

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

chapter 11-20

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I recited the mantra that the Tang Sowol of my previous life had shared with me.

At first, **Tang Jincheon**, the Poison King, frowned skeptically. But as I continued and reached the latter part, his expression shifted to one of shock—bordering on disbelief—and faint relief.

“I am the head of the Sichuan Tang Clan.”

“I know.”

“I am someone who can do far more than I cannot. Especially when it comes to poisons and concealed weapons.”

“Who in the world would deny the authority of the Tang Clan?”

“And yet, there have been more things I couldn’t do for my daughter than things I could.”

A mix of guilt, relief, and a hint of gratitude filled Tang Jincheon’s voice. In this moment, he wasn’t a grandmaster of the **Flowering Stage** or the head of one of the **Five Great Clans**—he was simply a father.

“Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For protecting Sowol when I couldn’t.”

“Even without me, things would’ve worked out somehow. And if we’re being precise, wasn’t I technically the kidnapper? Please don’t concern yourself too much with it.”

“The Toxin Spirit Physique is a talent so rare that even those with the so-called Heavenly Martial Body would envy it. But for Sowol, who isn’t just a martial artist but also a woman, it’s been nothing short of a curse. And yet, you found a way to lift that curse.”

“I just happened to know the right mantra. Without me, she may have found another solution on her own.”

“Perhaps. But it doesn't change the fact that you gave away something precious without hesitation.”

“I only did it because I knew about your clan's creed.”

“If that were the case, you would've made demands first.”

...Well, he had a point. I truly had no intention of asking for compensation. After all, I was simply returning something that Sowol had originally discovered herself in the past. It would've felt wrong to boast about something so natural.

“For a long time, I thought the only thing I could do for Sowol was to find her a good match as quickly as possible.”

“You have so much, yet your goals were rather modest.”

“In truth, that's why I wanted to push for you to become Sowol's fiancé. I don't know how you feel, but it seemed like Sowol had taken a liking to you, so I pressed forward using the Tang Clan's wealth and influence as bait.”

“F-Father?!”

Sowol, who had been quietly listening while glancing back and forth between us, turned bright red. Tang Jincheon chuckled heartily at her reaction.

Marriage is of little consequence to a vagabond like me, with neither home nor family...

But for a noblewoman like Tang Sowol, failing to marry was considered a flaw in itself. And being unable to bear children? An even greater flaw.

As someone who had been abandoned at birth and raised as an orphan, such concerns were difficult for me to fully comprehend. But for Tang Jincheon and Tang Sowol, they were serious matters.

I gave a small nod of understanding. Soon after, Tang Jincheon’s tone grew more cautious as he continued.

“With the situation being what it is, I suppose it’s only right that I tell you now. I hope you don’t mind, but I had you investigated.”

“You did well. Regardless of whether I’m a benefactor or not, if I’m a candidate for marriage, it’s only proper to learn who I am.”

“Thank you for understanding. I have many questions about your past, but I won’t press you for answers.”

“I appreciate your consideration.”

“However, there’s one thing I must ask. Can you answer me truthfully?”

“What is it?”

“Cheon Hwi-da. Are you, by any chance, related to the *Heavenly Killing Star*?”

For a moment, I was caught off guard by the unexpected question.

There are many rare and special physiques in the world—*Heavenly Martial Body*, *Toxin Spirit Physique*, *Nine Yin Severed Meridians*, *Nine Yang Severed Meridians*, and more.

These physiques bestow extraordinary talents upon those born with them but often come with severe drawbacks.

For example, those with the *Heavenly Martial Body* possess unmatched talent in martial arts but gradually lose interest in all other aspects of life, becoming emotionally detached.

Similarly, the *Toxin Spirit Physique*, which grants the body of a Toxin Master without the need for rebirth through intense training, causes one's body to grow increasingly toxic over time, making it difficult to bear children.

The severed meridian types allow for rapid cultivation and exceptional comprehension, but they drastically shorten one's lifespan.

These physiques have long been both envied and feared. While their talents are awe-inspiring, few would willingly bear the cost that comes with them.

Over the centuries, many have tried to find ways to overcome the drawbacks of these physiques, with varying degrees of success.

The emotional detachment of the *Heavenly Martial Body* was mitigated by having its bearer learn various martial arts from different sects, which eventually became a tradition among the **Nine Great Sects**.

For the *Toxin Spirit Physique*, it was long thought that bearing children quickly was the only solution. But in my previous life, Sowol had discovered a method to control her body's toxic reaction.

As for the severed meridians, countless physicians studied the condition until they established a viable treatment, albeit one requiring rare medicinal herbs and the aid of a skilled martial artist.

The *Heavenly Killing Star*, however, was a different story.

Like the Heavenly Martial Body, it bestowed unparalleled martial talent. However, it came with a severe flaw—the bearer struggled to control their killing intent, often becoming a danger to those around them.

Unlike other physiques, the *Heavenly Killing Star's* drawback posed a threat not just to the bearer but to others as well. And because no solution had ever been found, the physique was considered a curse of fate, beyond human intervention.

