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Chapter 151 : Facing Each Other

The road out of Henan Province was not smooth.

The Blood Cult’s invasion of the Shaolin Temple, the pillar of the Murim, and my actions there had already become the talk of the entire Jianghu.

“Captain, I feel eyes from all directions. It seems both orthodox and unorthodox sects are watching us closely.”

Baek Mu-yong reported while scanning the surroundings.

I held the reins, silently staring at the northern horizon.

“Leave them be. Their gazes don't matter right now.”

Inside my qi center, nine divine objects were rotating like a galaxy, complementing each other's energy.

The wisdom and scriptures of the Buddhist Venerable I obtained at Shaolin served as the core that harmonized the fragmented energies of the divine objects into one massive living entity.

-Heh heh. Brat, it’s almost complete. Nine suns are forming a single Wuji within your qi center.

-With this much energy, the last piece hidden by the Ice Emperor will reveal itself on its own.

The voices of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen were mixed with deep regret and anticipation.

I silently and lightly stroked the Ice White Divine Spear in my robe.

The Hundred Thousand Mountains.

That was the place where I was born as an illegitimate son of the Demonic Cult and abandoned, and it was the place where I had met a miserable death in my previous life.

And now, I was heading back there again.

As we reached the entrance of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, the party's footsteps naturally came to a halt.

The Mamun Pass, which once boasted the dignity of the Demonic Cult, was nowhere to be seen, replaced by a blood-colored barrier covered in dark red blood qi.

"……That's not a tool of the Saphaeryeon."

Seol Ye-rin drew her ice sword and guarded the surroundings.

Beyond the barrier, the sound of countless beings growling like hungry beasts could be heard.

"Is it the Blood Cult bastards?"

My purple eyes pierced through the blood-colored barrier.

"To block the Mamun Pass, the main gate of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, with such filthy blood stench. Hyeokryeon Geuk must have been quite desperate."

Growls echoed from beyond the barrier.

It was clearly the roars of the Blood Poison Demon Men, slaughter weapons that had lost their reason and craved only blood, mixed with the evil arts of the Blood Cult and turbid demonic qi.

I didn't draw the Blue and Red Twin Swords at my waist.

Instead, I took out the divine object of the Buddhist Venerable, the Vajra, which I had received from the Abbot of the Great Thunder Temple.

"To think the wisdom I gained from Shaolin and the Western Regions would be useful at a time like this."

My Extreme Yang Qi and the energy of the divine objects in my qi center poured into the Vajra.

The ink-colored Vajra began to emit a brilliant golden light and purple lightning simultaneously, enough to make one's eyes sting.

Diamond Immovable Wisdom King Divine Art Wisdom King's Purification.

I lightly struck the Vajra toward the blood-colored barrier.

Boom—!

Along with a thunderous sound that shook heaven and earth, a holy yet destructive wave surged out like a tsunami.

The blood-colored barrier that had been tightly blocking the entrance of the Hundred Thousand Mountains shattered and scattered as soon as it touched that overwhelming wave of energy.

“Aaaargh!”

As the barrier collapsed, hundreds, thousands of Blood Poison Demon Men who had been stationed behind it emitted black smoke and screamed.

The pure Buddhist power and the fire energy of Extreme Yang had burned away the blood qi residing within their bodies.

However, the monsters, still having lost their reason, discovered my party beyond the torn barrier and rushed toward us like beasts.

“Young Palace Head, we will clear the path!”

Led by Baek Mu-yong and Eun Bin, the Small Snow Squad members immediately drew their weapons and formed a formation.

Cheon Deung-jin also prepared to step forward, raising her Fire Spirit Qi in both hands.

Seol Ye-rin silently approached my side, frost blooming from her ice sword.

“Wait.”

I raised my hand and stopped the party.

“This is the Hundred Thousand Mountains. I will handle it.”

A massive invisible halo rose behind my back.

The nine divine objects coiled in my qi center resonated fiercely as if announcing the return of their true master.

I took a step into the air.

Void Step.

A ripple starting from my toes weighed down the atmosphere, and soon a massive storm of flames erupted along the rugged valleys of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

“I... have returned.”

Whoosh—!

I only lightly swung my hand once.

But the power that exploded along that trajectory was a disaster in itself.

The thousands of Blood Poison Demon Men filling the valley and rushing forward were turned into ash and scattered in the wind the moment they touched my demonic fire, unable to put up a single moment of resistance.

A single strike.

The terrible blood qi and monsters that had filled the Mamun Pass vanished without a trace, leaving only a wide-open road leading to the heart of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

“……As expected of the Captain.”

Baek Mu-yong swallowed a hollow laugh and sheathed his heavy sword.

Seol Ye-rin looked at that overwhelming martial prowess and wore a soft smile on her lips.

I tucked away the Vajra and descended back to the ground as if nothing had happened, moving my feet.

“Let’s go in.”

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At the highest point of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, the Heavenly Demon Hall was covered in a thick, eternal dark mist that never lifted throughout the year.

The Heavenly Demon, Hyeokryeon Hwi, slowly opened his eyes, which had been closed heavily while he leaned against the massive jade throne.

The ground beneath his feet was vibrating minutely.

It was the sensation of the Blood Cult’s wicked barrier blocking the entrance of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, the Mamun Pass, being evaporated without a trace by a massive fire demon.

It was the energy of his third son, Hyeokryeon Yeom, whom he had sent away to the North Sea as if kicking him out to keep him alive.

Beyond the limits of the Extreme Yang Body, he had swallowed both the demonic and the orthodox; it was the birth of a massive monster that even he, the father, could not easily gauge now.

However, the reason the Heavenly Demon's eyes trembled was not because of the flame that rose from the Mamun Pass.

'……It has gone out.'

Deep inside the Heavenly Demon's qi center, a fine thread of energy connected to his flesh and blood snapped vainly just moments ago.

It was the energy of the second son, Hyeokryeon Mu.

Hyeokryeon Hwi's lips slowly distorted.

Hyeokryeon Mu. Having realized the cruel ambition of the eldest, Hyeokryeon Geuk, early on, he had left the Hundred Thousand Mountains years ago to wander under the pretext of touring the Central Plains, as if he had no interest in the Cult Leader's orders or power struggles.

Even the Cult Leader, Hyeokryeon Hwi, had inwardly hoped that he would live freely in the Jianghu, unburdened, by tolerating that weakness, or rather, that clever avoidance.

But that bird who yearned for freedom had eventually returned to this blood-smelling cage of the Hundred Thousand Mountains on his own two feet.

Through intuition, Hyeokryeon Hwi pierced through the tragedy that occurred in the deep basement of the Young Cult Leader's Hall, below the Heavenly Demon Hall.

While Hyeokryeon Yeom was crossing the Central Plains and the Outer Regions to collect the divine objects of the Ten Venerables, Hyeokryeon Mu must have seeped into the main mountain alone.

To destroy in advance the numerous blood-colored formations and Blood Poison Demon Men that Hyeokryeon Geuk had planted to turn the Hundred Thousand Mountains into a massive blood pond.

To lessen that danger and burden even a little bit when his younger brother, Hyeokryeon Yeom, finally returned to his home and set foot in the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

"Foolish fellow……."

A low and heavy sigh leaked from between Hyeokryeon Hwi's lips.

The black trajectory of the Black Dragon Celestial Ascension that Hyeokryeon Mu had emitted, that desperate end where he tore apart the blood net in the basement and completely burned even his own life force, was vividly conveyed to the Heavenly Demon's mind.

The cruel law of the Demonic Cult where brothers must kill each other for the strongest poison to survive.

Within that terrible cycle, the first became a monster and the third survived, but the second finally scattered after harboring the most un-Demonic Cult-like emotion: brotherly love.

Snap-.

The armrest of the jade throne gripped by Hyeokryeon Hwi shattered and flowed down as powder.

Inside the heart of the Heavenly Demon, whose emotions were thought to have been removed, an inexplicable deep sense of loss and anger swirled.

'The fellow who left saying he wouldn't block your eldest brother's path, has he finally thrown away his life to open the youngest's path?'

Hyeokryeon Hwi slowly rose from the jade throne.

As Hyeokryeon Hwi stood up, black demonic qi whirled like a storm around the jade throne, rattling the roof tiles of the Heavenly Demon Hall.

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I instinctively sensed that the atmosphere within the Cult was unusual.

As we broke the blood wall of the Mamun Pass and entered the Cult, my brow furrowed strangely.

The heart of the Hundred Thousand Mountains was quiet.

A terribly sinking silence is felt before a storm hits, or when a massive predator holds its breath while eyeing its prey.

More than anything, my qi center was reacting sensitively.

Originally, Hyeokryeon Geuk's gloomy blood-colored formations, which should have been dominating various parts of the Cult, were left neglected after being forcibly torn apart by someone.

“……Young Master, look over there.”

Baek Mu-yong pointed where the Clan Head of the Yayul Demon Clan, the Hell Poison Demon Yayul Cheon-ung, was kneeling on one knee on the ground, covered in blood.

Around him, corpses dressed in Blood Cult attire were piled up like mountains.

As I approached him, Yayul Cheon-ung barely raised his blurred eyes to look at me.

He was someone who had already submitted to my overwhelming martial prowess and sworn loyalty.

“……You have come. Third Young Master.”

“Clan Head Yayul. What on earth is this situation? Why are the formations of the main mountain like this?”

Yayul Cheon-ung spat out blood-mixed saliva with a hollow laugh.

Yayul Cheon-ung pointed with a trembling hand toward a massive crack connected to the basement of the Young Cult Leader’s Hall.

“The Second Young Master…… Young Master Hyeokryeon Mu……”

My eyes shook violently.

“What happened?”

“It was after he woke up from the Heavenly Demon Puppet Art, even before he could recover his body. However, through his Roaming Shadow Squad, the Young Master already knew the location of the blood sea base that Hyeokryeon Geuk had secretly built in the basement of the main mountain. To strike the back of the Blood Poison Demon Men that would burst out from the basement the moment the Third Young Master reached the Mamun Pass…… he dove in alone.”

Yayul Cheon-ung’s voice trembled thinly.

“I tried to settle the main mountain that Hyeokryeon Geuk had emptied, but I couldn't handle the blood net in the basement even with my poison art. At that time, the Second Young Master appeared and said he had to pave the road for the youngest fellow’s return, and he crushed the entire basement.”

I instinctively gathered the energy rising from the basement.

“Brother……”

Yayul Cheon-ung took out an old wine bottle with clear bloodstains on it from his robe and held it out to me.

“He asked me to deliver this. He said the wine he drank in Liaoning was the sweetest in his life.”

I took the wine bottle.

The texture of the bottle pierced my heart as if cutting into it.

A brother who wandered the Central Plains like a playboy and once acted mischievously, saying he felt betrayed, but eventually showed concern for his brother’s safety by offering the Ten Thousand Year Fire Carp.

The brother who even advised me to go to the Black Lotus Cave opened the path for me in the most brother-like way at the last moment.

“Where is the Cult Leader?”

“He is inside.”

“……I must meet him.”

“I will guide you.”

In the Cult Leader’s Hall I ascended to.

“You have come.”

I faced the Heavenly Demon, Hyeokryeon Hwi, once again.

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Chapter 152 : Father-in-law

When the heavy doors of the Heavenly Demon Hall opened, the surge of energy filling the interior struck me like a wave.

But I didn't even blink an eye.

The nine divine objects inside my qi center resonated with my purple eyes, gently diverting the incoming pressure of the Heavenly Demon.

A man sitting on the jade throne, draped in black demonic qi.

The absolute ruler of the Demonic Cult and my father, Hyeokryeon Hwi, was there.

“……I have returned.”

My voice was calm.

However, in my hand, I tightly held the old wine bottle left by Hyeokryeon Mu.

Hyeokryeon Hwi’s gaze lingered on that wine bottle.

The air around the jade throne distorted, and a heavy silence flowed.

“Mu is dead. That weak fellow eventually used his life as kindling for you.”

“Did you know?”

“Nothing within this mountain escapes my eyes. Even if it is the end of my own child.”

Hyeokryeon Hwi slowly rose from his seat.

Each time he took a step, the ancient demonic characters engraved on the floor of the Heavenly Demon Hall flickered in gold and screamed.

“Yeom. Do you resent me? Or have you come to strike down this father who stood by and watched?”

Instead of an answer, I showed the Alms Bowl of Myriad People and the Vajra inside my robe.

The energy of the nine divine objects wrapped around my entire body, as purple lightning and golden Buddhist power achieved a strange harmony.

“Even the time for resentment is too precious. I have simply come to end this situation created by Hyeokryeon Geuk and to take what lies at the end of the path my brother cleared.”

“What about the tenth divine object?”

“I plan to think about it after I obtain the Heart of the Heavenly Demon.”

A thick, mocking smile hung on Hyeokryeon Hwi’s lips.

Hyeokryeon Hwi lightly tapped his own chest.

“To obtain the Heart of the Heavenly Demon, you will have to strike me down. Now, show me how much the son-in-law of the North Sea has grown.”

Whoosh—!

As soon as he finished speaking, pitch-black demonic qi erupted from Hyeokryeon Hwi's hand, becoming Blade Enhanced Qi.

Heavenly Demon Blade Enhanced Qi.

It was the true power of the demon that split the night of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

I did not dodge.

The silver tip of the Ice White Divine Spear collided head-on with the Heavenly Demon's Blade Enhanced Qi.

Boom—!

The entire pavilion shook with a massive vibration.

Yayul Cheon-ung and the Small Snow Squad members guarding the Heavenly Demon Hall were pushed back by that overwhelming momentum.

A storm mixed with demonic, holy, and ice energies blew away the entire roof of the Heavenly Demon Hall.

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While I stood against the Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi, shaking off my spear shaft in the center of the storm, Seol Ye-rin, who had been silently enduring their momentum from behind, slowly moved her feet.

Fragments of swirling demonic qi and cold air brushed past her hem, but Seol Ye-rin did not waver for a single step.

She stood beside me and bowed politely toward the absolute ruler of the Demonic Cult who had descended from the jade throne.

"Seol Ye-rin, the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace, greets the master of the Demonic Cult and Young Master Hyeokryeon's father."

