. But Master, the young lady's swordsmanship has improved tremendously...]

[It's junior head!]

[...I apologize. In any case, Junior Head has made great progress. Who would have thought she'd improve this much when just three years ago she couldn't even beat the Earth Vein's heir?]

[She still has a long way to go. At this level, she's still far from being worthy of being called Junior Head.]

[But Master...]

[Don't you know how much the Heaven Vein's heir was going easy on her? That child is acting like this because she knows that and is frustrated.]

[...]

At these words from Master Ryu Gang, Guard Captain Yu Soon closed his mouth.

He too had guessed this to some extent.

The swordsmanship of Bi Yong-heon, the Heaven Vein's heir, had reached an excellent level that was hard to believe for someone so young.

He was already comparable to the top masters of each vein.

[If only Hun were still alive...]

Master Ryu Gang muttered softly, as if regretful.

Ryu Hun was his deceased son.

He was a promising talent of the Moon Vein, said to have martial talent even greater than Bi Yong-heon.

He had hoped that on the day of the Three Veins' unification ceremony, as per the long-standing agreement, that child would defeat the heirs of the other two veins and become the leader of Heaven-Earth Moon Society, formed by the union of the Three Veins.

But that child had died and left his side.

As he was feeling regretful like this, a subdued voice was heard:

[Yes, things would have been different if my brother were here.]

'!?'

It was Ryu So-wol's voice.

Master Ryu Gang, who hadn't been aware of her approaching, felt a pang of regret.

But she had already run out of the training ground with a hurt expression.

[Ah ah.]

He had hurt that child again.

He had tried his best not to make verbal mistakes, but as the gap seemed to widen over time, he had unknowingly revealed his true feelings.

[Master...]

Guard Captain Yu Soon called out to him with a disappointed look.

[No. Why didn't you tell me she was coming?]

[Who was lost in thought when she was approaching right in front of us?]

[...Right. It's all this master's fault.]

[And cleaning up after the master is always my job. Hwa-yeon, Deputy Captain.]

[Yes, Captain.]

At his call, a woman with a sturdy face who appeared to be in her early thirties stepped forward.

Guard Captain Yu Soon gave her an order:

[Comfort Junior Head and bring her back.]

[Understood!]

Pat!

As the deputy captain called Hwa-yeon followed after her, Master Ryu Gang clutched his throbbing head and stood up from his seat.

[Let's go back.]

[Master... over there?]

[Hm?]

But then, someone was seen approaching.

It was Bi Hyeong-myeong, the current head of the Heaven Vein.

Although they had been seeing each other every year recently, he had changed a lot since his father's funeral three years ago.

He had become less talkative, and his whole demeanor had changed, you could say.

As he approached looking like he had something to say for the first time in a while, Master Ryu Gang couldn't hide his puzzlement.

In truth, he didn't really want to talk after Ryu So-wol's defeat.

Ryu So-wol was running out of the Heaven Vein's estate.

Someone caught up with her and blocked her path.

[So-wol.]

It was Bi Yong-heon, the heir of the Heaven Vein.

She raised one eyebrow and spoke with an annoyed voice:

[Why are you following me?]

[Were you planning to just leave without keeping your promise?]

[...You're really persistent.]

[No, what's persistent about claiming what was promised?]

At his words, Ryu So-wol clicked her tongue, then tore off an ornate jade orb accessory hanging at her waist and threw it.

Pak!

Bi Yong-heon caught it with a smile.

She said to him with displeasure:

[Even if it was a bet, do you really have to take something someone cherishes to feel satisfied?]

[It's special because it's something you cherished.]

[What?]

[Ah, it's nothing. Anyway, I'll take good care of it. Or do you want to make another bet? I'll give it back if you win in our next match.]

[No thanks. Do you think I'd want something that's been in someone else's hands?]

[Don't be like that...]

[Enough. If you're done, I'm leaving.]

[No, wait, I have something else to say besides this.]

[Something to say?]

Although she wasn't in a good mood after losing a cherished accessory, she stopped to listen since he seemed quite serious about having something to say.

As she turned her head, Bi Yong-heon spoke, fidgeting slightly unlike his usual self:

[Um... you know, So-wol.]

[What? Hurry up and say it, man.]

[No, why are you rushing? We haven't seen each other in a while.]

[We've seen each other, that's enough. Why are you hesitating and fidgeting like that when you said you had something to say?]

In truth, Ryu So-wol knew.

She had noticed for some time that he was showing signs of liking her.

Every time they met, he would blush and avoid meeting her eyes. One would have to be a fool not to notice.

But she didn't feel the same way.

To her, he, the heir of the Heaven Vein, was someone to be compared against and a mountain to be conquered.

That's why Ryu So-wol couldn't bring herself to like him.

[No, I'm not doing this on purpose...]

[Hey, it's late. I need to run away, you know.]

[Huh?]

[If you have something to say, tell me next time.]

Pat!

With those words, Ryu So-wol immediately used her lightness skill and jumped over the estate wall.

Seeing this, Bi Yong-heon bit his lip hard and was about to follow her but then stopped.

He had heard someone calling from behind.

[Junior Head!]

It seemed to be the Moon Vein's deputy guard captain.

Knowing he would only be interfering if he followed, Bi Yong-heon couldn't help but feel regretful.

Pat! Pat!

Ryu So-wol displayed her nimble lightness skill as she cut through the undergrowth.

'Almost there.'

Among the many mountain peaks, there was one particularly special place.

This mountain peak, which held a place she treasured like a treasure, was the highest and most scenic.

She had discovered it by chance three years ago and had been visiting it every year since then.

The circumstances that led her to find this place were quite amusing.

It was after she had fled from her father's disappointed gaze following her defeat in a sparring match, just like today.

She had climbed up there after running for several ri without rest to shake off the deputy guard captain and guard warriors sent by her father, Master Ryu Gang.

There, she was mesmerized by the red-tinged sky and the setting sun.

Could there be anything more mysterious and beautiful in the world?

For the first time, she felt comfort for her tired and wounded heart.

After her mother, older brother, and younger uncle had died of illness, her father had raised her strictly and sometimes didn't hesitate to say hurtful things.

"The one who will become the next head is no longer a woman."

"If your brother were alive, do you think you'd even be worthy of that position?"

"Behave like a proper heir."

Because of this, she grew up differently from other daughters.

She grew up like a tomboy, but the wounds inside had festered.

However, after seeing that scenery when she was struggling, she found solace in her heart and visited that mountain peak whenever she felt stifled, making various excuses.

[Junior Head!]

The voice of Deputy Guard Captain Hwa-yeon echoed from afar.

Perhaps because she had chased after her every time she ran away, her lightness skill had definitely improved compared to before.

If she didn't hurry up the mountain peak, she might be caught.

Pat! Pat!

She climbed the treacherous cliff of the mountain peak.

It was quite difficult at first, but now she was so familiar with it from frequent visits that she felt she could climb it with her eyes closed.

The sun was about to set soon, so she was excited.

Full of anticipation, she climbed to the top of the mountain peak and was about to let out a small exclamation when,

'!?'

She couldn't do it.

This was because on top of the mountain peak, which she had considered her own secret paradise, stood a long-haired man with his hands behind his back, his black robe fluttering.

Her face, which had been expecting to see the breathtaking scenery, immediately turned to disappointment.

Who on earth is that guy?

Who is he to come first and monopolize her personal paradise?

As she was wondering about this,

Pak!

At that moment, someone pressed down on her shoulder and slammed her to the ground in one swift motion.

Thud!

[Ah!]

Ryu So-wol, thrown to the ground, couldn't hide her bewilderment.

The force pressing down on her shoulder was so strong that even though she instinctively raised her inner energy, she couldn't move at all.

[Eeek!]

[Stay still.]

[Let... let go!]

Ryu So-wol struggled with all her might, but she eventually had to submit to the overwhelming force that felt like being crushed by a massive rock.

Meanwhile, the man who had been standing with his hands behind his back, looking at the scenery she had considered her personal paradise, turned his head and approached.

[Ah...]

The moment she saw the man's face, she inadvertently let out a gasp.

Despite having black hair and skin similar to hers, he had a strangely exotic and beautiful face.

Could a man be this beautiful?

Even someone like her, who had little interest in appearances, couldn't help but be surprised.

The man who had been staring at her intently opened his mouth.

[Is it a female?]

[Yes, it seems so. Ra...]

Swish

At that moment, the man dressed entirely in black raised his hand, cutting off what the other was saying.

Then, as if uninterested, he waved his hand dismissively and said:

[Kill her and dispose of the body.]

[I obey your command.]

Grip

With those words, the one pressing down on Ryu So-wol's shoulder applied even more force.

She should have been scared, but strangely, a strong defiance arose in her in this situation, and she shouted:

[Female? What a shitty way to talk. You fucking male.]

[...]

The man who had been about to turn away as if he had lost interest stopped.

The one pressing down on her shoulder became flustered and applied more force while raising his voice:

[How dare you, you worthless...]

[Quiet.]

[But...]

[Leave her be for now.]

[What?]

[I said leave her alone.]

[...]

At this, the one who had been about to crush Ryu So-wol's shoulder released his grip.

She quickly got up and drew the sword at her waist.

Regardless, the man raised the corner of his mouth and said:

[An interesting female, indeed.]

‘Again!’

As he called her a female again, she angrily unsheathed her sword towards the man without hesitation.

It was the fastest quick sword technique in the Moon (Wol) Sword Style.

Pat!

At that moment, an unbelievable thing happened.

Tak!

‘!?’

The man had effortlessly caught her prized quick sword between two fingers.

[You know how to use some force, female.]

[Wh-who are you?]

To her surprised question, the man answered in an arrogant voice:

[I am the one who will become your master.]

At those words, her surprise was momentary, and she spoke incredulously:

[You’re completely insane.]

Chapter 375 – That Day (2)

[I am the one who will become your master.]

Ryu So-wol was dumbfounded by the man's arrogant words, spoken so casually.

[You're completely insane.]

No sooner had those words left her mouth.

Groooooowl

She couldn't hide her bewilderment at the incredibly vicious energy she felt right behind her.

Even her father, Master Ryu Gang of the Moon Vein, one of the greatest masters she knew, had never exuded such an overwhelming pressure when revealing his aura.

But this energy she felt from behind was like being in front of a ferocious beast.

'What kind of energy is this?'

[This insolent female is so desperate to die...]

Swish

At that moment, the man dressed entirely in black extended his hand, gesturing not to interfere.

With just the man's gesture, that tremendous energy disappeared instantly.

At this, Ryu So-wol was inwardly amazed.

What on earth was the identity of this man who could command such a monstrous being whose level she couldn't even fathom?

As she was wondering about this,

Clang!

Her sword, caught between the man's two fingers, broke in half.

[Ah?]

He hadn't even used any true energy.

He had simply gripped the blade with his bare hand strength and not only that, but shattered it.

As she was in shock,

Pak!

The man, who had suddenly approached, grabbed the front of her clothes.

Then,

Rip!

He tore her clothes right off.

In an instant, her upper garment was torn away, exposing her pert breasts.

Flustered, Ryu So-wol instinctively covered her chest with both arms.

Seeing her like this, the man smirked and said:

[You're no different from other females.]

[You!]

[Even in a life-threatening situation, you're embarrassed about merely exposing your chest?]

At these words, Ryu So-wol's expression, which had been overcome with shame, suddenly hardened.

She had thought he might be trying to violate her, but the man's expression remained unchanged.

Rather, he seemed to be mocking her reaction.

‘.....’

Ordinary women, even if they were martial artists, would be at a loss from shame and embarrassment in this situation.

However, she had grown up like a man since her brother's death.

Therefore, she was different from those other women.

Ryu So-wol felt defiant, but hiding this, she instead showed a more timid appearance, clutching her chest even tighter.

[D-don't come any closer.]

Seeing her like this, the man shook his head and was about to let go of the torn cloth as if he had lost interest, when,

Pat!

At that moment, Ryu So-wol suddenly thrust the broken sword blade towards the center of the man's neck.

But,

'Damn it.'

Her blade didn't reach the center of the man's neck.

This was because a chilling yet vast energy was holding her entire body.

It was similar to manipulating true energy, yet completely different.

Because the energy was so evil.

Flinch! Flinch!

She trembled, overcome with fear enough to make her whole body break out in goosebumps.

It was the first time in her life she had encountered an opponent so terrifying and frightening just from their energy.

The man approached her like this and gently lifted her chin, saying:

[I thought you were embarrassed, but you were waiting for an opportunity? Interesting. Isn't it?]

[She's nothing but an insect.]

[Isn't she more interesting than those docile women of our clan?]

[That's because...]

[Enough.]

[.....]

The man cut off the words of the one behind him and smiled at Ryu So-wol, saying:

[What, have you suddenly become afraid?]

[Are you going to kill me?]

[You recklessly aimed for the life of one who will become your master, so you must pay a corresponding price.]

[.....]

[However, if you beg for your life, realizing your proper place, I might consider it.]

[What?]

[I am not one without mercy...]

[Kill me.]

For a moment, a strange light flashed in the man's eyes at her words.

[Kill you?]

[As someone born a martial artist, I'm always prepared to die. No matter how scared I am, I won't beg for my life from anyone. So kill me.]

[Hooh.]

One of the man's eyebrows raised.

He had just been enjoying a moment of amusement with an insignificant being.

But this female, no, this woman. Was she a being with her own sense of honor and dignity?

The man, showing interest, eventually spoke:

[Interesting. A mere woman possessing the honor of a warrior.]

[Warrior?]

[Yes. Warrior. I don't dislike such people. And I respect the honor of a warrior.]

[.....]

[Good. As a warrior, I apologize for insulting you. In that sense, I'll give you a clean death. If you have any last words, speak them.]

The man said as he removed his hand from Ryu So-wol's chin.

To this, she, having already abandoned attachment to her life, answered in a voice drained of strength:

[I don't. What last words could I have when I'm about to die? Leaving such things would only make me want to live.]

At her answer, the corners of the man's mouth turned up.

Usually, when asked if they have any last words, people tend to leave expected messages.

Most are expressions of regret, farewells to those left behind, or requests for their treatment.

But to cut off her own lingering attachments to life like this.

'Truly a person of dignity.'

It had just been amusement, and a moment ago it was respect, but now he was genuinely interested.

Among the women of his clan, none had shown such true dignity in front of him.

So the man asked:

[Not bad.]

[What?]

[I'll change my question. Instead of last words, tell me what you desire.]

[What's the difference?]

[I'm saying I'll grant whatever you wish for as your last request.]

The man's intention in these words was clear.

Having taken a liking to Ryu So-wol, he changed the question to give her a chance to save her life.

There was a difference between last words and a desire.

If she wished to preserve her life, he would spare her.

No, wouldn't she naturally say that?

But her answer was completely different from what he expected.

[I want to become strong.]

[.....You want to become strong?]

For a moment, Ryu So-wol was inwardly perplexed at her own words.

She didn't know why, but the atmosphere seemed to have reversed due to some whim of her opponent.

But in that instant when she was wondering what she truly desired, she had unconsciously blurted out those words.

It seemed too late to take them back when,

[Hahahahahahaha!]

Suddenly, the man burst into uproarious laughter, as if something was extremely amusing.

At this sight, she wore a bewildered expression.

Late at night.

Ryu Gang, the head of the Moon Vein, was left speechless at the sight of Junior Head Ryu So-wol.

This was because her face was covered in bruises and wounds, and she was limping as if severely injured.

He had felt sorry for his words and actions earlier in the day, but his belief that she needed to be raised strongly as the Junior Head remained unchanged, so he had intended to scold her.

However, seeing her in this state, he simply couldn't bring himself to be angry about it.

Rather,

[What on earth happened? Why are you in such a state?]

No matter how strongly he had raised her, what father wouldn't worry and just let it pass when seeing his child in such a miserable condition?

To his question, Ryu So-wol couldn't bring herself to give any answer.

"Strength is not something you simply obtain. A warrior becomes strong through fighting."

Those were the words that man had said.

After that, she had fought like mad with the man who claimed to be his subordinate.

For almost several hours without rest.

It was the first time.

The first time she had thought she wanted to die because it was so painful.

[Can you not hear this master's words?]

[.....]

At Master Ryu Gang's pressing, she couldn't bring herself to open her mouth.

In truth, she wanted to tell everything she had experienced.

But she had made a promise with that man.

"I'll only say two things. Don't reveal to anyone that you met me. And if you come to this place around the same time every year, you can obtain the strength you desire."

She had her own stubbornness.

A stubbornness to unconditionally keep a promise once made.

That's why she finally kept her mouth shut despite her father's continued pressing.

Master Ryu Gang finally gave up.

[You stubborn child.]

Clicking his tongue at her obstinacy, Master Ryu Gang spoke to her as if making an announcement:

[The Heaven Vein has proposed a marriage.]

[What?]

A marriage? What was he talking about?

To her bewildered look, Master Ryu Gang exhaled a deep sigh and said:

[It seems the Heaven Vein's Junior Head wants you.]

[I don't!]

Ryu So-wol raised her voice, flaring up.

At this, Master Ryu Gang snorted.

[Hmph. You wouldn't answer when I asked about your well-being, but now you open your mouth when marriage is discussed?]

[Th-that's.....]

[I refused for now.]

[Ah ah.]

At those words, she let out a sigh of relief.

However, the words that followed were by no means something to be relieved about.

[But I accepted their proposal.]

[What? What proposal?]

[I said I would allow the marriage if the Heaven Vein's Junior Head becomes the leader at the unification ceremony.]

[Master, no, Father!]

Ryu So-wol, who had been kneeling, suddenly stood up and shouted.

Master Ryu Gang also raised his voice:

[Be quiet! This is all for the sake of our family.]

[For the sake of the family? You said I was no longer a woman because I'm the Junior Head of the Moon Vein. So why should I marry the Heaven Vein's Junior Head?]

[Didn't I say? It's all for the Moon Vein.]

[That's not an answer.....]

[If you marry the person who will become the leader, the Heaven Vein and Moon Vein will become closely tied. And the Heaven Vein has agreed to give your firstborn son to the Moon Vein.]

[.....]

At these words from Master Ryu Gang, Ryu So-wol's expression turned cold.

Her father had already reached an agreement with the head of the Heaven Vein.

Through this agreement, she realized.

The fact that her father had accepted such a proposal meant that he didn't have high expectations for her as Junior Head.

Clench

Ryu So-wol's fists tightened.

It wasn't that she didn't understand her father.

Master Ryu Gang had become unable to produce seed due to a past injury.

That's why he desperately wanted someone to continue the Moon Vein's lineage, and she didn't meet that requirement.

But,

“...You are now the Junior Head.”

Were those words her brother had spoken, tightly grasping her hand as he breathed his last from illness, merely empty words?

Was all her effort to fill his empty place for nothing?

It truly made her heart ache.

But besides this heartache, she also felt defiant.

Grind

Ryu So-wol gritted her teeth.

Yes. If she thought about it the other way around, the answer was there.

The solution to overturn all of this.

It was none other than...

Crack!

Bi Yong-heon, the Junior Head of the Heaven Vein, stared at the broken wooden sword with wildly shaking eyes.

This was because he was inwardly amazed at the skills of Ryu So-wol, the Moon Vein's Junior Head, which changed every year.

Until just 4 years ago, he still had to hide his true skills.

But at some point, the situation changed.

From 3 years ago, her skills began to improve dramatically, and 2 years ago, he could no longer hide his strength.

And last year, she had finally caught up to within half a move.

He was able to avoid a draw by using the Heaven Vein's secret technique, but it had reached a point where he could no longer be careless.

So he had diligently practiced martial arts for a year to widen the gap again.

But an unbelievable thing happened.

'How can this be.'

She had broken his wooden sword in just about twenty moves.

He had thought he had closed the gap that had opened because he had reached the peak of the Transcendent Realm and widened the difference again.

But how could this happen?

Grind

Bi Yong-heon ground his teeth in frustration.

There was only one reason he had tried to maintain that difference and win at all costs.

“Don’t act weak and become the leader. Then you’ll be able to take that child as your wife.”

It was because of his promise with his father.

But not only had she caught up in 8 years, Ryu So-wol’s martial prowess had finally surpassed his own.

From the moment the wooden sword broke, the gap was already clearly evident, but if he fell here, it felt like he would lose her forever.

So,

Pat!

Bi Yong-heon was determined not to give up even if it meant fighting barehanded.

However,

Woong woong woong

‘!!!!!’

The moment he saw the blue sword energy gathering in her bare hands, he lost all will to fight.

‘.....This is impossible.’

To transcend the barrier at the mere age of twenty-eight.

That meant she had reached the Transformation Realm (Hwa-gyeong).

Murmur murmur

At this amazing sight, there was a commotion and uproar everywhere.

Even Master Ryu Gang of the Moon Vein was so shocked that he forgot his composure and stood up abruptly from his seat.

Chapter 376 – That Day (3)

[Waaaaaaah!!!]

At last, the entire training ground resounded with the cheers of the Moon Vein members.

Amid their shouts, Ryu So-wol withdrew the sword energy she had raised with her sword technique and looked towards the west.

There, she saw the joyful retainers and warriors of Moon Vein, and her father, Master Ryu Gang, standing up from his seat, dumbfounded.

She looked at her father and lightly tapped her chest with her fist.

-Thump thump!

At her gesture, which seemed to prove herself, Master Ryu Gang's lips twitched, and soon his eyes reddened.

As he raised his head towards the sky and closed his eyes, a single tear rolled down his cheek.

‘.....’

Seeing her father like this, Ryu So-wol barely managed to contain her intense emotions.

She had been incredibly curious about how he would react when she defeated the junior head of Heaven Vein and surpassed the limits he had set. Would he feel relieved? Or would his long-held resentment be resolved?

But now, seeing her father’s emotional reaction, she felt a sudden lump in her throat.

‘After giving up everything and accepting that kind of proposal, why are you crying now?’