Her voice was clear and elegant, yet it had the power to pierce through the heavy air of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

Hyeokryeon Hwi's sharp eyes passed me and rested on Seol Ye-rin.

The remnants of the Heavenly Demon Blade Enhanced Qi still caused the air to crackle, but Seol Ye-rin faced that intimidation directly and continued her words.

“I am truly sorry that my first greeting to my father-in-law is inside such a blood-reeking pavilion. However, since the burden Young Master Hyeokryeon carries is also my burden, please understand that I took up my sword before observing etiquette.”

A strange smile hung on Hyeokryeon Hwi’s lips.

“They called you the Ice Flower of the North Sea, and indeed your spirit is extraordinary. I was worried when I heard my son went as a live-in son-in-law to the Ice Palace, but it seems you have brought the entire Ice Palace with you instead.”

-Heh heh, look at her pretending to be gentle in front of her father-in-law. Earlier at the Mamun Pass, she looked ready to slice everything down with her ice sword.

-Oh my, Miss Ye-rin is observing formalities as the mistress of the North Sea. Because that old man’s temper is no joke.

The voices of the Illusion Venerable and the Demon Queen, mixed with jokes, brushed through my mind, but Seol Ye-rin’s expression was serious.

She simultaneously observed the wine bottle held in my hand and the throbbing felt from Hyeokryeon Hwi’s chest.

-There is no need to go easy even if he is your father-in-law.

At the words of the Ice Soul Spear Saint Seol Yeong-jin, Seol Ye-rin tightly gripped the hilt of her ice sword.

“Haha. A bold daughter-in-law indeed.”

Hyeokryeon Hwi took a step down from the jade throne and swallowed a deep, silent laugh.

He remembered that day in the past when he had sent me away to the North Sea as if kicking me out to avoid Hyeokryeon Geuk’s eyes and keep me alive.

The youngest son, whom he thought would die resenting him, had instead looked at him with clear eyes and said this:

‘I will return with the Wish-granting Jewel in my possession the next time I pay my respects.’

It was not a lie.

Hyeokryeon Yeom had completely made the haughty Ice Flower of the North Sea his own person, and furthermore, he appeared with the entire strength of the Ice Palace, which had been a rival, standing behind him.

Hyeokryeon Hwi's sharp gaze scanned Seol Ye-rin, who stood side-by-side with me.

The heart of the Hundred Thousand Mountains and the deepest part of the Demonic Cult.

Even while facing the Heavenly Demon's killing intent head-on, that young Palace Head's momentum did not retreat even an inch.

Rather, that spirit of drawing her sword first to protect Hyeokryeon Yeom was truly worthy of being called the treasure of the North Sea.

"A daughter-in-law who points her sword at her father-in-law first. This must be the most insolent and daring greeting in the history of the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult."

A strange curve was drawn on Hyeokryeon Hwi's lips.

In a corner of his heart, which had been frozen by the sense of loss from losing his second son, an inexplicable sense of relief was spreading.

The eldest, Hyeokryeon Geuk, who was swallowed by power and became a complete monster.

The second, Hyeokryeon Mu, who burned himself to slow down his brother's rampage and open the path for his younger brother.

And..... the youngest, Hyeokryeon Yeom, who shouldered the blood-reeking burden of those brothers and finally reached the realm of a transcender.

"Yeom."

Hyeokryeon Hwi's voice sank much heavier and deeper.

"I can see clearly that nine suns are boiling within your body. To encompass the limits of your Extreme Yang Body and contain both the demon and the orthodox in one massive vessel. You are of my blood, but you have truly become a monster."

Hyeokryeon Hwi slowly raised his right hand.

Instantly, the pitch-black demonic qi that had been weighing down the entire Heavenly Demon Hall began to condense terrifyingly at his fingertips.

It was the true ultimate essence that the master of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, imbued with the thoughts of past Heavenly Demons, could produce.

“I sent you to the North Sea to save you, but you eventually returned to this inescapable, hell-like battlefield on your own feet. If so, prove it to me.”

Whooooooooo—!

The demonic qi erupting from Hyeokryeon Hwi’s entire body took the shape of a massive black dragon and crushed even the remaining pillars of the pavilion.

“Whether you are a vessel capable of shouldering the price of Mu’s life and annihilating that massive disaster called Hyeokryeon Geuk!”

Boom—!

The pitch-black ray of light fired from Hyeokryeon Hwi’s hand tore the Heavenly Demon Hall in two and covered Seol Ye-rin and me.

However, in Hyeokryeon Hwi’s eyes as he fired the explosive light of destruction, there was instead a deep sense of satisfaction.

It was because he saw that the hands of the man and woman, held together even in front of that overwhelming power, never separated.

My demonic fire and Seol Ye-rin’s blue Extreme Cold Qi drew a perfect Taiji, meeting the Heavenly Demon’s energy head-on.

‘Yes..... that is enough.’

Hyeokryeon Hwi watched the brilliant radiance emitted as the two energies clashed, and he completed his preparation to gladly set down the heavy burden of the Heavenly Demon he had carried alone for many years.

It was because these two people were more than enough to open the gate of the forbidden area of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

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I squeezed Seol Ye-rin’s hand, which was in mine, even tighter.

Her hand inside my rough hand was cold yet firm.

The snow flower of the North Sea that did not waver even within the terrible demonic qi of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

That sensation calmly settled my boiling qi center.

‘In the end, I’ve come to hold this hand in front of my father.’

My emotions were profound.

On the day I left for the North Sea, I was alone.

The back of my father, who told me not to look back, was like a massive cliff, and the killing intent of Hyeokryeon Geuk felt from behind my back was sticky like a snake's tongue.

The me of that time was nothing more than a loser running away to survive.

But now, I have returned, harboring the divine objects called the essence of the world's Murim in my body, and having taken the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace as my wife.

Crash!

The pitch-black ray fired by Hyeokryeon Hwi struck Seol Ye-rin’s ice wall and my lightning spear barrier, scattering in all directions.

The massive shockwave turned the stone slabs beneath our feet into powder, but our footsteps did not retreat even an inch.

“Father.”

I spoke as I lowered my spear shaft.

“When I first met her in the North Sea, I only thought of a contract to survive. However, while crossing between life and death with her and collecting these nine divine objects, I realized something.”

My purple eyes met Hyeokryeon Hwi’s black eyes head-on.

“I did not return for revenge. It is to reclaim this land from the hands of the filthy Blood Cult..... the land that this person beside me and my brother, who gladly threw away his life for me, loved.”

Seol Ye-rin lightly swung her ice sword as if responding to those words.

The frost blooming from the tip of the sword mixed with my purple flames, blooming into a massive purple Snow Lotus.

“We plan to hold our wedding under the eternal snow of the North Sea. Will you attend the marriage ceremony?”

Hyeokryeon Hwi’s eyes trembled thinly.

The demonic qi in the shape of a black dragon hesitated for a moment, then soon scattered with a massive burst of laughter.

“Hahaha! A wedding under the eternal snow! Indeed, you have committed something hot, just like my son should!”

Hyeokryeon Hwi strode toward me.

A strange warmth began to circulate inside the pavilion that had been full of killing intent.

Hyeokryeon Hwi roughly gripped my shoulder with a thud.

“You have returned with the Wish-granting Jewel in your mouth.”

Hyeokryeon Hwi acknowledged me.

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Chapter 153 : The Kiss

“Hahahaha! You have returned with the Wish-granting Jewel in your mouth!”

“You flatter me, Father.”

Seol Ye-rin sheathed her ice sword and quietly bowed her head.

Unlike the initial bloodthirsty confrontation, Seol Ye-rin’s voice contained clear respect for her father-in-law.

I also sheathed the Blue and Red Twin Swords and faced Hyeokryeon Hwi.

“I will take it that I have passed the test.”

“Yes. I have painfully confirmed that your vessel, which Mu threw away his life to protect, is far larger than I expected.”

Hyeokryeon Hwi turned and approached the massive jade throne that stood alone at the innermost part of the half-destroyed Heavenly Demon Hall.

When Hyeokryeon Hwi placed his hand on the armrest of the jade throne and injected dense demonic qi,

Rumble—!

With a roar that seemed to vibrate through the entire Hundred Thousand Mountains, the jade throne split into two, revealing endless dark stairs leading downward.

“This is the true Forbidden Area of the Hundred Thousand Mountains. It is the place where the First Heavenly Demon and the Ice King Seol Cheon-u, after a life-and-death struggle, left their final arrangement.”

“Did you say an arrangement left by the First Heavenly Demon and the Ice King together?”

My eyes flashed.

It was the moment when the traces of the Ice King, which I had tracked while collecting the divine objects of the Ten Venerables, finally crossed paths.

“That’s right. The ‘Heart of the Heavenly Demon’ is here.”

Hyeokryeon Hwi’s voice trembled minutely.

I bit my lip hard.

“Miss Seol.”

“Yes, Third Young Master.”

“From here, it is just the two of us.”

I glanced at the Small Snow Squad members, including Eun Bin and Baek Mu-yong.

“You all control the perimeter of the Heavenly Demon Hall and escort the Cult Leader along with Clan Head Yayul. Don't let so much as a rat crawl near.”

“We will follow your command!”

I held Seol Ye-rin’s hand firmly and stepped down the stairs opened by the Heavenly Demon.

As we descended into the darkness, a pressure beyond imagination weighed down on our entire bodies.

It was an atmospheric pressure that would make an ordinary martial artist vomit blood and become a cripple instantly, but the nine divine objects coiled in my qi center emitted light and repelled that pressure.

Seol Ye-rin also utilized her Extreme Yin Qi to cool down my body so it wouldn't overheat from the demonic qi.

Finally, we reached the lowest floor of the Forbidden Area.

Unlike the darkness outside, it was a massive stone chamber where brilliant red and blue lights crossed to the point of being blinding.

And in the center of the stone chamber, in a strange formation, a crystal about the size of an adult male's heart was floating in the air, pulsating violently.

Thump-! Thump-!

Every time it pulsated, my blood veins boiled like crazy.

"This is..... the Heart of the Heavenly Demon."

A crystal composed half of dark red demonic fire and half of transparent ice qi.

-Come. You who have collected the nine keys.

As if led by an ancient thought echoing in my head like an auditory hallucination, I reached out my hand toward the heart.

Seol Ye-rin held my hand as if worried.

It was the moment our hands touched the crystal.

Flash—!

The crystal emitted an explosive light and shot into my qi center.

***

"Kh, ugh.....!"

A terrible pain as if my blood vessels were being torn to shreds and my bones were being reassembled.

However, within that pain, the nine fragmented divine objects reacted.

The power contained in the 'Heart of the Heavenly Demon' was massive.

This heterogeneous crystal, where the ferocious blood-colored demonic qi of the First Heavenly Demon and the absolute Extreme Cold Qi of the Ice King Seol Cheon-u were entangled,

Immediately upon entering my qi center, it destroyed the existing order and struggled to become the master itself.

Every time the heart beat once, my internal organs felt like they were on fire, and at the second beat, a hellish misery followed as if my blood were freezing solid.

But my qi center did not give up its place so easily.

Whoooooong-!

The first to repel it was the Black Lotus Bead, the legacy of the Dark Venerable.

A pitch-black abyss of darkness that swallowed everything opened its mouth and forcibly sucked in the blood-colored demonic qi that was trying to tear through my blood veins.

Following that, the Diamond Gauntlet imbued with the fighting spirit of the Fighting Venerable and the strength of the Iron Venerable surged, holding my crumbling bones and acupoints firmer than steel.

-Come. Submit!

The ancient thought that had aged for hundreds of years within the Heart of the Heavenly Demon tried to weigh me down arrogantly, but,

“……Just who do you think you're claiming to be master over!”

I gritted my teeth and spat out a blood-mixed shout.

Boom—!

The Vajra and prayer beads of the Buddhist Venerable emitted a brilliant golden Buddhist power and began to purify the wicked resentment emitted by the Heart of the Heavenly Demon.

At the same time, the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection of the Illusion Venerable emitted a purple light, shattering the hallucinations of pain created by the heart, and the Alms Bowl of Myriad People of the Beggar Venerable poured out the infinite life force of great nature to heal my destroyed body in real-time.

-Heh heh! You won't even have bones left at this rate! Brat, don't lose! Do you think the power of the divine objects will be pushed back by a mere heart like that!

-Third Young Master! You mustn't let the energy scatter! Bind the nine energies into one and surround that arrogant heart!

-That is also the arrangement of the Ice King! Swallow its essence with the harmony of Extreme Yin and Extreme Yang!

The thoughts of the Sword Venerable, the Demon Queen, and the Spear Saint struck my mind and shouted.

I snapped my eyes open.

My two eyes were already divided into a jet-black abyss of the universe where even the whites could not be seen, and a burning purple flame.

“Miss Seol!”

At my rough call, Seol Ye-rin, who was holding my hand tightly, bit her lip and poured in her Extreme Yin Qi to the maximum.

“I won't let go! I will stop your acupoints from being burned by your heat with my coldness, so Young Master, destroy that heart!”

Seol Ye-rin’s clear and transparent Extreme Yin Qi circulated through my body and cooled my overheated Extreme Yang Body.

With a perfect safety device in place, I no longer stood by as the energies collided.

I raised my Extreme Yang Qi, which was no different from my essence.

“...Burn the heart away.”

As my cruel command fell, the nine divine objects that had been resisting individually in the qi center finally began to rotate together like a perfect set of gears.

The Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand of the Poison Venerable melted the shield surrounding the heart with deadly poison, and the bracelets of the Twin Venerable generated a massive pressure to forcibly suppress the heart’s beating.

A massive amount of water qi emitted from the Heaven Sea Bead of the Zither Venerable mixed with the fire of Extreme Yang to form a massive millstone.

The formation of the Five Elements and Eight Trigrams created by the nine divine objects trapped the ‘Heart of the Heavenly Demon’ in the center and tightened fiercely.

-Kh, aaaaaargh!

The Heart of the Heavenly Demon, which seemed as though it would never submit, began to scream in the face of the nine divine objects' pincer attack and my Extreme Yang Qi.

Cracks like spiderwebs appeared on the crystal composed of red-burning demonic fire and transparent ice qi.

I did not miss that gap and opened the maw of my qi center wide.