This wouldn’t resolve the bitterness of all those years.

Emotions were truly spiteful.

Just one look at that face, and her heart was inexplicably softening.

Amidst the cheers, a faint voice was heard.

[..... This can’t be. How.....]

It was the muttering of Bi Yong-heon, the junior head of Heaven Vein.

After surpassing the wall and reaching the Transformation Realm, all her senses had become more acute than before, and she could hear this voice clearly.

‘Yong-heon.....’

His usual playful and confident demeanor had completely vanished, and he seemed overwhelmed by the shock of defeat.

Although she had endured hardships to defeat him, seeing him like this inevitably made her feel sympathetic.

She was about to say something to him when,

-Step step!

She saw Bi Hyeong-myeong, the clan leader of Heaven Vein, approaching behind him.

Was he coming to console his son who was shocked by the defeat?

Seeing him place his hand on his son’s shoulder, she thought it would be better for them to comfort him rather than the victor of the duel, so she stepped back.

But then,

‘!?’

For a moment, she doubted her eyes.

‘Smi..... ling?’

The corners of Bi Hyeong-myeong’s mouth, who had his hand on his son’s shoulder, were turned upwards.

It wasn't the kind of benevolent smile a father would give to console his son who had experienced his first defeat.

It looked as if he was smiling as though he had been waiting for this.

Seeing this, Ryu So-wol was suddenly gripped by a sense of displeasure.

'Why is he.....'

However,

[Junior Head!]

Due to the Moon Vein members rushing over to congratulate her on her first victory in the duel, she had to bury this feeling of displeasure.

The lingering unpleasantness soon became buried in the joy of the clan members.

That day, as the sun was setting,

Ryu So-wol, who had climbed to the peak of the mountain with light steps, spotted someone and smiled brightly.

Then she ran and embraced that person.

That someone was a man dressed entirely in black.

The man also enveloped her in his arms as she came into his embrace, and said with a smile,

[It seems you've finally achieved what you've been longing for.]

[I have. And who do you think taught me?]

[Seeing you even resort to flattery, you must be in a very good mood, aren't you?]

[Of course. The years of endurance are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.]

-Swish!

With those words, Ryu So-wol held the man's cheeks with both hands, stood on her tiptoes, and kissed his lips.

The man responded by continuing with a deep kiss.

He was her master who had awakened her as a warrior, and the first man who made her realize she was a woman.

Although they only met for two or three days a year at most, at some point, she had come to hold this man in her heart.

And it didn't take long for her to realize that she wasn't the only one with such feelings.

For a while, the man and So-wol indulged in each other under the red sunset.

Sitting on the edge of the cliff, leaning on the man's shoulder, Ryu So-wol's face was full of smiles.

There had never been a time in her life when things were this smooth and happy.

The man spoke to her,

[Now that you've achieved what you wanted, are you closer to your goal of becoming the Society Leader?]

[I don't know yet. I won this time, but I don't know how things might change next year.]

[Hoo. You've grown quite a bit.]

[You told me to never let my guard down.]

[Satisfaction leads to complacency, and complacency ultimately leads to defeat. That's why it's meaningless to savor victory for too long.]

[..... That's true. But when I hear you talk, it sounds like you've been fighting non-stop your entire life.]

The man silently smiled at her words.

His expression seemed to be an affirmation.

[Really?]

[I've been living on battlefields since long before you can imagine. Even now.]

[Even now, you say?]

Ryu So-wol lifted her head from the shoulder she was leaning on and looked at the man.

Although she had come to like him, there was still so much she didn't know.

Looking at his exotic appearance, it was unclear whether he was from the Central Plains or not.

Yet he didn't seem to be from the Western Regions either.

It was a feeling that was hard to describe in words.

[Whenever I look at you, I can't help but think how mysterious you are.]

[What do you mean?]

[Your appearance, everything. You wait here every year without fail, but I don't know where you come from or where you go.]

She had met with him here every year, but she had never seen him climb up or down this place.

Nevertheless, he always appeared in the same spot.

This had always been a mystery to her.

But even though they had become this close, the man never talked about anything regarding himself.

Sometimes, this made her feel a bit sad.

As if understanding her feelings, the man wrapped his arm around her shoulder and spoke in a gentle voice.

[I'll tell you someday. But now is not the time.]

[..... When will that be?]

[Not too far from now. The place where I live is becoming increasingly desolate, and war has been continuing for a long time. That's why I've been keeping an eye on this place for a long time. But if I do it now, they will move too. Then this place will soon become a battlefield.]

[.....]

What kind of world does this man live in?

When she listens to him talk, it sounds as if he's alone in a different world.

But soon she put away such thoughts.

Surely he would tell her everything when the time was right?

That's what she firmly believed.

Ryu So-wol tightly held the arm of the man wrapped around her shoulder and said playfully,

[Ah, I see. But I seem to remember someone saying something about becoming the lord of this place a few years ago. Maybe I'm remembering wrong?]

[..... Lord. Yes, I had intended to.]

[Oh my. Is that so?]

[You should be grateful for this. There are still many who wish for that. Even the one who has been dealing with you for the past few years.]

He's referring to his subordinate who, under the guise of teaching, had beaten her black and blue for years.

That person hadn't changed even after years had passed.

He always treated her like an insignificant bug.

Although she had grown up like a tomboy, she had been called a peerless beauty countless times. He was probably the only one who treated her like that.

[By the way, how is that person doing?]

[Didn't I tell you? For our clan, everyday life itself is a battlefield.]

[Battlefield..... It seems even more desolate than my life.]

[Everyone's life is precious. It's just that we often fail to realize it easily.]

[Is that true for me too?]

[Of course.]

Ryu So-wol smiled at his answer.

He had become much gentler than when they first met, but he was still as blunt as ever.

However, she could feel that he respected and cherished her more than anyone else.

That's why she liked him so much.

Staring intently at the man, Ryu So-wol spoke in a slightly hushed voice.

[I wish..... you could stay by my side.]

As her feelings for him had deepened, she always found the short annual meetings unsatisfying.

Finding her cute as she expressed her desire to be together while feeling shy about it, the man stroked her head and said,

[Just a little..... No, it might not be just a little for you, but wait for me.]

[If I wait, can we be together forever?]

[..... Yes. We will be together. Even if it's just for a fleeting moment.]

[A fleeting moment?]

Why did he say a fleeting moment instead of forever when talking about being together?

To her puzzled look, the man spoke in a somewhat regretful tone.

[If only you were like me.]

[What do you mean by that?]

[It pains me to embrace you, knowing it's just a fleeting moment.]

[..... Why are you talking like that?]

Ryu So-wol suddenly felt uneasy at his incomprehensible words.

The man then hugged her tightly and said,

[Don't worry. Even if it's fleeting, my feelings for you will continue.]

[Is it because our life together feels short to you?]

[..... Yes.]

Ryu So-wol chuckled at his words.

Her uneasiness vanished without a trace.

If he felt that the remaining life was short when they still had a long way to go, she could tell how much this man liked her.

She hugged him tightly back and said,

[Someone once told me that it shines brighter because it's short. We can live like that too, can't we?]

[It shines brighter because it's short..... Yes, that's right.]

The man smiled.

And as he kissed her forehead, he said,

[This moment with you is indeed the brightest in my life.....]

As he was speaking, he suddenly turned his head slightly to the side.

[I thought I told them not to disturb me while I'm here.]

[I apologize. The situation was too urgent, I had no choice.]

Hearing a familiar voice, Ryu So-wol looked in that direction and saw that the man's subordinate had already arrived.

Feeling embarrassed, she quickly stood up, suddenly feeling awkward about being in the man's arms.

[Oh, it's been a while. Sir Tau.]

Despite her greeting, the man's subordinate called Tau merely glanced at her as if looking at a bug and ignored her.

Then he approached the man and whispered something in his ear.

'..... I can't hear.'

She tried to focus her auditory senses to hear what they were saying, but their conversation was inaudible.

It seemed they had blocked it with some kind of energy.

However, the man's expression as he listened to his report was not good at all.

When the report was over, the man approached her and said in a somewhat subdued voice,

[It seems I have to leave.]

[..... It looks like a difficult situation. Is there anything I can do to help?]

[It's alright. You have things to do here, don't you?]

[Still.....]

Before she could finish speaking, the man gently embraced her and said,

[Don't worry. I'll come back here as I always have.]

[..... I understand.]

Yes.

The man is not weak enough for her to worry about.

She believed that no one could defeat him because he was stronger than anyone she knew.

[I'll be waiting.]

She sent him off with a bright smile, looking forward to next year.

However, at this moment, she had no doubt that this expectation would be shattered.

Ryu So-wol lay on her bed, covered with a blanket, shedding endless tears.

She had waited for the man in that place for nearly seven days in the rain, but he never appeared.

She was so worried that she had almost completely stopped eating and drinking.

She was in agony, feeling as if that small bit of uneasiness she had felt had become reality, despite how much she had believed in him.

[Sob.]

The tears wouldn't stop.

Her heart ached unbearably, wondering if he, who had always said he lived in the midst of battle, had left this world without her.

As she continued to cry, unable to stop her tears of sorrow and pain, someone knocked on her door.

-Knock knock!

[Go! Please just leave me.....]

-Bang!

At that moment, the door opened and someone entered.

It was her father, Ryu Gang, the clan leader of Moon Vein.

Ryu Gang looked at her, who had grown thin with sorrow, and spoke in a sympathetic voice,

[How long do you intend to stay like this?]

[..... Just leave me alone. I won in this duel too, didn't I? So.....]

[Is it because you couldn't meet him?]

[!?]

Her expression suddenly hardened.

She then glared at Hwa Yeon, the head of the guard who was standing behind Master Ryu Gang.

She had only told Hwa Yeon, her long-time confidante, about him.

She had asked her to keep it absolutely secret, but had she told him?

But then Master Ryu Gang clicked his tongue and said,

[If you like him that much, don't you trust him?]

[What?]

What is he talking about?

She was dumbfounded.

She had thought that when he found out about this, he would fly into a rage, seeing her only as the clan's heir and junior head.

This was because he had hoped for her to form a relationship with one of the junior heads of Heaven Vein or Earth Vein and bear children, even though she had defeated them.

So when her father, who she thought would react like that, said these words, she couldn't help but be surprised.

[Did you think this father, no, the leader of our clan would unconditionally oppose it?]

[.....]

Along with these words, Master Ryu Gang snorted with a bitter expression and said,

[I'm quite curious to see the face of that bastard who made my daughter cry like this.]

[..... Father.]

Tears welled up in Ryu So-wol's eyes again.

Her father had been so strict and cold ever since she became the junior head.

But for the first time since her brother left, he was treating her as his daughter.

Overwhelmed, she burst into tears as her father Ryu Gang approached and embraced her.

Ryu So-wol, who had been silently crying out of worry and longing for him, wept loudly with a tearful face.

Her father Ryu Gang silently patted her back and comforted her.

After she had cried for a while, Ryu Gang said to her,

[When that bastard returns, I'll give him a good thrashing, so cheer up now.]

[.....]