“Shatter and become my nourishment.”

Bang—!

Finally, unable to endure, the Heart of the Heavenly Demon shattered into tens of thousands of fragments.

The essence of the First Heavenly Demon and the Ice King Seol Cheon-u, which had been condensed inside, poured out like a waterfall, but the nine divine objects greedily absorbed those fragments as if they had been waiting.

The nine divine objects that swallowed the heart’s energy obtained the perfect ‘vessel’ that was the Heart of the Heavenly Demon, and the nine suns finally became a massive galaxy, a perfect microcosm.

Flash—!

The destructive storm of light that filled the interior of the stone chamber subsided like a lie.

The intimidation that weighed down the earth and the blood stench that gnawed at the soul vanished without a trace.

Only an absolute silence, as if synchronized with nature itself, settled in the stone chamber.

“……Haa.”

I exhaled a long breath of turbid qi and slowly opened my eyes.

My purple eyes were no longer the color of rampaging flames, but were shining brilliantly with a black-gold light as if looking down upon the world and attaining all logic.

I had shed the human shell and stepped into the Realm of the Profound, having broken even the wall of the Extreme Demon.

“……Third Young Master.”

Seol Ye-rin, who had felt that miraculous change firsthand through our joined hands, looked up at me with moist eyes mixed with relief.

I gently wrapped my hand around her white hand that had held me firmly, and a relaxed, deep smile appeared on my lips.

“Is it... a miraculous encounter?”

As I muttered at the vitality felt throughout my body.

The old freaks who had been watching the situation shouted out in unison as if they had made a promise.

-Heh heh! A miraculous encounter? Did this fellow just call it a miraculous encounter! This is not at a level that can be explained as just a miraculous encounter!

-To burn the essence of the First Heavenly Demon and the Ice King and harmonize it with the energy of the nine divine objects. It’s amazing……!

-It’s the same as obtaining a clue to approach the Ice King!

I slowly clenched and unclenched my fist.

Everything was different from before.

There was no need to even forcibly raise the energy in my body.

Just by thinking, the massive spiritual qi between heaven and earth crawled in on its own and danced at my fingertips.

My physical body became firmer than steel, and my spirit was infinitely expanded to the point of overlooking the entire Hundred Thousand Mountains at a glance.

“Young Master, are you really okay?”

At Seol Ye-rin’s worried voice, I slowly turned my gaze.

Seol Ye-rin’s complexion was incredibly pale.

It was because she had unsparingly poured out all her Extreme Yin Qi to stop my rampage just a moment ago.

Without a word, I wrapped my arm around Seol Ye-rin’s slender waist.

“Miss Seol…… thanks to you, I lived. If you hadn't held onto me by my side, I would have probably been consumed by this massive power.”

A warm yet pure energy flowed from my palm and gently wrapped around Seol Ye-rin’s entire body.

As the profound energy was injected, a rosy complexion began to return to Seol Ye-rin’s white cheeks, having recovered her strength instantly.

How lovely she looked.

Without even realizing it, I kissed Seol Ye-rin’s lips.

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Chapter 154 : Task

Seol Ye-rin’s eyes widened.

The lips of Hyeokryeon Yeom that touched her inside the stone chamber were not just hot, but held an intense warmth as if they would burn.

The energy of the Realm of the Profound emitted by Hyeokryeon Yeom flowed through Seol Ye-rin’s blood veins through the kiss.

-Heh heh heh! This brat has finally come to his senses. To think the first thing he does upon reaching the Realm of the Profound is kiss!

-Oh my, Sword Venerable senior, really. Look at the way this energy is being gathered. This is not an act of affection, but the process of the Young Master’s energy of Wuji perfectly mixing with Miss Ye-rin’s ice qi.

The fuss of the Illusion Venerable and the Demon Queen heard from within the qi center felt distant to me.

I don’t know how much time passed.

When I pulled my lips away, I stared intently at Seol Ye-rin with eyes that shone brilliantly.

Seol Ye-rin lowered her head as if flustered, but she couldn't hide the way even her ears turned red.

“……Young Master , this is the Forbidden Area. Father is waiting for us above.”

“I’ll stay like this for just a moment. Because I don't want to forget this moment.”

My voice had become deeper and heavier than before.

I pulled Seol Ye-rin deeper into my embrace. Her scent and the massive power I had obtained were mixing into one and finding stability.

It felt like the microcosm created by the nine divine objects and the Heart of the Heavenly Demon had finally settled.

“Let’s go, now. To meet my brother.”

Seol Ye-rin said as she gently pushed against my chest.

Without letting go of our firmly joined hands, we walked up the endless dark stairs leading to the Heavenly Demon Hall.

At the entrance of the Forbidden Area, in front of the broken jade throne , the Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi was waiting with his hands behind his back.

Hyeokryeon Hwi recognized my changed momentum.

The eyes of the Heavenly Demon trembled minutely as he confirmed the stage of the Realm of the Profound emitted through the perfect harmony of the Five Elements and Yin-Yang.

“……You have achieved it.”

“It is thanks to the sacrifice of my brother Hyeokryeon Mu, and your arrangement, Father.”

The Heavenly Demon said nothing more and slowly nodded his head.

That night, the funeral of the Second Young Master Hyeokryeon Mu was held at the Heavenly Demon Peak, the highest peak of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

Because he had completely burned even his own life force while destroying the blood-colored formations in the basement of the main mountain, all he left behind was his favorite broken jade sword and an old wine bottle.

Within the harshly swirling dark mist of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, I stood silently with Seol Ye-rin, the Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi, and the Small Snow Squad members, including Yayul Cheon-ung, around a small altar where the jade sword was enshrined.

A funeral in the Demonic Cult does not involve wailing in sorrow.

It is only that the survivors shoulder the share of the dead and move forward.

I slowly approached the altar.

I opened the cap of the old wine bottle left by Hyeokryeon Mu.

The smell of the strong and bitter poisonous liquor unique to the Demonic Cult spread through the wind.

Trickle—.

I slowly poured the wine over the broken jade sword.

“You always said you wanted to live like a playboy, just going on tours. Why did you crawl into the basement of the Hundred Thousand Mountains alone to open my path, when it didn't even suit you.”

My voice was low and calm, but the deep sense of loss contained within was heavy enough to weigh down the night air of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

“I will take this jade sword you left behind. And at the end of this road you risked your life to open..... I will cut that fellow Hyeokryeon Geuk’s neck and offer it to your spirit.”

I brought the remaining wine to my lips and drained it in one gulp.

The sensation of the hot, poisonous liquor passing through my esophagus etched the tragic, unavoidable fate of the brothers into my bones once again.

Seol Ye-rin approached and silently took my empty cup, then drew her ice sword and swung it lightly into the air.

Crack-

Beautiful blue ice crystals soared into the sky, clearing the murky fog of the Hundred Thousand Mountains and reflecting the clear starlight of the night sky.

It was like a North Sea requiem, wishing for the soul of the dead to rise peacefully to heaven.

The Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi, who had been watching the scene silently, spoke heavily.

“Yeom.”

“Yes, Cult Leader.”

“Where do you intend to go now?”

“For now, as I have returned to the Cult after a long time, I plan to let everyone know.”

I turned to Seol Ye-rin. Even within the solemnity of the funeral, Seol Ye-rin’s transparent eyes held only me.

I naturally reached out and firmly grasped her white hand.

“Who my only companion is, the one who willingly dove into these treacherous Hundred Thousand Mountains for me.”

The Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi showed a faint smile as he saw the two of us holding hands.

In his son’s eyes, there was no trace of the weakness of the illegitimate son who had to leave the Hundred Thousand Mountains as if running away in the past.

There, only an absolute ruler of the Realm of the Profound who could look down even upon the Great Mountains of the Murim stood.

“Good. Tomorrow morning, I will summon all the high-ranking members of the Five Demon Clans to the Heavenly Demon Hall. Declare to the whole world that you have returned, and who the new order of the Hundred Thousand Mountains is.”

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The next morning. In the wide courtyard of the broken Heavenly Demon Hall , the high-ranking members of the Five Demon Clans who support the Demonic Cult were lined up without exception.

However, the atmosphere was starkly different from when the Cult Leader had summoned them in the past.

Only the Clan Head of the Yayul Demon Clan, the Hell Poison Demon Yayul Cheon-ung, who had taken over control of the main mountain by standing on my side, held his head high with dignity.

The members of the Thunderbolt Demon Clan, whose Young Master Byeok Tae-san had frozen to death by my Ice White Divine Spear while plotting a rebellion; the Hyonwon Demon Clan, whose Clan Head Hyonwon Ak had been subjugated after turning into a monster; and the elders and acting leaders of the Dokgo Demon Clan, who had shrunk back after losing Captain Dokgo Pyo, were all prostrated flat on the ground, trembling like aspen leaves.

“The Third Young Master is entering!”

With the loud shout of Wi Ji-yeong, I appeared from the inner palace of the Heavenly Demon Hall. From my entire body, draped in an ink-colored long robe , a massive wave of black-gold light flowed out faintly, enough to make one cautious about even breathing and by my side, Seol Ye-rin, wearing a dazzling white palace robe that was reminiscent of the eternal snow of the North Sea, walked side-by-side.

“……!”

The high-ranking members of the Five Demon Clans gasped.

The overwhelming martial prowess I emitted was shocking, but the sharp Extreme Cold Qi emitted by the woman standing beside me was also so vicious and noble that it could instantly freeze the thick demonic qi of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

I looked down indifferently at the prostrated elders of the Five Demon Clans and spoke.

“Everyone, raise your heads. It wouldn't do for the Clan Heads and elders of the Five Demon Clans to only be looking at the ground.”

At my words, the elders who raised their heads while trembling saw me lightly wrapping my arm around Seol Ye-rin’s shoulder.

“I, who headed toward the North Sea as an envoy of this Cult—no, as a live-in son-in-law as if I were running away—have returned to the Hundred Thousand Mountains. And this person beside me is the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace, and my future wife, Seol Ye-rin.”

At that declaration, Yayul Cheon-ung was the first to kneel on one knee and shout loudly.

“Yayul Cheon-ung, Clan Head of the Yayul Demon Clan! I greet the Third Young Master and the Young Palace Head! Heavenly Demon Rebirth, Ten Thousand Demons Submit!”

Following Yayul Cheon-ung’s lead, the terrified elders of the Thunderbolt, Hyonwon, and Dokgo clans also hurriedly struck their heads against the ground and repeated.

“We, we greet the Third Young Master and the Young Palace Head!”

“It is an honor to welcome the great treasure of the North Sea as the mistress of the Demonic Cult!”

Seol Ye-rin lightly waved her hand as she received their greetings.

Crack-!

A transparent path of ice extending from her fingertips reached in front of the knees of the Five Demon Clans' leadership.

It was the perfect momentum of the future master of the North Sea, showing proper etiquette while establishing a dignity that could never be looked down upon.

“Thank you for the warm welcome. I am Seol Ye-rin of the North Sea Ice Palace. Wherever Young Master Hyeokryeon Yeom goes, whether it is the end of the North Sea or the main mountain of the Demonic Cult, I will be with him. I look forward to working with you.”

The reaction of the Small Snow Squad members who watched that perfect and dazzling scene from behind was nothing short of explosive.

“Kuh! Did you see that, Vice Captain! The momentum of our Captain and the Young Palace Head is completely devouring the Hundred Thousand Mountains!”

Wi Ji-yeong clenched her fist, unable to hide her excitement.

Eun Bin maintained his usual narrow-eyed look, but a deep smile that couldn't be hidden hung on his lips.

“Yes. To think the Young Palace Head is standing so proudly in the heart of the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult ..... I am deeply moved. I indeed chose my liege well.”

Baek Mu-yong nodded with his arms crossed.

“The union of the North Sea Ice Palace and the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult. If the Murim world hears this news, they will probably foam at the mouth and collapse. The Captain is truly rewriting history.”

Beside him, Tae Un-seo muttered as he wiped a kitchen knife on his sleeve.

“Haa, if I had known this would happen, I would have bought a bigger pot in Liaoning! To prepare a wedding feast in the Hundred Thousand Mountains, I’ll need more of the spicy spices that suit the taste of those Demonic Cult fellows.”

Yu So-dong and Cheon Deung-jin were also silently guarding that place where a new legend was beginning, each with a bright smile in their own way.

I looked down at the enthusiastic Small Snow Squad members and the prostrated Five Demon Clans, and finally turned my gaze toward the distant north.

The northern sky where my gaze landed was chillingly blue.

I gripped Seol Ye-rin’s hand once more and turned back to the Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi.

“Father. Along with setting the order of this Cult straight, I intend to complete the task I had postponed.”

Hyeokryeon Hwi leaned obliquely against the jade throne and looked at his son with interest.

His son’s momentum, having entered the Realm of the Profound, was now so deep that even he could not easily gauge it.

“A task. What is it?”

“Finding my eldest brother is important, but before that, I intend to formally hold a marriage ceremony with Miss Seol.”

At those words, the pupils of everyone gathered in the courtyard dilated.

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Chapter 155 : Marriage Contract

The courtyard in front of the Heavenly Demon Hall was instantly enveloped in silence at my bombshell announcement.

The high-ranking members of the Five Demon Clans froze with their mouths open, and the eyebrows of Hyeokryeon Hwi twitched slightly.

There was no one who did not know the meaning of the two massive powers, the North Sea Ice Palace and the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult—who had been confronting each other across the Central Plains for hundreds of years—becoming family beyond being blood allies.

"……A wedding?"

Hyeokryeon Hwi muttered lowly.

The intimidation contained in that voice was as ever, but within it was mixed a strange impression of a father watching his son's growth.

"Yes. There is no reason to delay it any longer."

I turned to Seol Ye-rin standing beside me.

Seol Ye-rin's complexion was flushed red, but her eyes alone were agreeing with my intent.

"Father."

Seol Ye-rin stepped forward one step. Frost bloomed everywhere Seol Ye-rin's footsteps touched, freezing the courtyard of the Heavenly Demon Hall that was filled with demonic qi.

"According to the laws of the North Sea, a wedding is held at the highest point during the coldest winter. Thus, I would like to invite you to the North Sea, Father. I would like you

to be a witness at the place where we declare to the whole world that the North Sea Ice Palace and the Demonic Cult are one."

A rough laugh burst out from Hyeokryeon Hwi's lips.

"Hahahaha! I was curious about what the daughter-in-law of my son—whom I sent away as a live-in son-in-law—would be like, and she is no ordinary person! To think she would invite this Seat to the North Sea!"

Hyeokryeon Hwi stood up from the jade throne and took one step forward.

The moment Hyeokryeon Hwi set foot, the frost Seol Ye-rin had laid down and the Heavenly Demon's demonic qi collided, and a fine spark flew in the air. It was not hostility, but a communion checking each other's status.

"Good! It will be the first time in hundreds of years that the Leader of the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult treads on the eternal snow of the North Sea. I must go personally and catch up with my in-law!"

At Hyeokryeon Hwi's hearty approval, the martial artists of the Demonic Cult, including Yayul Cheon-ung, knelt down all at once.

"Heavenly Demon Rebirth, Ten Thousand Demons Submit!"

"Heavenly Demon Rebirth, Ten Thousand Demons Submit!"

A new wind began to blow in the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

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While the loud lion's roar of hundreds of people shaking the Hundred Thousand Mountains echoed.

The reaction of the Small Snow Squad members who watched that solemn scene from behind was nothing short of explosive.

"Kuh! Did you hear that, Vice Captain! The momentum of our Young Master and the Young Palace Head is completely devouring the Hundred Thousand Mountains! My goodness, a wedding!"

Wi Ji-yeong clenched her fist and jumped around, unable to hide her excitement.

For her, who started as a maid of the Demonic Cult, went through the North Sea Ice Palace, and returned to the main mountain, the news of the marriage ceremony of the liege she served was more joyful than any report of victory.

Beside her, Tae Un-seo took out a gleaming kitchen knife from his sleeve and wiped it on his sleeve, muttering quite seriously.

"Haa, if I had known this would happen, I shouldn't have reduced my luggage in Liaoning but instead bought all the bigger cauldrons and rare spices! If it is a grand wedding ceremony where all the high-ranking members of the North Sea Ice Palace and the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult gather, I must prepare a banquet by burning my entire cooking soul!"

At that thought worthy of a swordsman crazy about cooking, Baek Mu-yong crossed his arms and let out a hollow laugh while nodding his head.

"A complete union between the North Sea Ice Palace and the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult. It was something I couldn't have even imagined when you first came as a live-in son-in-law. If the Murim world hears this news, they will probably foam at the mouth and collapse."

Eun Bin, who considered only the safety of the Young Palace Head as the top priority, also maintained his usual thin, narrow eyes, but a deep smile that couldn't be hidden hung on his lips.

"Yes. To think the Young Palace Head is standing so proudly in the heart of the Demonic Cult, facing the Heavenly Demon as a daughter-in-law..... I am deeply moved. I indeed chose my liege well."

Only Cheon Deung-jin, standing behind the Small Snow Squad members, could not smile.

Cheon Deung-jin was in a state of not knowing what to do with her fresh romantic feelings that had been directed toward me.

"Then, shouldn't we set a schedule to return to the North Sea?"

It was quite a long road from the Hundred Thousand Mountains to the North Sea.

***

That night, the Hundred Thousand Mountains became a frantic banquet hall, the likes of which could not be found in decades.

In the courtyard in front of the Heavenly Demon Hall, which would usually be controlled with strict discipline, a massive bonfire flared up, and under the command of Tae Un-seo, delicacies from land and sea and poisonous liquors requisitioned from all over the Demonic Cult poured out.

During the day, the funeral of the Young Master, Hyeokryeon Mu, was held grandly.

Time passed relentlessly as they talked about the news of the demonic practitioners of the Demonic Cult that the Young Cult Leader, Hyeokryeon Geuk, had taken out.

Hyeokryeon Hwi descended below the jade throne and drained wine cups repeatedly along with Yayul Cheon-ung and the high-ranking members of the Five Demon Clans.

Hyeokryeon Hwi, who had been hardened by the fratricidal conflict of his children and the secret plots of the Blood Cult, was wearing a lonely smile.

The first became the Young Cult Leader but ran out of the Demonic Cult, and the second reached his death.

In a situation where it was clear that the first would surely look for an opportunity to kill the third as well.

The third, me, announced a marriage ceremony with the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace.

"Yeom! And daughter-in-law! Come here and take a cup!"

At Hyeokryeon Hwi's call, Seol Ye-rin and I approached.

I took the heavy golden cup my father held out and drained it in one gulp, and Seol Ye-rin also emptied her cup with an elegant yet bold attitude worthy of the Young Palace Head of the Ice Palace, drawing cheers from the members of the Demonic Cult.

-Heh heh, look at that old man. Draining cups repeatedly at the news of his son's marriage.

-Ho ho, still, it's a relief that he seems to rely on the Third Young Master.

Listening to the blessing mixed with jokes of the old freaks heard from within my qi center, I tightly grasped the hand of Seol Ye-rin standing beside me.

Beyond the burning flames, it felt as though I could see the eternal snow of the North Sea.

Now, the Ice Palace was the haven where I had to return.

***

Before the hot heat of the Hundred Thousand Mountains even cooled, the carrier pigeon of the North Sea Ice Palace pierced through the blizzard and reached the main hall of the Ice Palace first.

The master of the North Sea, the Ice King Seol Baek-ho, stopped reading the letter brought by the carrier pigeon and jumped up from his seat.

His shoulders, which were usually heavy as a mountain, were trembling minutely.

"……L, look at this fellow?"

The Ice Queen, Hong Ye-hwa, who was tilting a teacup beside him, gave him an inquisitive look as if wondering.

"What's the matter that you're making such a fuss? Don't tell me something happened to our Ye-rin?"

"Something did happen! Something very big!"

Seol Baek-ho handed the letter to Hong Ye-hwa with a trembling hand. Hong Ye-hwa's two eyes grew large as she quickly scanned down the letter, and soon she burst into a hearty laugh that seemed to fill the Palace Lord's Hall.

"My goodness, indeed he is the son-in-law I picked! I told him to just go and retrieve the lost Ice Crystal, and he instead threw an invitation to the North Sea even to that terrible father-in-law!"

"Is this the time to be laughing? The Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi, that crazy old man has declared he will tread on the eternal snow of our North Sea! In the hundreds of years of Murim history, has there ever been a time when the Leader of the Demonic Cult walked into the main base of the Ice Palace on his own feet?!"

Seol Baek-ho touched his forehead as if he had a headache, but Hong Ye-hwa snorted and unfolded her folding fan.

"Why? Our Ye-rin invited him to the highest point of the North Sea first, didn't she? She's my daughter, but her spirit is truly the best under heaven. Besides, Hwi will probably act quite gently in front of his daughter-in-law, so what's there to worry about. I'm instead just having fun thinking about seeing that old man's face after such a long time."

"You are truly peaceful, wife……"

At that moment, the complexion of the General Manager Seol Su-hyeok, who had hurriedly run to the Palace Lord's Hall after hearing the news, was pale.

"P, Palace Lord! Ice Queen! If the Heavenly Demon of the Demonic Cult visits the main mountain personally, what should we do about the Ice Palace's defense? It is a joyous occasion that the Small Snow Squad Captain is returning in glory while escorting the Young Palace Head, but if the main force of the Demonic Cult follows, should we switch to a wartime system, or should we welcome him as a state guest……"

"Of course we should welcome him as a precious in-law!"

Hong Ye-hwa gave the order, cutting off Seol Su-hyeok's words firmly.

"General Manager! Open all the vaults of the Ice Palace right now! Mobilize everything from the wealth earned by trading Cold Iron with the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild last time to the rare materials that came in from the Central Plains. Decorate the most brilliant and grand wedding ceremony venue and banquet hall in North Sea history! We must never let the North Sea Ice Palace look small in front of those Demonic Cult fellows!"

"Yes! I will follow your order, Ice Queen! I will immediately mobilize the Ice Wolf Squad and the Snow Tiger Squad to decorate the entire Ice Palace!"

Seol Su-hyeok wiped the sweat from his forehead and hurriedly left the office.

Watching that busy scene, Seol Baek-ho let out a deep sigh, but couldn't hide even the faint smile leaking from the corner of his mouth.

A man who cleared the darkness of the Hundred Thousand Mountains that had pushed him even to the threshold of death with his own hands, and eventually firmly protected his daughter and even brought back the Ice Crystal.

A future he couldn't have even dared to imagine was unfolding before his eyes when he first took him in as a live-in son-in-law to the North Sea.

"Hyeokryeon Yeom..... you are truly cutting off the grudges between the Demonic Cult and the North Sea, and opening a new era."

At the highest point of the North Sea Ice Palace.

Even the bitter north wind fluttering outside the window felt unusually warm like a spring breeze today.

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At that time, somewhere in the Central Plains.

In the center of the deep blood pond underground.

In the middle of a pond where blood qi drawn from thousands of corpses swirled, the Young Cult Leader, Hyeokryeon Geuk, was floating in the air cross-legged.

".....A wedding?"

A smell of blood was buried in his lowly muttering voice.

The formations that Hyeokryeon Mu had sacrificed his life to destroy had already been forced back together with the forbidden secret arts of the Demonic Cult, and were emitting a more hideous demonic qi.

Hyeokryeon Geuk emitted a dark red radiance from his entire body.

"My foolish younger brother is indeed decorating the place he will surely come to die brilliantly."

Hyeokryeon Geuk slowly opened his eyes.

As Hyeokryeon Geuk's fingers scratched the air, the condensed demonic qi became a sharp blade enhanced qi and split the rock wall as if slicing tofu.

Behind him, countless masters of the Demonic Cult wearing red masks were kneeling in the shadows.

"Go. At every mountain pass toward the North Sea, sow the seeds of our Cult. On the day those fellows stand on the eternal snow of the North Sea Ice Palace, that snowfield will turn into a Demonic Sea boiling with the black blood of beasts."

A cruel smile hung on Hyeokryeon Geuk's lips.

Hyeokryeon Geuk intended to use the essence of the nine divine objects and the physical body that Hyeokryeon Yeom had collected as sacrifices to reach the stage of the Demon God, which even the First Heavenly Demon could not reach.

"It's perfect that Father is also heading there. There wouldn't be a place as desolate as the North Sea to bury an old lion and a young tiger at once."

The demonic qi emitted from Hyeokryeon Geuk's body filled the underground cave.

Chapter 156 : Chapter 156

Chapter 156 : Invitation Card

The morning of the North Sea Ice Palace was more noisy and hot than ever before.

Usually, a heavy silence would have hung over the main hall of the Ice Palace amidst the terrible cold emitted by the eternal snow, but today was an exception.

"Move faster! They say the Cult Leader of the Heavenly Demon Divine Cult is coming to step on the eternal snow of the North Sea himself! Even if you have to scrape the bottom of the Ice Palace's treasury, you must decorate the most splendid and majestic banquet

hall in the history of the North Sea! Decorate every path with red silk, golden candlesticks, and the best Ice Flowers of the North Sea!"

The owner of the voice ringing through the front yard of the Palace Lord’s Hall was none other than the Ice Queen Hong Ye-hwa.

Having returned from wandering the rugged Outer Regions alone to find a way to save the Young Palace Head Seol Ye-rin, she was perfectly controlling the affairs of the Ice Palace on behalf of her husband, Seol Baek-ho, who had collapsed, as soon as she returned.

The news that she had not only completely cured her daughter, who was dying from the Extreme Yin Body, but had also pacified the heart of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, the home of the Demonic Cult, and that an invitation for the Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi to come to the North Sea had arrived, set fire to Hong Ye-hwa's boisterous nature.

"Ice Queen! The top-quality carpets urgently procured from the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild and the precious incense brought in from the Potala Palace in the West have just passed through the main gate!"

"Tell General Manager Seol su-hyeok to lay them out according to the traffic lines immediately!"

"Yes!"

An irrepressible, refreshing smile was hanging on the lips of Hong Ye-hwa as she gave the orders.

An unprecedented situation in the hundreds of years of Murim history where the absolute ruler of the Demonic Cult, who was no different from an arch-enemy, was entering the Ice Palace of his own accord.

This was the beginning of a huge tectonic shift that would shake the entire landscape of the Jianghu Murim, going beyond forming an in-law relationship.

Watching that bustling scene from beyond the window of the inner room of the Palace Lord’s Hall, the Ice King Seol Baek-ho muttered.

"……I wonder if this is the same silent and cold North Sea I used to know. Has the North Sea ever been this stirred up for hundreds of years."

Seol Baek-ho's pale complexion was already showing quite a bit of red vitality.

He had been hovering between life and death after losing the Ice Crystal, the essence of the North Sea, but thanks to the overwhelming Extreme Yang Qi, the water energy of the Yeouiju, and the absolute life force mixed with the energy of the Dark Venerable that his son-in-law, I, had injected into him, he was recovering his strength day by day.

"You, is this the time for you to be leisurely laying out your impressions?"

Bang!

The Ice Queen Hong Ye-hwa, who had roughly opened the door and entered, had her hands full of brilliant red silk and golden ornaments that were dazzling to the eye.

"Now, get up quickly and try this on! The Cult Leader of the world-renowned Demonic Cult is coming to our North Sea of his own accord, so how can the person who is the Ice Palace Lord show himself looking sickly like a patient? I will serve you health foods starting tomorrow, so prepare a more dignified appearance than you had at the engagement ceremony, ten times over!"

"W-Wife. Even so, aren't you making too much of a fuss? The Ice Palace's treasury will be exhausted!"

"If it runs out, we can just ask our son-in-law to fill it again! Do you have any idea how much our lucky charm son-in-law sold the Cold Iron for after opening a trade deal with the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild? Besides, the son-in-law himself overturned the Hundred Thousand Mountains and invited his father-in-law, so this level of hospitality is the basics!"

At Hong Ye-hwa's boisterous scolding, Seol Baek-ho had no choice but to become a mute who had eaten honey.

Saving their daughter Seol Ye-rin, finding the legacy of the North Sea Martial Gods, and even completely overturning the relationship with the arch-enemy Demonic Cult were all my deeds.

Even if he wanted to maintain his dignity as the Ice Palace Lord, the achievements his son-in-law had established were so mountain-like that there was simply nothing to refute.