[That's enough now. Huu. If you miss him that much, tell the painter to draw a portrait and hang it up.]

[What?]

[I should know what my future son-in-law looks like too, shouldn't I?]

[Fa..... Father.]

[While you're at it, why don't you dress up prettily and have a portrait drawn of yourself too? In the future, when you lead Moon Vein, no, the Heaven-Earth Moon Society in my place, you'll rarely have the chance to dress up as a woman.]

[Pfft, are you finally seeing me as your daughter now?]

At her words, Ryu Gang smiled with his wrinkled face and said,

[You've always been my daughter, even before you were the junior head.]

More than any other words, her father's statement was the greatest comfort in her life.

Six months later.

On the way back from visiting the Spiritual Sword Sanctuary in Joyang, northern Hubei Province.

Hwa Yeon, the head guard of Ryu So-wol, kept teasing her.

[The clan leader must have been so furious to send an express message.]

[.....]

[Why did you wear a bridal gown for your portrait when you haven't even held the wedding yet?]

[..... It was to leave a portrait in the most beautiful appearance, is that really something to get so worked up about?]

[Of course it is. You had your portrait painted in a bridal gown, and he had his painted like a groom. How could he not be upset?]

At Hwa Yeon's words, Ryu So-wol pouted and expressed her dissatisfaction.

[Tch. He was all talk about son-in-law this and that, but it was all empty words.]

[Still, you went too far, Junior Head.]

[Stop teasing me now. It's giving me a headache.]

Seeing her reaction, Hwa Yeon seemed to think it was time to stop teasing, and changed the subject awkwardly.

[By the way, it's quite a coincidence, isn't it?]

[What is?]

[The time when the sword will be completed coincides with when you can ascend as the Society Leader.]

At her words, Ryu So-wol waved her hand and said,

[Don't get too excited. We don't know anything for sure yet.]

[Heh. But why did you show such confidence in front of the master of Spiritual Sword Sanctuary as if you would become the Society Leader?]

[Should I have said I wasn't confident in front of an outsider?]

[Well, I suppose that's true.]

Hwa Yeon nodded.

The master she served had truly become the greatest expert among the three branches.

She had every right to be proud.

Hwa Yeon herself was also very proud to serve such a young lady.

[By the way, Junior Head. Did you name the sword that way because of him?]

Hwa Yeon had unintentionally overheard the conversation between Ryu So-wol and Master Ou Moon-hyeok of Spiritual Sword Sanctuary.

When he asked about the name of the sword, Ryu So-wol had asked him to call it Sunyeon.

Sunyeon means longing.

It means longing to the point of aching.

If she's giving such a name to the precious sword she'll use for life, it's clear how much the Junior Head must miss him.

But Ryu So-wol answered in a subdued voice.

[Let's talk about that later.]

[I'm, I'm sorry, Young Lady. This darned mouth of mine ran off without me realizing.]

Hwa Yeon made a gesture of slapping her own mouth with her palm.

Seeing her like that, Ryu So-wol chuckled.

Then she soon said,

[Right now, I just want to focus on the duel at the Unification Ceremony.]

[Junior Head.....]

At her firm resolve, Hwa Yeon's lips twitched, unable to hide her inner pride.

After going through many hardships, she had truly become strong.

She was becoming someone capable of leading many people.

[You will definitely win. You'll become the final victor at the Unification Ceremony of the Three Veins, ascend as the Society Leader, and obtain the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques, known as the ultimate secret technique.]

Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques.

It was the catalyst that had caused the Three Veins of Heaven-Earth Moon Society to split into three factions.

Chapter 377 – That Day (4)

The origin of the Three Veins of Heaven-Earth Moon Society can be traced back to the fall of the Old Murim.

After the day of the great calamity, hundreds of martial arts sects were wiped out, and countless martial artists perished, their numbers beyond count.

However, those who barely survived that day became the roots of the current martial arts world.

Originally, Heaven Vein, Earth Vein, and Moon Vein were derived from one source.

Yang Biryu, the Keeper of Martial Records.

He was a man of outstanding martial prowess who managed the hidden martial records, considered the most important in a group that pursued pure martial arts.

He was able to become the Keeper of Martial Records not only because of his martial skills but also because he had been castrated, unable to have children, and had lost his sight, unable to see.

As the hidden Keeper of Martial Records for the martial arts group he belonged to, he lived and ate in a deep underground chamber, only coming out once every six days for a single day of rest.

“He essentially lived there, didn’t he?”

-That’s right.

Yang Biryu, who guarded the martial records, went out for his day of rest as usual, but he had to face a shocking reality.

The massive martial arts library, the manor, and even the city that should have been above were all gone.

Being blind, the only scents he could detect were the heavy smell of blood, a pungent odor he had never encountered before, and the smell of burnt ashes.

-Shocked beyond measure, he wandered for three days and nights looking for survivors, but eventually realized he was the only one left and departed from that place.

Although he had become unable to have children, he had sworn loyalty to this massive organization that had taken him in despite being born blind. The reality was too shocking, but he couldn’t stay in a place where no one else remained.

As he left the ruins, after much deliberation, he decided to take one secret martial arts manual that he had been guarding.

Unable to let this sole remnant and important secret manual of the organization be lost, he wandered the world with the mission of handing it over if he ever found a survivor.

However, even after ten years, no survivors appeared.

While searching for survivors, he happened to find three orphans on the brink of starvation in a poor village, and after saving them, he took them under his wing.

“Don’t tell me they are?”

-Yes. They are the three founders of Heaven-Earth Moon Society’s branches.

Coming from a poor village, they had no family names, only given names.

Yang Biryu, who took them in, raised them like his own children out of loneliness, and even taught them his unique martial arts so they could protect themselves.

Despite teaching them martial arts, Yang Biryu, unable to reveal his origins, did not tell them the name of the martial art.

-Even after taking in these children, he continued to wander for a long time. Unable to find any survivors, he eventually passed away from old age and illness in a small village.

As he died suddenly without leaving any last words, the three siblings he had taken in were left with many worries.

Yang Biryu, who had many secrets, didn’t tell them much, so they didn’t even know who he was looking for. After deliberation, they decided to burn it.

They had never dared to touch what their adoptive father had called “unthinkable,” so they tried to destroy it out of respect for his wishes.

However,

-Their agreement did not go as planned.

“Was it greed after all?”

-For those who had learned martial arts, it was nothing short of the ultimate treasure. Only after Yang Biryu's death did they first see its contents, and they simply couldn't overcome their desire.

“So that's how they split up?”

-That's right.

Taking one character each from their adoptive father Yang Biryu's name for their surnames, they became the founders of Heaven Vein, Earth Vein, and Moon Vein, and for a long time, they were in conflict over possessing the secret manual.

As they continued to oppose each other for a long time and their scale grew, they also began to face external enemies.

Because of this, in later generations, they judged that it was meaningless for the three branches with the same roots to keep fighting, and they made a treaty.

That was the duel at the Unification Ceremony.

They agreed to reunite the three divided branches into one Association, and the one who leads this Association would possess this secret manual.

That secret manual was the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques.

And so, the day of the final duel to determine the Society Leader quickly approached.

The location for the duel was the training ground of Moon Vein.

For Master Ryu Gang, this day held a special significance.

Just eight years ago, he had lost all motivation, believing that Heaven Vein would take everything.

But now, everyone saw Moon Vein's junior head as the likely Society Leader.

‘My dear. Hun. Our So-wol has grown so much.’

It's been over ten years since they passed away, so why do I miss them so much now?

With this thought, he went to the separate building where their memorial tablets were placed.

As he entered the building, he stopped abruptly in surprise.

The reason was that someone was inside the separate building.

[You?]

It was Bi Yong-heon, the junior head of Heaven Vein.

He had thought he would be preparing for tomorrow's final duel, so why was he here?

As he wondered, he saw Bi Yong-heon staring intently at something and gritting his teeth.

-Grind!

Then Bi Yong-heon came out and met him face to face.

[Master.]

[What brings you here?]

[..... I came to pay my respects to Brother Hun.]

[Ah, I see.]

The junior head before Ryu So-wol was Ryu Hun.

That's why Bi Yong-heon, who had competed with him several times and built a friendship, was here.

Knowing this, Master Ryu Gang nodded in understanding.

But the place where the memorial tablets were located wasn't in that direction, so why had the junior head of Heaven Vein been looking in a different direction and getting angry?

[I'll be heading back to the guest quarters now.]

[Very well.]

After sending him off, Master Ryu Gang entered and let out a faint sigh.

[Ah.....]

What Bi Yong-heon had been looking at was none other than the portraits of Ryu So-wol and the man she liked.

He had hung their portraits to show them to his deceased wife and son.

Seeing this must have been quite disheartening for him.

Moreover, although it wasn't intentional, in the portrait, Ryu So-wol was wearing a bridal gown, which must have made it even worse.

‘This is unfortunate.’

He was well aware that Bi Yong-heon, the junior head of Heaven Vein, liked Ryu So-wol as a woman.

That's why the clan leader of Heaven Vein must have made such a proposal.

But they,

‘Are not destined for each other.’

Even if Bi Yong-heon, the junior head of Heaven Vein, were to win the final duel, he would never win So-wol's heart.

That's how firm her heart was.

[Aaaaaaargh!]

Ryu So-wol looked up at the sky and shouted as if roaring.

All the members of Moon Vein on the western side cheered at her roar.

And for good reason, as she had finally won the final duel.

The final duel was incredibly intense.

This was because Bi Yong-heon, the junior head of Heaven Vein, had also managed to break through the wall in the past year, just like her.

If she hadn't made painstaking efforts over the past year, she might have lost.

However, after nearly two hours of fierce battle, she emerged victorious.

'I won..... I really won.....'

Ryu So-wol was overjoyed.

Her preparation, based on the assumption that the junior head of Heaven Vein would become as strong as her, had paid off perfectly.

Breaking through the wall was a realm of enlightenment, and many couldn't reach it even after decades of training, but she was certain that he would reach the same realm as her.

[Haa..... haa.....]

After roaring and savoring her joy, she looked at Bi Yong-heon, the junior head of Heaven Vein, who was sitting on the ground.

He must be deeply disappointed.

This duel was different from the previous ones.

It was the occasion to determine the leader of the three branches and the owner of the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques, the ultimate secret manual.

And,

‘It was your last chance to have me.’

But with this defeat, the proposal made by the clan leader of Heaven Vein became null and void.

Ryu So-wol, who had been staring at Bi Yong-heon, approached him.

Although she didn’t like him as a man, and they had been fighting for their respective clans, he was also a long-time friend.

There would be no more need to fight him, so it was time to embrace him.

She extended her hand towards Bi Yong-heon, the junior head of Heaven Vein, and said,

[Take my hand.....]

-Shudder!

At that moment, Ryu So-wol felt a chill down her spine.

Bi Yong-heon had raised his head and was glaring at her with murderous intent, tears in his eyes.

Even if he was disheartened by his defeat, could he be this agitated?

To the bewildered Ryu So-wol, Bi Yong-heon opened his mouth.