"Hoho..... Indeed. If Ye-rin is happy, what does it matter if the treasury is emptied or the pillars of the North Sea are pulled out. Do as you please, wife."

When Seol Baek-ho surrendered and laughed heartily, Hong Ye-hwa also pulled up the corners of her mouth as if satisfied.

The highest point of the North Sea was now filled with the hot heat of preparing for the wedding of the century, instead of the cold snowstorm.

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At the same time. Quite contrary to the North Sea Ice Palace being filled with a festive atmosphere, the Hundred Thousand Mountains, the home of the Demonic Cult, was enveloped in silence.

A wide corridor leading to the heart of our cult.

If it were usual, the warriors of the Demonic Cult, filled with killing intent, would have walked this path while keeping a bloodshot eye on each other, but I was walking this path with a very leisurely gait.

"Now, now, everyone is working hard. The weather is gloomy, but you are all doing a great job."

My black satin long robe was faintly scattering an overawing black-gold light with every step I took.

Having embraced the divine objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens and the Heart of the Heavenly Demon, I possessed the aura of the Realm of the Profound that had surpassed the Extreme Demon stage.

Under the suffocating pressure I emitted, the elite warriors of the Demonic Cult guarding the corridor could not even dare to lift their heads and were prostrated flat on the floor, trembling.

However, quite unlike that terrifying aura, a mountain of luxurious letters decorated flamboyantly with red silk and gold leaf was stacked on my left arm.

-Keke, brat. Why on earth have you been carrying those hideous red scraps of paper since a while ago? The demons of the Hundred Thousand Mountains are trembling as if they've seen a ghost upon seeing your appearance.

-Oh my, Master. Those are invitation cards sent out when there's a joyous occasion in the Central Plains or the Outer Regions. But I also don't understand why you're personally handing them out in this gloomy headquarters of the Demonic Cult.

-Isn't it obvious! It must be a scheme to extort money!

The telepathic laughter of the Sword Venerable, the Demon Queen, and the Illusion Venerable Danmok Ryeong rang out from inside my qi center.

I chuckled and replied in my head.

'Elders, isn't my mother-in-law scraping the bottom of the Ice Palace's treasury to decorate the banquet hall? Since the family of my wife-to-be is undergoing excessive financial bleeding, isn't it only natural as the son of the Demonic Cult's Leader to lightly shake out the pockets of the people in this family?'

I remembered my first life as a second-string baseball player in South Korea.

At that time, one of the things I envied most was the sight of successful seniors holding grand weddings in top-tier hotels and sweeping up congratulatory money from countless guests.

In my current state of martial power, I could have extorted wealth by threatening the entire Murim, but I decided to choose a very "legal and polite" method.

"Captain! Where shall I take you to the next destination!"

Following closely behind me, Wi Ji-yeong, who was holding a bunch of red invitation cards in both hands, shouted with excitement.

Having started as a mere maid of the Demonic Cult, Wi Ji-yeong was enjoying the luxury of looking down on the elders of the Hundred Thousand Mountains while following me.

"Hmm, since the atmosphere in the Hyonwon Demon Clan and the Thunderbolt Demon Clan will be bad because I handled the Clan Heads and Young Masters last time..... Shall we try going to the Dokgo Demon Clan first?"

"Yes! They say the top brass of the Dokgo Demon Clan are all huddled in the Sword Demon Hall right now!"

"Good, lead the way."

When my party arrived in front of the Sword Demon Hall, the warriors of the Dokgo Demon Clan guarding the entrance were startled and made way for us.

It was a family that had been smashed by me while following the orders of the Young Cult Leader Hyeokryeon Geuk not long ago.

With even the leader Dokgo Pyo having lost his life, this walking calamity had come of his own accord, so they could neither lock the doors nor run away.

"H-How could the Third Young Master come to such a humble place....."

An elder who was acting as the head of the Dokgo Demon Clan began to tremble like an aspen leaf.

I smiled very warmly and politely held out a red invitation card right in front of the elder's nose.

"Please do not be surprised, Elder. I will be holding an official wedding with the Young Palace Head at the North Sea Ice Palace soon. As it is a meaningful occasion to end the ill will between our cult and the Ice Palace and promote new harmony, I hope the elders of the Dokgo Demon Clan will also attend and grace the occasion with your presence."

“A, a wedding……? A-ah, I understand. I shall attend as commanded…….”

"Ah, I won't be disappointed even if it's difficult for you to attend."

I gently cut him off and patted the elder's shoulder.

At that moment, the pitch-black darkness of the Dark Venerable and the Mad Fire intertwined like a thread at my fingertips and brushed past the elder's cheek.

Fwoosh—!

The hard obsidian floor melted without a sound, and a huge pit was gouged out.

"……I believe and doubt not that even if it's difficult for you to attend, the sincerity and congratulatory money that the Dokgo Demon Clan will send will be heavy enough to fill the storehouse of the North Sea Ice Palace. If that is not the case, I suppose I can consider the Dokgo Demon Clan as a group of rebels who oppose the harmony between our cult and the Ice Palace?"

The elder almost fell to the spot foaming at the mouth.

This was clearly blackmail. It was a threat that if they didn't attend, they would be branded as rebels and killed.

"I-I will immediately open the family treasury and prepare ten wagons worth of the most precious treasures and gold! Please accept the sincerity of our Dokgo Demon Clan, Third Young Master!"

"Haha, as expected of a pillar supporting our cult, the Dokgo Demon Clan is indeed generous. Thank you. Wi Ji-yeong, write it down well. It's ten wagons worth. If even one is missing, I'll come back to collect it again."

"Yes, Captain! Dokgo Demon Clan, ten wagons worth of congratulatory money! I've recorded it meticulously!"

Seeing the scene of Wi Ji-yeong taking out a ledger from her bosom and scribbling away with a brush, the elder slumped to the floor with a soul-less expression.

After completing the collection…… no, the distribution of invitation cards by touring the large and small pavilions of the Hundred Thousand Mountains like that, our carriage was now full of treasures and promissory notes that seemed about to burst.

-Master, that brat is definitely a devil. In our time, we couldn't even imagine such a creative way of extorting money. The warriors of the Demonic Cult are shedding tears of blood while paying the congratulatory money.

-I have also watched many groups of the unorthodox faction, but this is the first time I've seen a guy who pulls out the pillars of a family with such a bright expression. The Ice King has caught a real lucky charm.

While listening to the Martial Gods clicking their tongues, I headed to the main hall of the Yayul Demon Clan, the final destination.

There, Yayul Cheon-ung, the Hell Poison Demon who held the actual power of the headquarters and moved as my hands and feet, ran out in his stocking feet to greet me.

"Third Young Master! I have been waiting! A wedding in the North Sea, what a heart-pounding joyous occasion this is!"

Yayul Cheon-ung was wiping away tears of emotion while taking a clasped hands greeting.

I handed him a red invitation card and chuckled.

"Clan Head Yayul, you are working hard to protect the headquarters. You are doing the scouting well, right?"

"Yes! I have seized all major strongholds of the Hundred Thousand Mountains so that the remnants of Hyeokryeon Geuk cannot dare to lift their heads. And as for the congratulatory gift from the Yayul Demon Clan for the Third Young Master's wedding, I have already contacted the Moyong Clan Merchant Guild and completed preparations to send top-quality silks and jewels to the North Sea!"

As expected, he was a man who was incredibly quick to catch on.

I patted Yayul Cheon-ung's shoulder and nodded.

"Good. I will continue to leave the defense of the headquarters to Clan Head Yayul. A real war will break out soon, so do not let your guard down."

"A war..... are you saying?"

My eyes sank.

"I don't know when it will be, but you should just think that it will definitely happen."

That was why the Ice Palace and the Divine Cult were trying to join hands now.

After making a round of the Five Demon Clans, I looked for Seol Ye-rin.

Seol Ye-rin was waiting for me while looking up at the night sky.

Seol Ye-rin's dazzling white palace robe shone exceptionally transparently even in the gloomy mist of the Hundred Thousand Mountains.

"Did you finish handing out all the invitation cards?"

When Seol Ye-rin asked with a soft smile, I approached and firmly held her cold hand.

"Yeah, I think everyone is planning to give us a generous amount."

"Father and mother will be pleased."

"Let's decide on the exact date after returning to the North Sea and sending a message, but how about taking a trip around the Central Plains as well?"

Seol Ye-rin chuckled at my appearance as I made plans to collect money again by revisiting the places I had formed ties with until now.

"In that case, it will take some time until the wedding ceremony?"

"It doesn't matter, right?"

"That is true."

Seol Ye-rin said so and leaned into my embrace.

It was because she felt that she could overcome any hardship if she was with me.

Meanwhile, while holding Seol Ye-rin, I gazed behind her.

It was because I could see Cheon Deung-jin watching us from afar.

Question

The night breeze of the Heavenly Demon Hall gently ruffled Seol Ye-rin's hair.

I felt her body heat as she leaned into my embrace, and I looked at Cheon Deung-jin, who was standing alone in the darkness beyond her shoulder.

My senses as one in the Realm of the Profound were cruelly sharp.

She probably thought she was hiding in the dark mist of the Hundred Thousand Mountains, but to my eyes, her trembling shoulders and the way she bit her lip were as clear as if I were holding them in my hand.

-Keke, blood tears must be falling from that brat's eyes. Are you pretending not to know?

-Sword Venerable, please be quiet. That child's heart is being torn into a thousand, ten thousand pieces right now. For a child who possesses the Fire Spirit Qi to be chilled to such an extent.

The regretful telepathy of the Demon Queen brushed through my mind.

I closed my eyes for a moment.

Cheon Deung-jin.

She was the Young Palace Head of the Potala Palace in the West and the only daughter of the Lion King Cheon Jeok-pa.

It was me who had saved her while she was dying in the pain of the Fire Spirit Body while disguised as a man.

Since that day when I took in her rampaging fire energy with my own qi center, I had become more than just a savior to Cheon Deung-jin; I was the only light in her life.

The times we spent together crossing the snowy fields of the North Sea, the jungles of the South, and the waves of Dongting Lake after she shed her male disguise and followed me as a woman.

In that process, she and Seol Ye-rin had clashed at every turn, sparks and ice flying, but that too was a strange bond unique to the two women who shared the existence known as me.

"……Young Master?"

Seol Ye-rin, who was in my arms, realized where my gaze was fixed and asked in a low voice.

She was also clever, as expected of the daughter of the Ice Queen Hong Ye-hwa.

There was no way she didn't know that Cheon Deung-jin's energy was burning much more roughly than usual before sinking coldly.

Seol Ye-rin lifted her head from my chest and spoke in a calm voice toward her romantic rival hiding in the darkness.

"Miss Cheon, I know you are there."

At Seol Ye-rin's call, the shadow behind the rock wavered.

Cheon Deung-jin, with her long, reddish hair flowing down, slowly revealed herself.

Hot fire energy that hadn't been gathered was rising like a haze from her entire body.

"……Forget the greetings. I enjoyed watching the two of you acting all lovey-dovey."

Cheon Deung-jin spoke bluntly, but her red eyes were filled with moisture she couldn't hide.

At this moment, when I had reached the Realm of the Profound, obtained the Heart of the Heavenly Demon, and finally declared the unification of the North Sea and the Demonic Cult, Cheon Deung-jin was feeling poignantly that there was no room for her to squeeze in.

I let go of Seol Ye-rin for a moment and approached Cheon Deung-jin.

"Did you prepare a generous amount of congratulatory money? I'm planning to invite the Potala Palace as well."

"...You're really mean, Young Master."

Cheon Deung-jin bit her lip and lightly punched my chest with her fist.

The intense heat emitted by the Fire Spirit Body was transmitted through my long robe.

"After saving me from death, letting me join the Small Snow Squad, and now you're just going to fly off to the North Sea?"

"You're really going to hold a wedding with Miss Seol?"

"That's how it turned out. You're coming to the North Sea too, right?"

I took out an invitation card carefully wrapped in red silk from my bosom and held it out to her.

It was a real invitation that I had written myself with my own brushwork, with a texture different from the ones I had handed out to the Five Demon Clans to shake them down.

Cheon Deung-jin took the invitation and finally let a suppressed tear fall.

"I have to go. If I don't go, the Young Palace Head will take the seat next to the Captain and brag about it so much, so I'll go even if it's just because I don't want to see that. I'm going to go and drink every single drop of alcohol at the banquet hall, so be prepared."

Seol Ye-rin chuckled, approached Cheon Deung-jin, and wrapped an arm around her shoulder.

The cold ice energy and the hot fire energy clashed with a hiss, but the two women did not push each other away anymore.

"Yes, come and help. Without your rough firepower, the wedding hall might be too cold."

"Hmph, it's not like I'm helping, okay?"

Cheon Deung-jin replied petulantly and placed the invitation card preciouslly into her bosom.

-Keke, what a flame-like child. As expected of the daughter of the Lion King, she has no lingering attachments.

-Oh my, Demon Queen. That's not having no lingering attachments; she's declaring that she won't give up. Our Third Young Master is going to have a hard time in the North Sea.

Leaving the telepathy of the old monsters behind, I led the two women and walked toward the pavilion.

Dawn the next day.

In the courtyard of the Heavenly Demon Hall, dozens of wagons and elite escort warriors of the Demonic Cult were lined up.

The boxes of congratulatory money offered by the Yayul Demon Clan were piled up like a mountain, and a huge procession to go through the dark mist of the Hundred Thousand Mountains and toward the Central Plains was prepared.

The Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi descended from his jade throne to see them off.

"Yeom."

"Yes, Father."

"To think of going around the Central Plains to collect money. Since there are many who owe you, the number of wagons will increase by a hundred more by the time you go to the North Sea."

"Haha, it's not that many."

Hyeokryeon Hwi tapped his son's shoulder.

"Go and prove it. How the blood of the Demonic Cult rules over the snow and wind of the North Sea. And..... on the wedding day, I will also come by palanquin, so prepare plenty of alcohol."

"I will follow your command."

I, Seol Ye-rin, and the Small Snow Squad members, including Cheon Deung-jin, mounted our horses.

"Departure!"

With Baek Mu-yong's thunderous shout, the procession began to move.

Clatter, clatter—!

The aura emitted by dozens of huge wagons and the elite warriors of the Demonic Cult on black horses was indeed a magnificent sight.

In the past, when the gates of the Hundred Thousand Mountains opened and the Demonic Cultists poured into the Central Plains, a blood-soaked bloody wind always blew, but today's procession was different.

On the carriage at the front, the flag representing the Demonic Cult and the snowflower pattern of the North Sea Ice Palace were fluttering side by side.

Sitting leisurely in a lotus position on the roof of the carriage, I deeply inhaled the fresh air of the Central Plains.

-Keke, your face is truly thick. An invitation that even the famous masters of the Orthodox faction would barely send out if they were the Murim Alliance Leader, and the son of the Demonic Cult's Leader is roaming the middle of the Central Plains to collect money!

-Oh my, Master. This is not collection, but asking for a rightful 'gratitude,' isn't it? How many lives has our Third Young Master saved, so what does it matter to take some of those treasures.

-Tsk tsk, to think you're going around committing robbery with my spear. I'm worried whether the spear will rust before we arrive at the North Sea.

-Everyone, please be quiet. The rumors of the marketplace reflected in this mirror are already turning out to be interesting.

The Sword Venerable, the Demon Queen, the Spear Saint, and the Illusion Venerable.

At the sound of the four Martial Gods dwelling in my qi center and divine objects chatting noisily, I let out a chuckle.

"Everyone, please be quiet. I'm not going to extort money, but I've stepped up for the peace and great integration of the Murim, haven't I?"

-Since the arch-enemy Demonic Cult and the Ice Palace are holding a wedding, do you think the sects of the Central Plains will give their blessings?

At my cheeky reply, the ghosts clicked their tongues all at once as if it were absurd.

Then, Wi Ji-yeong, who stuck her head out of the carriage window, shouted while holding a large ledger and a brush.

"Captain! No, Young Master! The treasures received as congratulatory money from the Yayul Demon Clan and the Dokgo Demon Clan have already filled the wagons! If you go to other places in the future, won't these wagons be enough?!"

"Don't worry, Ji-yeong. If it's not enough, we can just tell those sects to give us the whole wagons and horses as congratulatory money. You just record it thoroughly. I have to have the ledger checked by my mother-in-law later."

"Yes! I will record every single coin!"

While the excited Wi Ji-yeong was scribbling with her brush, light sighs flowed from Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin inside the carriage.

"The Young Master is really..... he must be the best in the world in this area."

"That's true. Even the monks in charge of the finances of the Potala Palace would click their tongues in front of the Young Master."

The two women were already sitting side by side and drinking tea.

The terrifying atmosphere of the other day, when they were emitting bone-chilling ice qi and fire qi toward each other, had vanished without a trace.

Under the absolute pivot that was me and in this journey toward the North Sea, the two of them were forming a strange bond.

"So, Captain. Where have you set the first collection point?"

Baek Mu-yong, who was sitting on the coachman's seat holding the horse's reins, turned back and asked.

I stroked my chin and drew a map of the Central Plains in my mind.

"I must go to the place where the justification is most certain, has the most money, and can never refuse us."

"Where is it?"

"First, I should stop by the nearest Tibet."

At my words, Cheon Deung-jin's eyes, who was guarding the side of the carriage, grew round.

"Huh? My home? You're going to the Potala Palace?"

"Yeah. I have to give an invitation to the Lion King and also take some of your dowry... no, congratulatory money."

At my cheeky reply, Cheon Deung-jin's face turned red, but she couldn't hide her inner joy.

In fact, her father Cheon Jeok-pa was a man who couldn't get enough of me, since he had saved his daughter's life and even punished the Ma Jo of the Blood Cult thanks to me.

The procession crossed the rugged mountain ranges of Xinjiang and headed straight for the plateau region of Tibet.

Upon arriving like that.

Potala Palace of Tibet.

"Is it true that Hyeokryeon Yeom has returned!"

Even before the huge castle gate of the Potala Palace opened, a shout like a Lion's Roar echoed across the plateau.

A huge man wearing a gold palace robe, Potala Palace Lord Cheon Jeok-pa, ran down in his stocking feet.

Cheon Jeok-pa suddenly grabbed my hand, then his eyes grew wide upon feeling my changed aura.

"L-Look at this fellow? Your energy is worlds apart from before!"

"Haha, Elder. You flatter me. I stopped by to greet you because I'll be holding a wedding in the North Sea soon."

At the word wedding, Cheon Jeok-pa's expression hardened.

He knew about the relationship between me and the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace, but hearing the news directly made him worry about his daughter.

"Father."

As Cheon Deung-jin stepped forward, Cheon Jeok-pa asked via telepathy.

-Are you okay?

Nod.

Cheon Deung-jin nodded.

And Cheon Jeok-pa could notice Cheon Deung-jin's sadness.

Eventually.

"Before giving the congratulations, I have something I want to ask Young Master Hyeokryeon, so could you leave for a moment, Young Palace Head?"

At Cheon Jeok-pa's words, Seol Ye-rin quietly stepped back with the Small Snow Squad.

The three who remained.

Cheon Jeok-pa, Cheon Deung-jin, and me.

Cheon Jeok-pa looked at me and asked.

"I will ask you point-blank. What do you think of my daughter?"

Chapter 157 : Chapter 157

Chapter 157 : Question

The night breeze of the Heavenly Demon Hall gently ruffled Seol Ye-rin's hair.

I felt the body temperature of her as she leaned into my embrace and looked at Cheon Deung-jin, who was standing alone in the darkness over her shoulder.

My senses in the Realm of the Profound were cruelly sharp.

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"……Young Master?"

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Seol Ye-rin lifted her head from my chest and spoke in a calm voice toward her romantic rival hiding in the darkness.

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"...You're really mean, Young Master."

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***

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Potala Palace of Tibet.

"Is it true that Hyeokryeon Yeom has returned!"

Even before the huge castle gate of the Potala Palace opened, a shout like a Lion's Roar echoed across the plateau.

A huge man wearing a gold palace robe, Potala Palace Lord Cheon Jeok-pa, ran down in his stocking feet.

Cheon Jeok-pa suddenly grabbed my hand, then his eyes grew wide upon feeling my changed aura.

"L-Look at this fellow? Your energy is worlds apart from before!"

"Haha, Elder. You flatter me. I stopped by to greet you because I'll be holding a wedding in the North Sea soon."

At the word wedding, Cheon Jeok-pa's expression hardened.

He knew about the relationship between me and the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace, but hearing the news directly made him worry about his daughter.

"Father."

As Cheon Deung-jin stepped forward, Cheon Jeok-pa asked via telepathy.

-Are you okay?

Nod.

Cheon Deung-jin nodded.

And Cheon Jeok-pa could notice Cheon Deung-jin's sadness.

Eventually.

"Before giving the congratulations, I have something I want to ask Young Master Hyeokryeon, so could you leave for a moment, Young Palace Head?"

At Cheon Jeok-pa's words, Seol Ye-rin quietly stepped back with the Small Snow Squad.

The three who remained.

Cheon Jeok-pa, Cheon Deung-jin, and me.

Cheon Jeok-pa looked at me and asked.

"I will ask you point-blank. What do you think of my daughter?"

Chapter 158 : Chapter 158

Chapter 158 : Consecutive Attacks

"I will ask you point-blank. What do you think of my daughter?"

Cheon Jeok-pa's voice was low, but the pressure contained within it vibrated the earth.

It was not a simple question.

It was a Lion's Roar as the master of the West, and as a father who, while grateful to the savior who saved his dying daughter, was letting out the pent-up frustration in a corner of his heart.

I did not avoid it.

I stared straight into Cheon Jeok-pa's bulging eyes.

-Keke, brat. Finally, what was bound to come has arrived. The old man who was anxious to make you his son-in-law is now trying to reach a conclusion.

-Master, this is not the time to joke. That old man is serious right now. His energy is right on the verge of exploding.

Leaving the interference of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen in my qi center behind, I slowly opened my mouth.

"Miss Cheon is..... my most precious comrade, and someone I can trust with my back."

"Comrade? Trusting your back?"

Cheon Jeok-pa's eyebrows twitched.

"I did not ask because I wanted to hear such a cliché answer! Do you really not know the reason why my daughter followed you all the way to the North Sea and the South? If you saved a child who was dying from the Fire Spirit Body, shouldn't you take responsibility!"

"Father! Stop it!"

Cheon Deung-jin, unable to bear it any longer, shouted.

Red fire energy soared from her entire body. However, Cheon Jeok-pa did not stop.

"Be quiet! I am asking this as a father. Hyeokryeon Yeom, you are soon to hold a wedding with the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace. It is a blood alliance that the whole world knows. Then what about my daughter? Are you saying she should grow old and die while following behind your shadow for the rest of her life?"

Silence flowed.

I looked at Cheon Deung-jin, who was bowing her head and trembling beside me.

The hardships she had endured for me, and those eyes that ultimately supported me even while quarreling with Seol Ye-rin, flashed through my mind like a kaleidoscope.

I took a step forward.

The moment I stepped out, my aura of the Realm of the Profound spread in all directions, silently erasing the pressure that Cheon Jeok-pa was emitting.

"Elder. I am a greedy fellow."

"What?"

I had thought about it a lot.

I was no fool.

I was not unaware that the way Cheon Deung-jin and the Divine Physician's granddaughter, Seong Sang-ah, looked at me was unusual.

But.

'My fiancée is Seol Ye-rin.'

I could not follow Cheon Jeok-pa's words to accept Cheon Deung-jin with the wedding approaching.

Then what should I do?

The faces of those who had shared life and death with me while going through the North Sea, the Hundred Thousand Mountains, the South, the West, and Dongting Lake during my past three lives and this one quickly flashed through my mind.

What I wanted to achieve was not revenge or the conquest of the Murim.

A world where I escaped from the hands of Hyeokryeon Geuk, and where those who believed in and followed me no longer shed tears of blood.

To fully contain that massive world in my own vessel, the transparent ice flower of Seol Ye-rin was necessary, but the hot flame of Cheon Deung-jin was also an absolute piece that I could never give up.

"My only fiancée is the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace, Seol Ye-rin. I have no intention whatsoever of breaking that vow made under the eternal snow of the North Sea."

"You fellow……! Do you dare to humiliate my daughter in front of me!"

"Listen to the end."

The energy of the Realm of the Profound was loaded into my voice.

Rumble-!

Inside my qi center, the black-gold light waves emitted by the nine divine objects swirled and swallowed Cheon Jeok-pa's pressure in an instant.

My aura was so enormous that even the Lion King instinctively inhaled.

"The position of my fiancée belongs to Miss Seol. However, I have no intention of letting Miss Cheon rot away as a shadow behind my back. In the future, I will rewrite the path of power of the world's Murim, and I will make this dirty history of the Jianghu kneel at my feet. In that vast and rugged path of power…… Miss Cheon's fire spirit is an indispensable and most brilliant pillar to me."

Silence. In the heavy stillness where even the sound of the wind seemed to have stopped, I turned to look at Cheon Deung-jin, who was trembling beside me.

The woman who had endured the terrible pain of the Fire Spirit Body for me, shed the shackles of her male disguise, and willingly volunteered for the rugged journey of the Murim.

I firmly grasped Cheon Deung-jin's shoulders.

At the warm heat of the Extreme Yang Qi transmitted through that touch, thick tears fell from her two eyes.

"Miss Cheon. Let us go together. As your father said, there is no need to hide behind a shadow. Whether it be the North Sea Ice Palace, the Hundred Thousand Mountains, or the middle of the Central Plains. Stand at the very front of the path I walk and light my way with your hot flame."

I did not say I would take her as a partner until the end.

Even for Seol Ye-rin's sake, I could not ask her to be my partner.

However, depending on how one hears it, it could be hopeful words.

"Sob..... sob..... You're mean. You're a truly mean person....."

While Cheon Deung-jin tapped my chest with her fists, the strength of the arms embracing me did not loosen in the slightest. The Young Palace Head of the West, who had lived her whole life as a woman in male disguise while being suppressed, made up her mind after hearing my words.

"Father. It's okay if I'm not officially recognized."

The lips of the Potala Palace Lord, the Lion King Cheon Jeok-pa, who was silently watching that scene, trembled slightly.

He recalled the past when he had thrown me into a forbidden area just because I was of the bloodline of the Demonic Cult.

'If he had expressed it as a concubine, I would have fought a life-and-death battle.'

I did not do that.

I made it clear that she could not be my fiancée, nor did I say I would relegate his daughter to a concubine.

I could not give her the position of partner, but my sincerity in wanting to be together was conveyed.

".....Hahahahahaha!"

Cheon Jeok-pa suddenly looked up at the sky and let out a thunderous mad laugh.

"Hahaha! You arrogant brat! To think you would so boldly package the words that you would make my daughter roll around on the battlefield for her entire life! It's truly so absurd that I'm speechless!"

Cheon Jeok-pa approached me and Cheon Deung-jin, stamping his foot with a booming sound.

"Fine! That spirit to make the world kneel at your feet, I shall recognize it as the master of the West and as Jin-ie's father! As long as my daughter continues to be with you, the Potala Palace shall be your reliable shield!"

-Kekeke! The old men are communicating with each other. Since you've finally embraced even the flame of the fire spirit into your universe, your stomach must be on the verge of bursting!

-Oh my, our Captain is a real man!

-Sword Venerable, Demon Queen. Be quiet. With the Third Young Master's vessel, he can easily embrace two or three women. One needs that much boldness to grasp the world.

Leaving the noisy telepathy of the Martial Gods in my qi center behind, I bowed respectfully toward Cheon Jeok-pa.

"Thank you, Father-in-law."

"Father-in-law..... Hahaha! It turns out that the Heavenly Demon Hyeokryeon Hwi of the Demonic Cult, the Ice King Seol Baek-ho of the North Sea, and the Lion King Cheon Jeok-pa of the West are all to become your fathers! It is truly an unprecedented grand luxury in the history of the Murim!"

It was then.

"Who said you could take only the flame of the West as you please?"

The door of the guest hall slid open, and Seol Ye-rin, who was emitting a blue mist chilled with coldness, and Seong Sang-ah, who was smiling languidly behind her, revealed themselves.