[You..... You..... have..... finally..... driven me..... to the edge.]

[..... Yong-heon.]

[Don't..... call me that.]

[You.....]

-Smack!

Bi Yong-heon slapped away the hand she had extended.

Then he stood up on his own, cupped his hands in salute, and left the training ground.

Watching his retreating figure, Ryu So-wol was gripped by an odd sense of foreboding.

Why did his demeanor not feel like mere disappointment?

Three months had passed since then.

During this time, the Unification Ceremony of the three branches had proceeded normally, and Ryu So-wol, who was about to have her inauguration ceremony as the Society Leader, wore an expressionless face.

Hwa Yeon, the head of her guard, looked at her with sympathetic eyes.

[Sigh.]

Ryu So-wol was smoking a pipe, something she had never done before, burning tobacco leaves.

The thick smoke surrounding her spoke of her depressed mood.

After the final duel, she had hurried to meet her lover at their usual place, but she returned a few days later deeply heartbroken.

It was because he hadn't shown up.

Feeling as if she had been abandoned, she was immersed in sorrow and grief, secluding herself for nearly eight days before finally coming out.

Since then, she had been constantly smoking her pipe with an emotionless face, staring intently at the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques and practicing it.

‘Ah, Young Lady.’

The sight was utterly pitiful.

She could only hope that she would overcome this.

By the way, since the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques was said to be the ultimate secret manual, they naturally thought she would be practicing techniques or something similar, but she had been just reading it continuously.

Although she wondered what could be written in it to make her act like this, she hoped that practicing martial arts would help her forget her sorrows, so she didn't ask about it at all.

Besides, she didn't have the right to ask in the first place.

But as it was late at night, nearly dawn, Hwa Yeon cautiously broached the subject.

[Junior Head, no, Head..... Tomorrow is the inauguration ceremony, wouldn't it be better if you got some sleep? I'm worried you might fall ill from exhaustion.]

[Don't worry about it and go to sleep.]

[How can I, your guard, sleep before you?]

[Then just leave me be. It's not like I'll die from lack of sleep.]

[.....]

Her voice was ice cold.

Was it her deep sorrow that had made her like this?

Hwa Yeon could only watch her sadly until the late hours of dawn.

Dressed in the formal attire and crown prepared for the inauguration ceremony, she looked into a mirror.

The reflection in the mirror still looked unhappy.

However, she tried to compose her expression.

Although her longing had grown even stronger because he hadn't appeared this time either, this moment required her to focus as the Society Leader leading Moon Vein, no, Heaven-Earth Moon Society.

The person who was to become the Society Leader couldn't be seen looking depressed and buried in emotions.

-Tap!

Standing up from her seat, she spoke with a firm voice.

[Let's go.]

[Yes, Head.]

Hwa Yeon, the head of her guard, and the warriors assisting with her inauguration ceremony as the Society Leader followed behind her.

As Ryu So-wol walked along the corridor towards the main hall, her steps felt incredibly heavy.

She had been waiting for this day ever since she became the junior head.

Although she was depressed because her lover hadn't appeared, she didn't think he would break his promise to her so easily.

He would surely appear someday.

Until then, she just needed to fulfill her duties as the Society Leader.

-Step step!

As she headed towards the main hall, her expression became subtle.

When she paused her steps for a moment, Hwa Yeon asked curiously.

[Young Lady, what's wrong?]

[..... Something's strange.]

[Pardon?]

[No matter how solemnly it's being held, this is.....]

Feeling that something was off, Ryu So-wol stopped walking slowly and rushed into the main hall.

At that moment, Ryu So-wol's expression hardened.

The inside of the main hall was nothing short of a scene from hell.

Countless corpses were piled up, and the grand decorations for the inauguration ceremony were all stained with blood.

[Th-This is.....]

Hwa Yeon and the guards who followed her couldn't hide their shock.

What on earth had happened here?

How did they not know about this until now?

[Head.....]

As Hwa Yeon called out to Ryu So-wol, they saw her staggering towards something.

There,

[Fa..... Father.....]

The severed head of Moon Vein's Master Ryu Gang lay on the floor with eyes wide open, and around it were the mutilated corpses of Moon Vein's retainers and warriors in a horrific state.

Ryu So-wol, who had been staggering forward, collapsed to the floor in front of her father's severed head.

-Thud!

[Ugh.....]

Choked up, she couldn't speak properly and embraced her father's head, pulling it close.

They say that when human emotions become too intense, they cannot be controlled.

Ryu So-wol held her father's head, unable to make a sound or even breathe properly.

Why..... Why had her father ended up like this?

What on earth had happened here?

Then,

[You're here at last?]

A voice was heard.

Looking in that direction, she saw a man slowly walking out from beside the throne.

The man with a blood-soaked sword resting on his shoulder was none other than Bi Yong-heon, the junior head of Heaven Vein, no, the one who was to become the clan leader of Heaven Vein.

Her eyes, filled with a mix of sorrow and anger and barely able to breathe properly, didn't leave him.

Then Bi Yong-heon smiled and said,

[How do you like it? Is the inauguration gift to your liking?]

[You..... You!]

Is he calling this a gift?

Bi Yong-heon, have you truly gone mad?

All sorts of words erupted inside her, but with her breathing still not calmed, she could only glare at him while exhaling rough breaths.

Then Bi Yong-heon said something incomprehensible.

[You saw it, didn't you? I told you you'd be able to see the best face you've never seen before. Heheheh.]

[How dare you!]

At that moment, Hwa Yeon, the head guard, unable to contain her anger, launched herself towards Bi Yong-heon.

[No..... Don't!]

A startled Ryu So-wol reached out her hand.

But Hwa Yeon had already reached him, and,

-Slash!

Before she could even properly swing her sword, her body was split in half on the spot.

Unable to even scream, her body fell to the floor in two pieces.

Witnessing the death of Hwa Yeon, the head guard who had cared for her and been her companion since childhood, right before her eyes, Ryu So-wol's eyes turned red as if they were about to burst.

[Ugh.....]

Bi Yong-heon, who had been smiling while watching her reaction, sat down on the Society Leader's throne.

Then, as he plunged his sword into the floor, he spoke with a cold face.

-Thud!

[You brought all of this upon yourself.]

Chapter 378 – That Day (5)

[You brought all of this upon yourself.]

[Ugh.....]

Ryu So-wol, her breathing ragged, glared murderously at Bi Yong-heon, the future clan leader of Heaven Vein, who was sitting on the Society Leader's throne.

How could something like this happen?

In her arms was the severed head of her father, Ryu Gang, who had breathed his last, and around her were the bodies of Moon Vein people, chopped into pieces like hunks of meat.

Such a..... Such a horrific scene.

And another tragedy unfolded before her eyes.

‘Hwa..... Yeon.....’

Her long-time companion had been cut in half and died.

Her once clear and bright eyes were now bloodshot, and thick tears of blood flowed down her cheeks.

Unable to even breathe due to the sorrow and anger overwhelming her, she continued to choke and cough, while Bi Yong-heon's face was full of smiles as he watched her.

[Protect the Society Leader!]

-Rumble rumble!

The guards protecting Ryu So-wol surrounded her with fear-filled eyes.

Although they knew how monstrous the opponent was, having seen the supreme expert Hwa Yeon die from a single sword strike, they were still guards.

They had to protect the Society Leader no matter what.

Im Yuseon, Hwa Yeon's deputy, spoke to Ryu So-wol.

[Head..... Head, please come to your senses. Now is not the time to grieve.]

[Ugh..... Ugh.....]

[Slowly..... slowly regulate your breathing. You might fall into qi deviation from hyperventilation and mental shock.]

Despite her advice, Ryu So-wol couldn't easily regain her breath.

She had already been in low spirits for nearly three months.

In the midst of that, seeing all her loved ones meet such a tragic end before her eyes, it was impossible for the shock to subside easily.

Then, the sound of clapping was heard.

-Clap clap clap clap clap!

The one clapping was none other than Bi Yong-heon, the perpetrator of this tragedy.

Bi Yong-heon looked at Ryu So-wol, who was choking and unable to control her breathing, and said,

[Your face is even better than I expected. Though he doesn't seem to like it.]

‘He?’

Im Yuseon frowned.

There was no one visible around Bi Yong-heon.

What was he talking about?

As she wondered, Bi Yong-heon's face suddenly turned cold and he said,

[Stop blabbering. This is not for you to interfere with.]

‘!?’

What's going on?

She felt something was odd.

Strangely, every time he opened his mouth, his manner of speech changed, as if a different person was talking.

As she found this peculiar,

[It's about time for you all to exit the stage.]

-Bang!

Bi Yong-heon, sitting on the throne, suddenly flicked his finger towards one of the guards.

At that moment,

-Thud!

[Gah!]

One guard's face was pierced, creating a hole.

[Clang!]

As another guard tried to catch the falling guard whose face had been pierced,

-Bang!

The sound of something being flicked was heard again.

With that, another guard's face was pierced through.

As two guards died instantly from this incredible Finger Flicking Divine Skill, the panicked guards tried to break their formation.

At this, Deputy Im Yuseon shouted,

[We must maintain the formation.....]

-Bang!

At that moment, Im Yuseon noticed something flying directly towards her.

But it was already too late to dodge.

She thought she would die with her face pierced, but,

-Smack!

At that moment, someone pushed her, and she narrowly avoided Bi Yong-heon's Finger Flicking Divine Skill.

The one who pushed her was none other than,

[He-Head?]

It was Ryu So-wol, who until just now had been unable to breathe properly.

Her breathing was still rough, but having somewhat caught her breath, she stood up with a ghastly face stained with tears of blood, and handed her father Ryu Gang's head, which she had been holding in her arms, to Im Yuseon.

[Guard it.]

[..... I obey your command.]

Guard Deputy Im Yuseon received Ryu Gang's head.

Then Ryu So-wol walked towards the throne, stepping on the blood-soaked floor of the main hall.

-Step! Step!

Her white formal attire was now stained red with blood.

Watching Ryu So-wol approach, Bi Yong-heon, sitting on the throne, rested his chin on his hand and spoke with a hint of disappointment.

[You're tougher than I thought. I didn't think you had the qualities of a leader.]

[Shut up.]

-Shing!

Ryu So-wol drew the sword from the scabbard at her waist.

Although the custom-made sword by the master of Spiritual Sword Sanctuary was not yet complete, this one given by her father was also a precious sword.

Ryu So-wol, holding the drawn sword, looked only at Bi Yong-heon and said,

[Go outside. And summon the leaders of Earth Vein and the other sects.]

At the Society Leader Ryu So-wol's command, Im Yuseon answered vigorously.

[Yes!]

Although this tragic situation was heartbreaking, the only person who could stop and handle this was Ryu So-wol, the Society Leader of Heaven-Earth Moon Society and the supreme expert.

She had been worried about what would happen if So-wol couldn't regain her senses due to the severe shock, but this was somewhat relieving.

However,

‘Will Earth Vein and the other sects respond to the summons?’

Most of the dead here seemed to be from Moon Vein and its related sects.