Seol Ye-rin's eyes were shining, but a faint smile that she couldn't hide was hanging on her lips.

It was because she had heard my declaration outside the door that my only fiancée was Seol Ye-rin.

Seong Sang-ah approached her side with light steps and poked my side.

"My, my, Young Master. If you only take care of Miss Cheon, what should I do with my disappointment? As the granddaughter of the Holy Hand Divine Physician, you should have left the position of your personal physician, who will treat your overheated qi and blood for your entire life, for me."

"……Miss Seong."

"I hope you don't forget that one side of the Third Young Master belongs to me."

Seol Ye-rin spoke while looking at the two of them.

Cheon Deung-jin looked at Seol Ye-rin with a tear-stained face, then snorted and emitted red fire energy.

"Who said they're taking it? Sister, you just firmly guard the frozen jade throne of the Ice Palace. It will be my role to stand at the very front and burn the enemies when the Young Master roams the battlefield."

"Hoho, both of you shouldn't worry since this Seong Sang-ah will treat all the blood you get on you at the battlefield."

The gazes of the three women clashed in the air with a crackle, as a strange bond and a spark-flying battle of nerves crossed paths.

The ice flower of the North Sea, Seol Ye-rin, who intended to firmly guard her position as 'wife'.

The flame of the West, Cheon Deung-jin, who intended to remain as a sun rather than a shadow as a 'companion on the battlefield'.

And.

"How did Miss Seong get here……."

"I must follow wherever the Young Master is!"

I wiped away the cold sweat flowing down my spine.

'They say it's not luck with women but trouble with women…….'

-Kekeke! This is quite a sight! You're going to sweat a lot of cold sweat in the future!

-Master, really. They say a hero is fond of women, don't they? With our Third Young Master's vessel, he should be able to handle a flower garden of this level.

-I'll say one thing, it'll be much more of a struggle to avoid the gazes of these women than avoiding the spearheads of enemies on the battlefield.

-You wish it were an illusion instead, don't you?

My temples quivered as the Martial Gods in my qi center held their sides and laughed.

The space where Seol Ye-rin's transparent ice qi, Cheon Deung-jin's hot fire energy, and Seong Sang-ah's strange herb scent were mixed was more suffocating than any death zone.

It was then.

"Hoho, the young people are indeed full of vigor."

From deep inside the guest hall, where the shadows were thick, an old man revealed himself along with a hearty laughter.

He had a humble appearance, carrying an old bundle on his shoulder and a worn-out herb hoe in his hand.

However, every time he took a step, the thick tension vanished as if it were washed away, and a gentle life force filled the space.

It was the man praised as the best physician under the heavens, the Holy Hand Divine Physician.

"Grandfather!"

Seong Sang-ah ran to him happily and linked her arm with his.

While stroking his granddaughter's hair, the Holy Hand Divine Physician scanned me with a sharp gaze.

"Divine Physician."

"Lion King, I came out for a moment because it seemed like you were hounding my grandson-in-law candidate too much."

"Grandson-in-law?"

Cheon Jeok-pa's eyes flashed.

The Holy Hand Divine Physician nodded and slowly approached me.

I took a respectful clasped hands greeting and showed my etiquette.

This old man was a decisive helper who had stabilized my qi and blood whenever I hovered between life and death, and had allowed me to obtain the legacy of the Dark Venerable through his token.

"Young Master Hyeokryeon. No, I should call you the one with the actual power of the Demonic Cult and the son-in-law of the North Sea now."

"No, Elder. I have received many favors from you as well."

"Favors..... Indeed, I am not unaware that you saved my granddaughter's life and poured out those precious spiritual medicines without sparing them. Thanks to that, this child has become much brighter than before."

The Holy Hand Divine Physician's gaze suddenly became serious.

He looked once at Seong Sang-ah, who was looking at me with a flushed face, and then stared at me again.

"So, like the Lion King, I must also say a word. Hyeokryeon Yeom, what do you plan to do with our Sang-ah?"

Cold sweat broke out on my spine again.

I thought I had responded well in front of the Potala Palace Lord.

This time, the Holy Hand Divine Physician was pressuring me with morality and gratitude.

At her grandfather's question, Seong Sang-ah's eyes began to sparkle.

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Chapter 159 : Heading to Sichuan

“What do you plan to do with our Sang-ah?”

Grandfather’s voice was not as benevolent as usual.

That one sentence, which came riding on the dry wind of the West, was as sharp as a silver needle piercing the deepest acupoint of my heart.

Seong Sang-ah naturally applied strength to her hand that was clutching her grandfather’s sleeve.

Extreme Yin Qi flowed from Miss Seol Ye-rin, the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace who was standing nearby, and even Miss Cheon Deung-jin of the Potala Palace, who had been sobbing until just a moment ago, watched me with bated breath.

Me.

The person who took Seong Sang-ah out of the hellish pain of the poison and showed her the wide world called ‘Murim’ instead of just boiling medicine pots for the rest of her life under the name of the Holy Hand Clan.

Seong Sang-ah’s gaze was fixed on my back.

It was a back with shoulders as firm as a great mountain, befitting a master of the Realm of the Profound, but was it just her imagination that those shoulders seemed to tremble slightly today.

-Keke, brat. What kind of sophistry are you going to bewitch the old man with this time?

-As the Spear Saint, I’ll say one thing; it’s much more of a struggle to avoid the gazes of these women than avoiding the spearheads of enemies on the battlefield.

Seong Sang-ah gulped. Grandfather was serious.

There was no way her grandfather, who had spent his whole life curing people by looking into their eyes, would not know that the way Seong Sang-ah looked at me was not out of reverence as a physician.

“Elder.”

I slowly opened my mouth.

My voice was calm, but inside it was a weight deep and solid enough to quell both the rough winds of the Hundred Thousand Mountains and the snowstorms of the North Sea.

“Do you remember the weight of the gratitude tokens you handed to me?”

“……Of course, they are tokens of connections that can move the world.”

“That is right. And through those gratitude tokens, I obtained the legacy of the Dark Venerable, brought the hidden masters of the Murim to their knees at my feet, and was able to come this far. It is no different from you handing the world to me.”

My violet eye light turned toward Seong I-han without wavering.

“Such is Miss Seong, your most precious bloodline and the one who always silently looked after my qi and blood by my side as I crossed the line between life and death. How could I ever regard her lightly?”

I turned to look at Seol Ye-rin and Cheon Deung-jin once each, then met Seong Sang-ah’s eyes.

“My only fiancée is Miss Seol. I have no intention of breaking the promise made amidst the extreme cold of the North Sea. Also, the companion on the battlefield who will light my path forward will be Miss Cheon.”

“Then does that mean our Sang-ah must ultimately become a shadow standing behind them!”

“No.”

I firmly cut off Seong I-han’s words.

“In the new world I will establish, on the path of the great power that will be created by the union of the Demonic Cult, the Ice Palace, and the West..... Many people will shed blood and be wounded. I have no intention of hiding Miss Seong behind my shadow.”

I reached out and lightly, yet firmly, grasped Seong Sang-ah’s slender shoulders.

“Miss Seong. You said you wanted to become the best physician under the heavens, beyond just the name of the Holy Hand Divine Physician, didn't you?”

“.....Yes, Young Master.”

“Come with me. I will entrust all the power over life and death to Miss Seong. As the only personal physician responsible for the life threads of my family, my comrades, and my people, please stay by my side for the rest of your life. I will become your greatest shield so that no one dares to treat you with disdain.”

Silence.

In the stillness where even the cold night wind of the West seemed to have stopped breathing, Seong Sang-ah’s eyes shook violently.

I had seen through her dream and offered her the largest and most solid position where she could realize that dream.

And that too, was the best seat in the house—by the side of the strongest man in the world.

“.....Ugh, sob.”

Thick teardrops flowed down the cheeks of Seong Sang-ah, who had always hidden her true feelings with a languid smile.

She no longer hid behind her grandfather’s sleeve.

Seong Sang-ah took a step forward and buried her face in my chest as she embraced me.

Flinch—

At that sight, the shoulders of Cheon Deung-jin and Seol Ye-rin twitched.

“You..... promised. My Young Master’s qi and blood will now be managed by me for the rest of my life. If you hand your wrist to some other quack physician, my silver needles will pierce your acupoints.”

“Haha, then I must not get sick even if only because I'm scared.”

I laughed heartily and gently patted Seong Sang-ah’s back.

Seeing that, the Holy Hand Divine Physician Seong I-han coughed loudly and looked up at the sky.

“Ahem! Hmph! Good grief, you’re just openly showing off your affection in front of an old man! Now I see why the old man Lion King laughed so heartily. You cheeky fellow!”

A smile that he couldn't hide also spread across Seong I-han’s lips.

He was a man who was called the best physician under the heavens, yet he had almost lost his only granddaughter’s life.

This was the man who had rescued that granddaughter from hell and promised her the safest fence in the world.

As a grandfather, where could there be a more reliable grandson-in-law?

-Kekeke! From the precious daughter of the North Sea and the Young Palace Head of the Potala Palace to even the Divine Physician of the Central Plains! It is a fortune with women.

-Oh my, he didn't use the words concubine or partner this time either.

-.....It means he will only hold a wedding ceremony with Miss Seol.

The Martial Gods in my qi center cackled and made a fuss.

I felt cold sweat running down my spine and slightly turned my head.

“My, Miss Seong. I suppose the Young Master’s embrace is very comfortable?”

The one who spoke in a cold voice first was Seol Ye-rin.

Blue frost was slowly rising from beneath her feet.

Beside her, Cheon Deung-jin was crossing her arms while floating Fire Spirit Qi in both her hands.

“Miss Seong, how cowardly of you to use a tear strategy by even mobilizing your grandfather. You were smiling so slyly during the day; you’re nothing short of a fox.”

Seong Sang-ah poked her head slightly out from my embrace and, with tear-filled eyes, gave a faint smile and slightly stuck her tongue out at the two women.

“Hoho, you two can just go get as much blood as you want on the battlefield. I’ll be the one applying medicine to the Young Master’s body. Originally, a devoted physician stays closest to a hero’s side.”

“Wh-What did you say?!”

“Th-That fox-like……!”

From the ice qi that froze coldly and the boiling fire qi to even the toxic energy that emitted a strange herb scent.

The fierce battle of nerves between the three women began to shake the night sky of the West once again.

I let out a deep sigh and shook my head.

Fighting with a sword was a hundred times easier than enduring the pressure from these three women right now.

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The next morning, in front of the huge white fortress of the Potala Palace.

Under the clear sky of the West, a large-scale return procession, unprecedented in Murim history, completed its preparations for departure.

“Young Master, are you really going to take all these wagons with you?”

Baek Mu-yong, sitting on the coachman's seat, looked back and clicked his tongue.

In front of the main gate of the Potala Palace, there were ten more wagons than yesterday.

The gold of the West and raw Fire Spirit Jade stones that the Lion King Cheon Jeok-pa had loaded as his daughter's dowry, and the chests of rare spiritual medicines that the Holy Hand Divine Physician Seong I-han had thrown in saying, "Brew some health restoratives for my granddaughter," were piled up like mountains.

"Mu-yong, you still have a long way to go. Isn't this all out of affection and loyalty."

I replied cheekily and lightly leaped onto the roof of the carriage.

-Keke, affection for my foot. All I see is a robber who is excited about the thought of sucking the marrow out of the Orthodox faction fellows.

-Master, really, when have you ever seen our Third Young Master traveling empty-handed? Originally, when planning big things, one must start by securing war funds.

Leaving the banter of the Sword Venerable and the Demon Queen behind, I took a clasped hands greeting Cheon Jeok-pa and Seong I-han standing atop the castle gate.

"Elders, I will see you in the North Sea soon! I will prepare plenty of alcohol!"

"You brat! If you make tears fall from my daughter's eyes, I'll turn the North Sea into a sea of fire, so know that!"

The Lion's Roar of Cheon Jeok-pa echoed across the plateau.

The procession left behind the eternal snow of the West and slowly began to lower its altitude.

The center of the procession, the inside of the most flamboyantly decorated carriage, was truly the 'calm before the storm.'

Seol Ye-rin was drinking tea while looking out the window, and Cheon Deung-jin was humming a tune.

And Seong Sang-ah had taken a seat right near my knees and was maintaining her silver needles.

The cold ice qi, the hot fire qi, and the strange herb scent.

The density inside the carriage where the three kinds of energy were mixed was suffocating even for me, a master of the Realm of the Profound.

"So, Young Master."

Seol Ye-rin asked in a low voice as she set down her teacup.

“Where is next? According to this route, it would be Mount Hua or Zhongnan in Shaanxi.”

I recited the terrain embedded in my mind without even unfolding a map.

“No, there is one more place to stop before that. It is a place located on the path as we head down from the West to Sichuan.”

“If it’s Sichuan..... is it perhaps the Tang Clan?”

Seong Sang-ah asked with sparkling eyes. I nodded my head.

“Yes. The Sichuan Tang Clan. It hasn't been long since Tang Mu-myeong, whom I met when I obtained the legacy of the Poison Venerable, reclaimed the position of Clan Head. He must have struggled quite a bit to prune away Tang Cheon-ak, who was a spy for the Blood Cult, and set the family straight.”

My eyes flashed with black-gold light.

“I should go and ask after Tang Mu-myeong, and also collect some of the Tang Clan’s treasures like the North Sea Cold Iron and the spiritual medicines of poison immunity. Since he sat in the Clan Head position thanks to me, wouldn't he show at least that much sincerity?”

-Indeed, he should! That brat Tang Mu-myeong would have already become a poison jiangshi if it weren't for you. He’d have no right to complain even if you pulled out the pillars of his house!

-Oh my, pulling out the pillars is a bit much!

At the interjections of the Martial Gods, a slanted smile hung on my lips.

It was when the procession descended from the rugged mountain ranges of the West and entered the lush forests of Sichuan.

Unlike the West, the air in Sichuan was damp and humid.

A secret whistling sound was heard amidst the thick fog spread in all directions.

“Stop!”

The moment the procession came to a halt with Baek Mu-yong’s shout.

Swish! Swish swish swish!

Ten thousand hidden weapons poured down like rain from the darkness of the forest.

“Ten Thousand Heavens Flower Rain?”

I stepped forward upon seeing that and raised my energy.

As the energy of the Dark Venerable enveloped the hidden weapons.

“You are still the same.”

“Mu-myeong.”

Tang Mu-myeong revealed himself from within the forest.

“Tang Mu-myeong, Clan Head of the Tang Clan. I heard the news from the Rogues' Guild that the Captain was coming to the Tang Clan, so I came out to meet you.”

Chapter 160 : Chapter 160

Chapter 160 : Fusion

The Shu Path Pass is covered in damp humidity and thick fog of Sichuan.

Tang Mu-myeong inhaled the massive wave of energy pushing out through the bushes.

He had heard the news through the Rogues' Guild that ‘the Third Young Master of the Demonic Cult is coming to Sichuan, leading the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace, the Young Palace Head of the West, and even the granddaughter of the Divine Physician’.

The emotion of being able to meet the Captain again breathed a driving force into Tang Mu-myeong, who was living a difficult life in the Tang Clan.

As soon as they arrived.

Tang Mu-myeong’s mouth hung wide open.

Dozens of wagons were approaching, making creaking sounds as they failed to withstand the weight of the treasures.

And in the center of that procession, sitting on the roof of the carriage and leisurely gathering his energy, was the man.

It was I, Hyeokryeon Yeom—the one who rescued Tang Mu-myeong from the hellish clutches of Tang Cheon-ak and established him as the true head of the Sichuan Tang Clan by having him inherit the legacy of the Poison Venerable, his lord and savior.

“……You are the same as ever.”

Tang Mu-myeong walked out from the forest and took a light clasped hands greeting.

The hidden weapons of the Ten Thousand Heavens Flower Rain that Tang Mu-myeong had just fired fell thudding helplessly to the ground at a single glance of my violet eye light.

He wondered if he had caught up a little, but the level was different.

I was a monster before, but now I exuded the appearance of a transcendent who had already moved beyond the human realm.

“Mu-myeong.”

I lightly jumped down from the roof and let a smile hang on my lips.

“Was the greeting a bit too fierce?”

“Haha, I wanted to show you how much I’ve grown, but as expected, my hidden weapons are rendered useless by a single glance.”

Tang Mu-myeong approached me with a bitter smile.

However, his gaze soon lingered on the three women standing behind me.

Seol Ye-rin, the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace with an aura like frost,

Cheon Deung-jin, the Young Palace Head of the West like a burning flame,

And even Seong Sang-ah, the granddaughter of the Holy Hand Divine Physician, who was handling silver needles while emitting a gentle herb scent.

Women with different charms were all looking at Tang Mu-myeong.

‘I heard the news that he is marrying the Young Palace Head of the North Sea…….’

Although they were traveling with the Young Palace Head of the Potala Palace and the granddaughter of the Divine Physician, it was because he did not yet know what kind of relationship they had with me.

“Clan Head Tang Mu-myeong, it’s been a long time.”

Seong Sang-ah offered a greeting with a beaming smile.

“The Young Master’s qi and blood were just about to become a bit stiff because of the humidity in Sichuan, so it’s fortunate that we stopped by the Tang Clan. I heard the Tang Clan’s treasure, the Ten Thousand Year Heavenly Poison Liquor, is so good for qi and blood circulation?”

Cold sweat ran down Tang Mu-myeong’s spine.

Seong Sang-ah’s eyes already contained a silent threat: ‘If you don’t bring out that liquor, Young Master Hyeokryeon might get sick’.

“Haha..... Miss Seong, even without that, I have already opened the family treasury upon hearing the news that the Young Master was coming.”

I tapped Tang Mu-myeong’s shoulder and whispered in his ear.

“Mu-myeong, I’m holding a grand wedding in the North Sea this time. You know, right? I expect ‘sincerity’ befitting the prestige of the Sichuan Tang Clan. I think about twenty crates of Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron would save my face.”

Twenty crates.

It was an amount close to half of the Tang Clan’s annual production.

However, Tang Mu-myeong nodded without a word of complaint.

If it hadn't been for me, neither the current Sichuan Tang Clan nor the Clan Head Tang Mu-myeong would have existed.

“For the Young Master, I should pull out even the pillars of the family. Let’s go, I will lead you to the main house.”

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The Sichuan Tang Clan Main House, Hall of Gathering Immortals.

When my party entered the Hall of Gathering Immortals, where the original solemnity of the Tang Clan had been restored, the elders of the Tang Clan all had soul-less expressions.

Particularly when Wi Ji-yeong stood firmly in front of the Tang Clan storehouse with a large ledger open and began checking the items one by one, the complexions of the elders turned ashen.

“Twenty crates of Ten Thousand Year Cold Iron, confirmed! One thousand Hundred Poisons Detoxification Pills, confirmed! Five hundred Tang Clan special Thunderbolt Fire Spheres, confirmed! Clan Head, your congratulatory gift is very generous!”

Every time Wi Ji-yeong’s boisterous voice rang out, the hearts of the elders were torn apart.

However, when I sipped a cup of tea and faintly emitted the aura of the Realm of the Profound, no one could open their mouth.

I sat facing Tang Mu-myeong and tilted my wine glass.

“Young Master, has the wedding date been set?”

“I don’t know. I’m planning to move after securing a generous amount of congratulatory money, so I don’t know the exact date. And there are still problems I haven’t solved yet.”

I hadn't caught Hyeokryeon Geuk yet.

In a situation where I had to find the legacy of the Ice Emperor, Seol Cheon-u, and also find the last divine object of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens.

There was much to do, but this time, I was conversely thinking of drawing people to the North Sea.

‘Because there’s more than one fellow trying to attack the Ice Palace.’

As long as they were going to challenge me, my desire to wipe them out all at once was great.

My eyes sank deeply.

“Mu-myeong. Once I have held the wedding, the Tang Clan will no longer need to worry about the eyes of the Central Plains' Orthodox faction. The North Sea, the Demonic Cult, the West, and the Tang Clan will be bound as one. For that day, you should also do your best to prepare.”

“……I will follow your command.”

I emptied the glass.

The Sichuan Tang Clan is a sect between the Orthodox and Unorthodox.

As long as Tang Mu-myeong was with me, it was true that the Tang Clan could be in a relationship where they shared a meal with the Demonic Cult and the Ice Palace.

I didn't know if the Orthodox faction would leave that be, though.

‘I’ll have to think about that then.’

Right now, I intend to think of only one thing.

‘Where should I go to receive the next congratulations?’

It was called a congratulatory gift, but it was almost no different from robbery.

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That night, at the training ground of the Tang Clan.

The night air of Sichuan was still damp and heavy, but the area around me, as I sat in a lotus position in the middle of the training ground, was quiet.

In front of me sat a jade bottle containing the Ten Thousand Year Heavenly Poison Liquor, the treasure of the Tang Clan that Tang Mu-myeong had opened the family treasury to willingly offer.

-Young Master, has the wedding date been set?

The question Tang Mu-myeong had cautiously thrown a moment ago lingered in my ears.

Although I had come to embrace the nine divine objects of the Ten Venerables under the Heavens in one body while traveling the world, my current state was insufficient to catch Hyeokryeon Geuk, who was trying to awaken as a true God-Demon in his depths.

In order to find the remaining one divine object and fully occupy the legacy of the Ice Emperor Seol Cheon-u left in the place closest to the sky, there was a priority task that I absolutely had to address here at the Sichuan Tang Clan.

‘An absolute fusion that will perfectly weave the nine different energies into one.’

I slowly opened the stopper of the Ten Thousand Year Heavenly Poison Liquor.

A terrible scent of poison that stung the tip of the nose rose, and the leaves of grass around me were instantly charred black.

-Keke, brat. Are you really planning to drink that? No matter how much your body has become close to poison immunity, that thing is the concentrated poison of the Tang Clan for a thousand years.

Inside my qi center, the Sword Venerable Baek Un-han clicked his tongue and warned.

-Master is right. In the Third Young Master's qi center right now, the energies emitted by the nine divine objects are in a tight confrontation. If the balance breaks by any chance, your body might explode!

The Demon Queen also sent an urgent telepathy.

However, I let a faint smile hang on my lips.

"I realized something when I met the Poison Venerable, who had become a vengeful ghost in the dark underground of the Poison Venerable's Tomb in Guizhou, and inherited the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand."

Both of my hands began to be dyed in a deep black color in an instant.

It was the energy of pure poison art that only the true legitimate bloodline of the Sichuan Tang Clan could emit.

"Poison is an energy of destruction that gnaws away at life, but at the same time, it is also the most powerful catalyst that suppresses and transforms other energies. To clump the nine dragons rampaging inside the body into a single Yeouiju, there is no furnace more certain than this extreme poison liquor."

I brought the Ten Thousand Year Heavenly Poison Liquor to my lips without hesitation and drank it in one go.

Gulp, gulp. The moment the terrible deadly poison flowed down my esophagus.

"Ugh……!"

My whole body exploded.

Along with a pain that felt as if my blood vessels would snap, a dark blue poison gas slowly rose over my skin.

However, immediately, the fundamental yang qi of the Extreme Yang Body surged from my qi center and began to burn the poison gas.

At the same time, the energy of the Ten Thousand Heavens Poison Hand gently embraced the deadly poison of the Ten Thousand Year Heavenly Poison Liquor and began to weave the energies of the divine objects, which had been revolving separately inside the qi center, into one.

Whirrrr—!

Iron, Fighting, Poison, Buddhist, Jade, Dark, Twin, Illusion, Beggar.

The nine divine objects created a huge whirlpool with the poison of the Ten Thousand Year Heavenly Poison Liquor and the Extreme Yang Qi as the medium.

A terrible yet wonderful sight, as if a small universe were being born.

The one who felt this massive wave of energy and could not sleep ran to the training ground.

It was Tang Mu-myeong, the new head of the Sichuan Tang Clan.

“Ca-Captain……!”

Mu-myeong, who had become the master of the family after punishing the fake head Tang Cheon-ak who had sold the Tang Clan to the Saphaeryeon, froze on the spot as he saw the five-colored brilliance emitting from my entire body.

As he saw the empty bottle of the Ten Thousand Year Heavenly Poison Liquor I had offered rolling around, Mu-myeong’s eyes shook as if an earthquake had occurred.

To think I had emptied the best poison liquor under the heavens, which even the heads of the Sichuan Tang Clan had to risk their lives to drink a single drop of, as if it were just plain alcohol.

“Mu-myeong.”

Then, I slowly opened my eyes amidst the deep black-gold light waves.

My eye light, in which violet, gold, and pitch-black darkness were perfectly fused, seemed to have already far transcended the shackles of humanity.

“You’ve come at just the right time. I was just about to call you because there was something you must carve into your eyes today as the head of the Tang Clan.”

I slowly rose from my seat.

Tang Mu-myeong gulped.

Just like that night at the Poison Venerable’s Tomb when I had smashed the tomb with my fist, comforted the resentful soul, and inherited the legacy, his heart began to pound like crazy.

“The Ten Thousand Heavens Flower Rain you fired with black fine needles when you punished the fake Tang Cheon-ak was certainly excellent. However, as the master of the Tang Clan and the legitimate bloodline of the Poison Venerable, you must not be trapped in the narrow frame of hidden weapons. I will show you here in this training ground the true mystery of Ten Thousand Heavens—that is, filling the sky.”

I lightly reached out my hand, dyed in black, toward the air.

Whirrrr—!

Hundreds of pebbles and leaves rolling on the floor of the training ground rose into the air, drawn by my energy.

And over those ordinary objects, the energies of the nine divine objects, which I had just perfectly fused through the Ten Thousand Year Heavenly Poison Liquor, began to be coated.

The energy is like a heavy lump of iron of the Iron Venerable.

The destructive fighting spirit of the Fighting Venerable.

The darkness that swallows light of the Dark Venerable.

The holy golden Buddhist power of the Buddhist Venerable.

The shimmering illusions of the Illusion Venerable.

“Th-This is……”

Tang Mu-myeong’s mouth hung wide open.

At a single gesture of my hand, the hundreds of objects floating in the air had transformed into absolute hidden weapons of different properties.

It was truly the pinnacle of martial arts, fired by fusing all the principles and energies of the world.

“Watch closely. This is the true Ten Thousand Heavens Flower Rain, which has embraced the principles of the universe through the energy of the Ten Thousand Year Heavenly Poison Liquor as the medium.”

Flashhh—!

As I flicked my hand, a rain of five-colored light embroidered the night sky of Sichuan and poured down.

There was not even a sound.

The trajectory of hundreds of hidden weapons falling while cutting through the air of the training ground was a fantastic sight, as if the stars of the sky were dancing and descending to the earth.

However, its destructive power was absolute, beyond even estimation.

The thick fog and damp humidity remaining in the air of the training ground evaporated in an instant, and a perfect vacuum was created.

Tang Mu-myeong collapsed to his knees on the spot.

It was an overwhelming realization, to the point where the Ten Thousand Heavens Flower Rain he had unfolded felt like mere child's play.

“……It is marvelous. Is this truly the end of martial arts that a human can reach?”

Tears of emotion flowed from Mu-myeong’s two eyes.

I gathered the energy of my hand, which had been dyed black, and smiled softly.

“This is the goal you must reach while leading the Tang Clan in the future. Since you’ve pulled down the fake, you must now become the real one who fills that sky yourself.”

“I will keep it in mind, and keep it in mind again, Captain!”

I looked up at the night sky and took a deep breath.

Through the treasure of the Sichuan Tang Clan, the nine divine objects that had been revolving messily inside the qi center were now fused into one perfect core, harmonizing with my Extreme Yang Qi.

-Oh my, you did it. The nine suns have finally clumped into one.

-Keke, now even if that fake fellow Hyeokryeon Geuk comes, you can take care of him with a single punch.

The satisfied telepathy of the Illusion Venerable and the Sword Venerable rang out.

I took out the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection, the divine object of the Illusion Venerable that I had recovered from Tang Cheon-ak, from my bosom.

As my energy, which had completed the perfect fusion, touched the mirror,

The surface of the Mirror of Heavenly Flower Reflection shone brilliantly and began to clearly reflect the place where the final tenth divine object was hidden.