This meant that the possibility of Earth Vein and other sects siding with or joining Heaven Vein couldn't be ruled out.

Although it was troublesome, they had no choice.

They had to call them, come what may.

But then,

[Stop!]

As Guard Deputy Im Yuseon and the guards were hurrying to leave the main hall, Ryu So-wol's voice rang out, as if tearing through their ears.

As they hurriedly tried to stop,

‘!?’

Someone appeared as if they had been waiting, swinging a sword imbued with powerful energy.

The sword technique was extremely simple, but its power and range were tremendous, so,

-Slash!

In an instant, it cut through the waists of Guard Deputy Im Yuseon and the other guards, separating their upper bodies from their lower halves.

-Thud! Thud! Thud!

[Aaaaaaargh!]

Ryu So-wol screamed at the sight.

Once again, her people had lost their lives right before her eyes.

In the midst of this, Im Yuseon, even as her body was cut in half, tried to lift up and protect the head of Moon Vein's Master Ryu Gang that she was holding.

-Thud!

[Kuh..... He..... Head..... I'm sorry.....]

Im Yuseon, who had prevented Master Ryu Gang's head from being damaged, breathed her last.

At the same time, Ryu So-wol, who had been heading towards the throne, changed direction and launched herself towards the being who had cut them down.

-Clang!

The sound of swords clashing resounded throughout the main hall, accompanied by a shockwave.

Blue sparks flew in all directions as the two swords, both imbued with powerful energy, collided.

Ryu So-wol shouted at her opponent before her eyes, her voice filled with anguish.

[Yang Incheol!]

The person before her eyes was the clan leader of Earth Vein.

Earth Vein's Master Yang Incheol spoke with a somewhat bitter expression.

[..... So it has come to this. No matter how much I try to accept it, we can't entrust the first position to lead an association to a mere woman like you.]

[Just..... Just for such a reason.....]

[It's not just that. Did you think it would make sense for a woman like you to hold a position like the founder, who must lead these numerous sects, no matter how high your martial prowess?]

..... He joined them because he couldn't accept a woman?

Just for such a reason?

Ryu So-wol's gaze turned cold.

Then,

-Whoosh!

As her energy rose, Earth Vein's Master Yang Incheol's body began to be pushed back.

He had reached the pinnacle-stage of the Transcendent Realm and had devoted himself to internal energy cultivation for much longer than her, so he had been confident that he wouldn't be inferior in terms of energy at least.

However, the gap between someone who had broken through the wall and a supreme expert was stark.

[Bi..... Bi Yong-heon, hel.....]

-Slash!

Before his words could finish, Ryu So-wol's sword severed Master Yang Incheol's neck.

Without even uttering a final cry, Yang Incheol's head rolled on the floor.

-Splurt!

The blood spurting from his severed neck soaked her face.

Regardless, Ryu So-wol stomped on Yang Incheol's head.

-Crunch!

Then, with ragged breathing, she turned her head and glared at Bi Yong-heon on the throne.

Now she wasn't even curious about what kind of feelings had driven him to do this.

She only wanted to tear him limb from limb and kill him.

-Swoosh!

Ryu So-wol stomped on the floor and launched herself towards the throne.

If you wanted to shake me and make me fall into qi deviation so you could sit on the throne, I'll call it a mistake.

Even if I can't overcome the shock and fall into qi deviation, I'll definitely kill you before that happens.

At least you.....

-Clang!

At that moment, her body was flung backwards.

She flew back more than five zhang before stopping by plunging her sword into the floor.

-Crack!

She looked at Bi Yong-heon with surprised eyes.

Bi Yong-heon, still sitting on the throne, had somehow drawn the sword he had plunged into the floor earlier.

He blocked my sword strike in that state?

Although she had been consumed by extreme anger and had only thought about killing him unconditionally, this single contact was enough to calm her excitement.

‘..... How did his energy become like this?’

His energy had changed from just three months ago.

It had become so strong that it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say it had almost doubled, which left her puzzled.

What on earth did he do?

As she wondered, Bi Yong-heon opened his mouth.

[Why are you surprised?]

[..... What have you done?]

She questioned, confused by the energy that had changed so dramatically in just three months.

Bi Yong-heon answered in a monotone voice.

[I told you. You brought all of this upon yourself.]

[Cut the crap. No matter how much you cultivate, for your energy to increase this much in just three months.....]

-Clink!

[!?]

Her words were suddenly cut off.

This was because of the ornament attached to Bi Yong-heon's sword hilt.

It was the ornament with intricate patterns that he had taken from her in a bet long ago.

Why on earth was he wearing that on his sword hilt?

Could it be.....

[Ah, this? He..... Hmm. It seems he wants to talk directly.]

[What are you talking about.....]

At that moment, Bi Yong-heon's smiling face suddenly turned cold as he spoke.

[Why did you do it?]

[..... What are you talking about?]

[Did you do it to shake me?]

[Shake you? What do you mean?]

[You..... I only looked at you alone. But why..... did you do that? Did you humiliate me?]

[Humiliate? Bi Yong-heon, you.....]

[That man! That man! That maaaaan!]

At that moment, Bi Yong-heon sprang up from the throne, veins popping on his neck and forehead as he shouted.

Seeing his crazed appearance, Ryu So-wol's face contorted, forgetting even her anger.

Why had he changed like this?

Was this really the same cheerful and playful man she knew?

[..... Why have you become like this?]

[You still won't answer my question. Am I not even in your consideration?]

[It's not about consideration.....]

[Is it the man you chose?]

[What? You..... Now..... Don't tell me.....]

[It was beautiful. I wanted that beautiful sight to be by my side so much, but why such a..... Huu..... Huu.....]

Seeing Bi Yong-heon trying to control his breathing out of anger, Ryu So-wol bit her lip hard.

She had been wondering why he was acting like this.

But to say that this tragedy was just because he couldn't have her?

Is that why you took away everything I held dear?

[Just..... Because you couldn't have me, you took from me.....]

[You! You! Are mine! Ryu So-wol!]

-Rumble!

With that shout, an enormous pressure arose, shaking the entire main hall as if an earthquake had struck.

-Shudder!

For a moment, she felt a chill down her spine.

She even felt fear at his appearance, consumed by madness.

She knew how addictive and painful this emotion could be, having loved a man herself and still longing for him.

But his current state was closer to obsession than love.

Then,

-Swish!

As Bi Yong-heon pulled his hand towards somewhere, something flew and landed in his hand.

It was none other than,

[You?]

Ryu So-wol's eyes shook violently.

What had landed in his hand was the head of Heaven Vein's Master Bi Hyeong-myeong, with a round wound on the forehead and a severed neck.

Seeing this, she was shocked beyond measure.

The moment she saw the severed head, she was reminded of her father Ryu Gang and felt nauseous.

[Ugh.]

To her, who was suffering, Bi Yong-heon spoke with a crazed smile.

[How could I let you experience the pain alone? Although he was nothing but an empty shell, it was so painful when I beheaded my father with my own hands.]

[..... You're insane.]

This man is truly mad.

At first, she thought his obsession had gone too far because he liked her too much.

No, she thought that was the cause.

But seeing him behead his own father to experience the same pain as her, she could only think that he had gone beyond madness and become truly insane.

[You..... You just need to die.]

She gripped her sword hilt tightly with both hands and gritted her teeth.

Any trace of sympathy had disappeared.

If he had gone this mad and was consumed by insanity, the only answer was to kill him somehow.

To her, Bi Yong-heon dropped his father's head to the floor and reached out his hand as if inviting her, saying,

[Let's be together. We're the same now, we can understand each other.]

[Stop spouting nonsense. I will never understand you.]

[..... Please don't make me make that choice.]

[Shut up!]

-Swoosh!

She hated even exchanging words with him anymore, so she raised all her energy and launched herself.

However, given the sudden increase in his energy, the outcome of the battle might have already been decided.

[Haa..... Haa..... Haa.....]

Unlike her battered state, Bi Yong-heon was still at ease.

He was even sitting on the throne in the main hall, looking at her with arrogant eyes.

-Thud!

Ryu So-wol plunged her sword into the floor like a cane and shouted while panting,

[Why..... Why..... Aaargh!]

She wanted to kill him so badly, but she couldn't.

That tormented her terribly.

She wanted to kill him, but he was just toying with her.

Then, Bi Yong-heon, sitting on the throne, said,

[This is your last chance. Let's be together.]

Ryu So-wol answered his proposal with a single word.

[Die.]

Then So-wol gripped her sword hilt tightly.

She tore her clothes and wrapped them tightly around her wrist, then launched herself towards Bi Yong-heon sitting on the throne.

But at that very moment,

-Thud!

In the blink of an eye, Bi Yong-heon, who had been on the throne, appeared in front of her and plunged his hand into her chest.

[Gah!]

Her bloodshot pupils shook.

In those shaking pupils, countless beings flashed by.

Her mother who died long ago, her brother Ryu Hun, and her father Ryu Gang..... And the faces of the Moon Vein people.

Lastly, the face of a single person appeared.

It was that man.

She had wanted to see him so much..... She missed him so much.....

-Crack!

Something appeared in her eyes, which were being consumed by sorrow rather than death.

It was her heart, beating loudly.

Who would have thought she'd see this while alive?

To her, who couldn't speak, Bi Yong-heon said with tears in his eyes and veins popping on his face,

[The one you should hold in this heart is me.]

[Ha..... Ha..... Ha.....]

[Don't worry. One way or another, we'll be together forever, So-wol.]

-Crunch

As soon as those words ended, she saw the sight of her heart being crushed by his hand.

The heart that had been beating as if still alive no longer beat.

Is this how I die.....

-Boom!

At that moment.

With a tremendous roar, the ceiling of the main hall collapsed.

Everywhere suddenly darkened and filled with dust, obscuring vision, and she closed her eyes as she fell forward.

-Thud!

Is this how I die?

Then, she heard someone's scream that sounded like Bi Yong-heon's voice.

[Aaaaargh!]

After several screams, someone embraced her.

She opened her eyes with difficulty.

It was truly strange.

Her heart had been ripped out, so she was as good as dead, but was this the final burst of consciousness before death?

The person she had longed to see appeared.

It was the man.

[Ugh.....]

She saw him..... She saw him looking at her with such sorrowful eyes, sobbing.

Is he grieving my death?

She wanted to say something, but no voice came out.

-I..... wanted..... to be..... your bride.....

So-wol moved her lips with difficulty.

And she wiped the tears flowing down his cheeks with her fingertips.

She wanted to comfort him in his sorrow.

Even if it was for the last time.

The man held her hand tightly and said,

[You were beautiful..... So beautiful, like a red peony in bloom.]

Ah..... He saw.

He saw it.

Then she could no longer resist her heavy eyelids.

As her eyes slowly closed, she saw him roaring in sorrow.

Chapter 379 – Joining (1)

Throughout her story, Cheong-ryeong was filled with anger and sorrow as she recalled the past.

Mok Gyeong-un listened intently to Cheong-ryeong's tale.

As she recounted everything up to the moment she breathed her last, Cheong-ryeong seemed overwhelmed with emotion and shed tears of blood once again.

How deep must her resentment be to shed tears of blood despite being a bodiless spirit?

Mok Gyeong-un silently grasped her hand.

He felt it was the right thing to do.

-Grasp!

Cheong-ryeong, who was sobbing, held Mok Gyeong-un's hand tightly.

Like a child clinging to a parent's hand for support.

Although a vengeful spirit's body should feel cold as it's pure yin energy, Mok Gyeong-un found her hand strangely warm.

However, as she recounted her final moments, the strength in her hand weakened.

It was when she spoke of wanting to become "his" bride.

As she tearfully told the story, she looked at Mok Gyeong-un sheepishly, feeling somewhat embarrassed.

'I got carried away while speaking.'

She felt she shouldn't have mentioned that last part.

She worried that the mortal might be disappointed after learning about her feelings for him.

That's how much she loved him.

To the point of thinking only of him even in her dying moments.

-.....,

“.....”

Mok Gyeong-un stared at her as she remained silent out of embarrassment, then spoke.

“But hearing it all, one thing seems strange.”

-Strange? What do you mean?

“Cheong-ryeong... no, So-wol..... At the end, you clearly lost your father and clan, but it seems you saw ‘that man’ and the junior head of Heaven Vein or whoever die. How did you become a vengeful spirit? Of course, you could remain due to deep resentment from losing your family, but.....”

Her fundamental resentment was towards that Bi Yong-heon.

It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say everything stemmed from him.

But according to her story, it seemed this Bi Yong-heon had likely been dealt with by “him” whom she liked so much.

It was then,

-No, he didn’t die.

“What?”

He didn’t die?

-I too thought he had died because of his scream I heard at the end. But he was alive.

“How do you know that?”

-..... I sensed it.

“You sensed it? That he was alive?”

-..... I may not know now after a hundred years have passed, but at that time, he was certainly alive. He lived on to humiliate me to the very end.

How much time had passed?

Deep resentment becomes yin spiritual energy that holds the soul in this world.

A newly formed vengeful spirit doesn't immediately form self-awareness due to the adaptation period to the spiritual body change and its low rank.

It took quite some time for her to gain self-awareness.

When she finally formed her own consciousness, the first thing she saw was none other than a book.

‘A... book?’

She instinctively knew that she was strongly bound to this book.

This book was a medium that allowed her to remain more firmly attached to the mortal world even as a spirit.

But how could this unfamiliar book be related to her?

Puzzled, she examined the book closely.

And in the process,

‘!!!!!!’

The book was made from none other than her own heart.

Having become a spirit, she could now see the world differently, so she instinctively knew.

What on earth had they done with her heart?

She opened the book made by drying and pressing her heart.

Inside, like any other book, words were inscribed one by one.

The words were the verses of the Moon Sword Technique, which combined the Eight Thought-Shattering Techniques with her Moonless Void Sword[1].

‘What is this.....’

It was then.

As if having a headache, she felt pain in her head.

It was strange to feel pain when spirits shouldn't experience headaches, so why did it hurt so much?

As she wondered, a faint memory flowed into her mind.

It was,

[The heart is the source of life and also symbolizes a person's feelings. You and I will be together forever.]

‘!?’

She couldn't hide her bewilderment at his image appearing in her mind.

How..... How was this man still alive?

Clearly, by his hand..... Ugh.

Suddenly, another memory flashed in her mind.

He was inscribing words on her heart.

[..... So-wol. I'll leave all traces of you here.]

-Clench!

She bit her lip hard and raged.

Was he looking at this constantly after inscribing it on her heart as if doing it for her sake?

-Rumble rumble rumble!

As her enraged spiritual energy spread out, the surroundings shook.

She was so angry.

It was already miserable enough to become a vengeful spirit due to unresolved resentment, but was he humiliating her even after death?

-Unable to endure the humiliation from him even after death, I went berserk. Although I hadn't yet properly gained power as a vengeful spirit, I was consumed by the thought of killing him.

“Were you sealed by him then?”

When he first met Cheong-ryeong, or rather Ryu So-wol, the secret manual made from her heart, which was her medium, was clearly sealed by some magic.

According to her story, it was highly likely that she had been sealed to stop her rampage.

But,

-..... I don't know. To be honest, I don't remember anything from this point on.

“You don't remember?”

-Yes. I have no memory of how I was sealed.

She had tried to recall that moment many times, but couldn't remember no matter how hard she tried.

To this, Mok Gyeong-un said with a tone of regret,

“Then you don't know how that secret manual made from your heart ended up in Yeon Mok Sword Manor either?”

-I don't remember. When I was sealed, I was essentially cut off from the outside world. That period was close to a hundred years. However.....

She had endured solely with the thought of revenge.

Because of him, she lost her family and caused pain to the man she loved by making him lose someone precious.

That remained as deep resentment and pain even as she was dying.

-Only this resentment sustained me.

Enduring for such a long time while harboring deep resentment was a battle against loneliness.

She had persevered steadfastly through the long loneliness. However, no matter how strong a vengeful spirit, that terrible loneliness inevitably ate away at one's own heart.

That's why she had crumbled in front of Mok Gyeong-un, who shook her.

“.....”

After hearing the whole story, Mok Gyeong-un, though unskilled in emotions, could understand in his heart how difficult and lonely a battle she had fought.

Therefore,

-Grasp!

He held her hand and spoke as if making a vow.

“I promise you.”

-.....

“I’ll erase everything related to him from this world. Even if he’s already dead and gone, it doesn’t matter.”

Her expression became strange at Mok Gyeong-un’s pledge, which carried a sense of murderous intent.

Until now, she had been a spirit interested in nothing but her own revenge.

She couldn’t help but feel strange that such a person was now vowing revenge for her sake.

But soon, she spoke with tearful eyes.

-I’m sorry, mortal..... My heart is rotten and decayed, as good as dead long ago. There might be no place for you to settle in it.

“That doesn’t matter.”

-You..... You say such things even after hearing this.....

“I can’t help that I’ve already come to like you.”

-Ha.....

A hundred years had passed since her death.

Despite that, “he” still remained in her heart.

That’s why it was even more difficult for her.

Both in life and death, she had considered only him as her man.

Yet now, she found herself wavering at every word of this mortal whose fate wasn’t even that long, and she felt utterly resentful of herself.

Is it just because of loneliness?

Is that why she wants to lean on him whenever he shakes her?

She couldn’t understand why her heart, which had been like an old tree that would break rather than bend, was now swaying like a reed.

‘I..... I.....’

She shouldn’t be like this, but every time she looks at him, “he” strangely comes to mind.

From his manner of speech to his appearance, nothing resembled him at all, yet she couldn’t understand why this was happening.

‘..... I can’t.’

She shook her head repeatedly.

She stared intently at Mok Gyeong-un, who was holding her hand tightly.

Despite being a spirit, her chest ached.

‘Should I have kept it to myself?’

For the first time, she had told this story to someone, and it made her feel somewhat relieved to have shared it.

However, she couldn’t help but feel bitter.

It seemed like she had dampened his spirits.

Even though he said it was okay, he would have realized that “he” still remained in her heart, so even this mortal wouldn’t feel too good about it.

-Mortal. I.....

“It’s alright.”

-What?

“Cheong-ryeong..... Ah. I guess I’ve gotten too used to it. Anyway, So-wol has feelings too, and it’s not wrong that she liked someone and kept him in her heart.”

-..... Mortal

This guy is unexpectedly good at touching others' hearts.

A person who doesn't even properly understand his own emotions.

For someone so bleak and cold to try to comfort her instead.

Perhaps that's why her chest feels even more tingly.

"It's strange."

-What do you mean?

"Actually, if I followed my heart, I'd want to steal even So-wol's feelings for someone else."

-.....

"But after hearing the story, I realize that doing so would just repeat another pain for So-wol. I don't want that for her."

-.....

"So for now, I want to focus on my revenge and resolving So-wol's resentment."

At these words from Mok Gyeong-un, her eyes welled up with tears.

Your words like this shake me even more.

She wanted to say those words, but she quickly composed herself and somehow calmed her emotions.

It was the first time her heart had gone to someone other than him.

But she had to suppress this feeling.

‘The fate between you and me must end with revenge.’

There was a predetermined end when a vengeful spirit resolves its resentment.

Because there was a set ending, she couldn’t waver anymore.

Realizing this anew, she firmly grasped her wavering heart.

-Yes. You’re right, mortal. Let’s focus on your revenge and resolving my resentment for now. And.....

“And?”

-You don’t have to force yourself to call me Ryu So-wol when it doesn’t even feel natural to you.

“I’ll get used to it soo.....”

-Just call me Cheong-ryeong.

“What?”

-I want you to keep calling me Cheong-ryeong.

On a dark night.

Two carriages appeared at the foot of a mountain not far from Spiritual Sword Sanctuary.

The ones driving these two carriages were none other than Seop Chun and Mong Mu-yak, subordinates of Mok Gyeong-un.

They had barely managed to catch up to their lord, who had flown ahead using the Shadow Sword Flying Technique.

As they came this far, thinking they only needed to find the treasure bead and wouldn't have to enter Spiritual Sword Sanctuary's territory, they had somehow reached a place not too far from it.

Spiritual Sword Sanctuary was the domain of Ou Cheon-mu, one of the Six Heavens, so even their lord wouldn't have approached this place carelessly, but why was there still no news?

It was then.

-Screech!

“Whoa!”

Seop Chun, who was driving the horse behind, was startled and stopped when the carriage in front suddenly halted.

Seop Chun then shouted towards the front.

“Mu-yak. You should signal when you're stopping.....”

Soon, Seop Chun could see why the carriage in front had stopped.

There were people in front of the carriage who appeared to be sword disciples from Spiritual Sword Sanctuary.

Seop Chun quickly launched himself towards the front of the carriage to support them, but,

-Swoosh!

‘What’s this?’

He saw that Mong Mu-yak had a strange expression on his face.

-Shing!

Although puzzled, he tried to draw his unique weapon, the Gwangmudo, to prepare for a fight, when,

“Stop!”

Mong Mu-yak held him back.

“Stop? Huh?”

Suddenly, something caught Seop Chun’s eye.

In the center of the Spiritual Sword Sanctuary sword disciples was a middle-aged man at the Transcendent Realm, who was respectfully cupping his hands in salute to them.

Why on earth were they doing this? As he wondered,

“His Lordship is waiting. From here on, it will be difficult to move by carriage, so please follow on foot.”

“His Lordship? You mean the master of Spiritual Sword Sanctuary?”

Did they notice our entry and send someone?

As he was thinking this,

“No. Lord Heavenly Demon sent us to escort you all.”

‘!?’

For a moment, Seop Chun doubted his ears.

Lord Heavenly Demon?

Chapter 380 – Joining (2)

In the Society Leader’s quarters at the main hall of Heaven and Earth Society.

“Cough, cough.....”

Vice Leader Mong Seo-cheon clicked his tongue at the coughing sound coming from behind the screen.

The coughing was getting worse, and he desperately wanted to call for Wailing Doctor Hoe Ta.

However, the Society Leader strangely seemed unwilling to receive treatment.

Instead of treatment, he kept obsessing over the Holy Fire Priestess of the Fire Faith Order, and Mong Seo-cheon couldn’t understand why.

Could bringing her in really improve his condition?

‘We must heal him somehow.’

The Society Leader didn’t even have children, only three disciples.

If he at least had a child, there would be a justification to solidify the succession plan, but now the factions had split into three, and tensions were growing.

Especially,

‘The First Disciple’s movements are concerning.’

Since emerging from seclusion, First Disciple Na Yul-ryang had been moving without hesitation.

He was subjugating all the neutral sects, and it seemed he would soon clash properly with the alliance of Second Disciple Jang Neung-ak and Third Disciple Wi So-yeon.

Or they might already be fighting in unseen places.

Well, up to this point was somewhat understandable.

‘A successor needs to be decided anyway.’

Otherwise, the internal strife would continue, which would become poison for the association in the future.

However,

“Head..... There are rumors that the Elder Council is contacting First Disciple Na Yul-ryang. The other sects are one thing, but they.....”

“Cough, cough. So the time has finally ripened.”

“Pardon?”

What does he mean by the time ripening?

As he wondered, the Society Leader’s voice continued from behind the screen.

“It means they no longer wish to go through me.”

“How can that be? No matter what, how can the retired elders interfere in the association’s internal affairs?”

“Leave them be. They only move on his orders anyway.”

“Head..... By ‘him’, you don’t mean...?”

“Who else could it be?”

At the Society Leader’s question, Vice Leader Mong Seo-cheon frowned.

He thought he knew who the Society Leader was referring to.

But hadn’t that person passed away long ago?

How could the Elder Council.....

“More importantly, have they not arrived yet?”

The Society Leader asked then.

“They.....”

“If they escaped Kaifeng safely, they should be getting quite close to the main hall by now.”

‘Ah!’

Only then did Vice Leader Mong Seo-cheon realize who the Society Leader was talking about.

“Actually, an express message just arrived from Mu-yak.”

“How are things progressing?”

“They succeeded in escaping safely, but due to pursuit from the imperial capital, they had to deviate from their original route to shake off pursuers. It seems they’ll be coming via Guizhou province.”

“Guizhou..... So they’re coming from the west? Cough, cough.”

“It appears so. Besides this, there’s also something urgent I need to report.”

“Urgent?”

“Yes, because of this, the movements of the Righteous Alliance are concerning.”

Vice Leader Mong Seo-cheon passed the prepared report towards the screened bed.

As he received and slowly examined it, the Society Leader's eyes flickered.

"The Seventh Heaven?"

Young Master Ou Woong-hwang of Spiritual Sword Sanctuary, who had personally guided Mok Gyeong-un's subordinates to one of the empty guest rooms, politely greeted them before coming out.

"Please rest well then."

Only after moving quite far from the guest room did one of the Spiritual Sword Sanctuary sword disciples assisting him cautiously speak up, seeming not to understand.

"Uh..... Young Master. Was there really a need for you to guide them personally? Couldn't you have just left it to us?"

At these words, Young Master Ou Woong-hwang chuckled and replied.

"If it was something I could leave to you, I would have. But regardless of the outcome, since they've entered under our Lord's command, shouldn't we check what kind of people his subordinates are?"

"Ah. So that was your intention? I failed to grasp the Young Master's thoughts."

"There's no need to think so deeply about it. It's fine, don't worry about it."

"But how were they?"

"What do you mean?"

“Lord Heavenly Demon’s subordinates. I was... quite surprised. That fallen monk is clearly Ja Geum-jeong, one of the Three Madmen, isn’t he?”

“Yes, it seems so.”

Young Master Ou Woong-hwang was also unable to hide his surprise at seeing the fallen monk Ja Geum-jeong.

However, what surprised him even more wasn’t Ja Geum-jeong.

No matter how much he observed, he couldn’t gauge the martial prowess of the one wearing the mask with unique patterns and the one leaning on the snake staff.

Because of this, he could guess that they were experts above his level.

‘None of them are ordinary.’

Not just those two, but the fallen monk Ja Geum-jeong and even the two who looked youngest were the same.

Both had reached the Transcendent Realm.

How could all his subordinates be so extraordinary?

With just these people alone, they could wipe out one or two small to medium-sized sects in a single night.

Having such amazing people under him, it was puzzling how his name and reputation hadn’t become known until now.

Now that his father Ou Cheon-mu, one of the Six Heavens, and Spiritual Sword Sanctuary had come under his command, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say their strength had doubled.

What on earth does the Lord intend to do with this tremendous power?

He grew increasingly curious.

Inside the guest room.

As soon as the Young Master of Spiritual Sword Sanctuary who had guided them withdrew and his presence disappeared, Seop Chun spoke as if dumbfounded.

“Am I dreaming right now?”

At his question, Mong Mu-yak also shook his head with a somewhat blank expression.

He too was just as surprised.

When the Young Master of Spiritual Sword Sanctuary first mentioned Lord Heavenly Demon, he wondered what was going on.

But everyone was shocked by what he said next.

[Our Spiritual Sword Sanctuary has sworn to serve Cheonma as our Lord.]

‘!!!!!!’

This was the same for Ma Ra-hyeon, who usually doesn't express emotions well, wearing the mask, and Guyang Sa-oh, who was living a new life wearing the human skin mask and wielding the Eight Poison Snake Staff.

They too couldn't hide their surprise at Young Master Ou Woong-hwang's words.

This was because if Spiritual Sword Sanctuary had been an ordinary sect, they might have brushed it off, but they were master craftsmen who had a huge influence on the sword techniques of the Central Plains martial arts world.

Moreover, their leader, Master Ou Cheon-mu, was one of the Six Heavens, who could be considered the pinnacle of the current martial arts world.

To think such an incredible existence had sworn loyalty to their lord, Mok Gyeong-un.

It was hard to believe even after hearing it.

“..... It seems we're serving a far more extraordinary person than we expected. Don't you all agree?”

“.....”

At Seop Chun's words, everyone nodded silently.

This incident had given them such a great shock.

Even the events at Shaolin Temple and Sichuan Tang Clan could be considered amazing, but if this news spreads through the martial arts world, the impact will be tremendous.

After all, a place like Spiritual Sword Sanctuary, which has a huge influence on the current martial arts world, has come under our Lord's command.

“It seems we’ve underestimated our Lord.”

At that moment, Mong Mu-yak, who had been silently listening to Seop Chun’s words, spoke up.

“Underestimated?”

“Yes.”

“You say that even after observing him so closely?”

“..... I do. Of course, until now, I simply thought our Lord’s goal was just to become the Society Leader’s fourth disciple.”

“.....”

At these words, Seop Chun’s eyes also became strange.

He too realized what Mong Mu-yak meant by saying this.

The reason he decided to follow Mok Gyeong-un was partly due to his martial prowess and great capacity, but decisively because he thought he was a candidate for the next Head.

But it turned out as Mong Mu-yak said.

It truly was an underestimation.

Their Lord’s capacity wasn’t something they could casually evaluate.

Who could have imagined he would subjugate one of the Six Heavens, who stands on the same level as the Society Leader?

Their Lord was already beyond what the Society Leader could encompass.

He was a great master in his own right.

At that moment, the fallen monk Ja Geum-jeong, who had been sipping alcohol from a gourd bottle, interjected.

“Keu. So you guys have been following the master for such petty reasons until now? Puahahahat! Who’s becoming whose disciple?”

He burst into laughter as if finding it amusing.

At his attitude, Seop Chun scratched his head, speaking in a somewhat wronged tone.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about. If you knew how quickly our Lord has become stronger, you wouldn’t say such things.”

Although he was already a monster when he left the association, it wasn’t to this extent.

Not only did he break through the wall of walls to become a master of the Profound Realm, but he even subjugated one of the Six Heavens.

‘Monster..... Yes. This is a real monster.’

Ma Ra-hyeon, who was silently leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, also inwardly clicked his tongue.

When he first met Mok Gyeong-un, he didn’t expect his capabilities to grow so rapidly.

Even when leaving the imperial palace, didn't even Gu Seong-baek, the Northern Sect Blade King and also Southern Pacification Commissioner, another of the Six Heavens, struggle against the combined attack of Six Thousand Commander So Yerin and Leader of the Nine Blood Sect?

But now he's on par with the pinnacle Six Heavens.

"Ha."

Has there ever been someone in martial arts history who became this strong so quickly?

If it had happened over a few years, it might be understandable, but the fact that it occurred in just a couple of months was even more unbelievable.

Then Seop Chun said,

"But it's a bit regrettable."

"What is?"

"Think about it. Although he's using the alias Heavenly Demon (Cheonma) because of the imperial pursuit, imagine if our Lord had made his reputation under his real name."

"Real name?"

"Yes. If our Lord had destroyed the Shaolin One-Hundred and Eight Arhat Formation, closed Sichuan Tang Clan for sixty years, and subjugated Spiritual Sword Sanctuary under the name Mok Gyeong-un, his reputation alone would have secured the Society Leader's position. But I don't understand why he doesn't want to reveal this even to the association."

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

“Are you really asking because you don’t know?”

“What?”

“Huu..... You really don’t know. Well, I guess you only know how to swing a knife. Someone like you who doesn’t know how to use the head on your shoulders wouldn’t think that far.”

“..... Then why don’t you, who’s so smart, explain our Lord’s intentions?”

“Even without knowing his intentions, our Lord doesn’t need to reveal that he is Cheonma.”

“He doesn’t need to reveal it?”

“Yes. Do you think only the First Disciple and the Second and Third Disciples would be wary if our Lord revealed that? No. Our Lord is a new force recruited from outside. Moreover, he’s from the righteous faction.”

“Ah.....”

“Although he was recognized solely for his talent, if they realize that talent is at an uncontrollable level, how do you think the association will react?”

At these words, Seop Chun spoke in a cooled voice.

“They might go beyond wariness and even try to prevent him from entering the association again.”

“Now you’re starting to understand.”

Mok Gyeong-un had already reached a level where he could directly compete with the Society Leader.

If such a person tried to enter, he would inevitably face all kinds of opposition and, in the worst case, might be rejected from even entering, let alone joining.

“It’s not that I’m completely thoughtless. But it’s interesting to see you analyze so coolly.”

“.....”

“Although you reluctantly pledged loyalty to our Lord, your identity originates from being the successor to Vice Leader Mong Seo-cheon, the Society Leader’s right-hand man, doesn’t it?”

At Seop Chun’s words, Mong Mu-yak’s eyes flickered.

He had thought Seop Chun was simple-minded, but it seems he had been constantly monitoring him for Mok Gyeong-un, or rather, their Lord’s sake.

Did he think he might betray them at any time?

Of course, it’s understandable.

Even he would have constantly doubted someone who joined in this manner.

But not anymore.

“That was true. But now it’s different.”

“Different?”

“..... Yes. Now I’m just someone who wants to see how far our Lord will go.”

At his words, the corners of Seop Chun’s mouth turned up.

“That’s a first. Our thoughts aligning, I mean.”