Hence, it was named the *Heavenly Killing Star*, a star of death decreed by the heavens.

The rule regarding anyone discovered to have this physique was simple: they were to be executed immediately. In rare cases, mercy was shown by imprisoning them under constant surveillance, only to be executed if their killing intent ever went out of control.

It was no wonder that the Heavenly Killing Star was feared and loathed, given that its bearers had repeatedly caused massacres in the martial world.

And now, Tang Jincheon was asking if I had any connection to such a physique.

Without realizing it, my eyes narrowed. Noticing my reaction, Tang Jincheon quickly shook his head.

“Don’t misunderstand me. I’m not accusing you of being a Heavenly Killing Star. After all, I saw with my own eyes how you immediately suppressed your killing intent the moment you heard Sowol’s voice. That’s something even most martial artists would find impossible, let alone someone with that physique.”

“Well, that’s true.”

“The reason I brought it up is because of your martial arts.”

“My martial arts?”

“Yes. When you were unconscious, I examined your condition briefly, and I noticed something unusual about your internal energy.”

Ah...

I immediately understood what he meant. The internal energy I cultivated using the *Wave-Breaking Death Art* was imbued with killing intent.

While it lacked purity compared to orthodox arts, its power was equal to that of any supreme martial art.

Of course, it was highly unstable, to the point where falling into *Qi deviation* wasn't out of the question.

However, the killing intent imbued in my internal energy came from my own life experiences. It couldn't overwhelm me.

Unfortunately, no one else knew that.

To Tang Jincheon, it likely appeared as though I had learned some highly dangerous demonic martial art.

If he had indeed investigated my past, his suspicions would have only grown.

After all, I was once just an orphan scraping by under a minor bandit faction. Then, one day, I had slain those very bandits and disappeared without a trace. Without some fortuitous encounter, such a transformation would have been impossible.

And now, I was using a martial art that appeared both powerful and perilously unstable.

As expected, Tang Jincheon spoke in a grave tone.

“Even the most notorious demonic masters of the martial world wouldn’t dare practice such a dangerous form of internal energy. If anyone could, it would have to be...”

“You’re thinking that while I may not be a Heavenly Killing Star, I could have learned martial arts left behind by one.”

“...Exactly. Even if you’re fine now, such techniques will only grow more dangerous as time passes. Perhaps you had no other choice before, but now things are different.”

“Different, how?”

“If you wish, the Tang Clan can offer you our internal energy cultivation method. Since you would need to rebuild your foundation from the ground up, we’ll provide you with the necessary medicinal support. Why not abandon that dangerous martial art?”

Of course, while he was offering the Tang Clan’s method, it wouldn’t be their highest-level secret art. Still, it wouldn’t be some mediocre technique either—it would likely be a Rising-class cultivation method, capable of reaching the Peak Realm with steady practice.

Rising-class methods were priceless treasures that many factions would kill for. Wars had been waged over rumors of their existence alone.

Tang Jincheon’s offer was undoubtedly one of goodwill.

But it wasn’t one I could accept.

“I appreciate the offer, but I must decline.”

“May I ask why?”

“No matter how humble it may seem, I wish to climb the mountain I’ve built with my own hands.”

“Even if that path is shrouded in darkness and fraught with danger?”

“No matter how narrow or treacherous, it’s my path. I can’t abandon it so easily. And even if, as you say, I stumble along the way... as long as someone is there to catch me, I’ll be fine.”

“...Hah.”

Tang Jincheon let out a sigh, somewhere between admiration and sympathy. He nodded slowly.

“If that’s your resolve, so be it. Just remember that my offer remains valid should you ever change your mind.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

I gave a slight bow, and Tang Jincheon smiled in satisfaction.

“Also, while the mantra you provided seems legitimate, we’ll verify it on our end as well.”

“Of course. I only passed along what I happened to hear. I’m sure you, Poison King, are far more knowledgeable in this field.”

“Hmm... Apologies for prying after saying I wouldn’t, but could you tell me how you came to learn it? I can’t help but be curious.”

Well, it made sense. After all, the mantra was something Tang Sowol had developed herself after reaching the *Flowering Stage*.

For Tang Jincheon, a master renowned for his poison arts, encountering a poison-based technique on par with his own must have been quite the surprise.

But there was no way he’d believe the truth, so I had to come up with something plausible.

“In this vast world, while the Tang Clan is undoubtedly the pinnacle of poison arts, it doesn’t hold a monopoly on all poison techniques. Let’s just say it was a stroke of luck.”

“Hahaha! Fair enough. The martial world has always been vast. Perhaps I’ve grown complacent, intoxicated by the hollow title of Poison King.”

Tang Jincheon laughed heartily and picked up his chopsticks again.

“We’ve talked too long during the meal. I’ll have the food reheated.”

With a cheerful expression, he summoned the head chef.

After that, the rest of the meal passed peacefully, with only light conversation to accompany us.

After finishing the meal, I walked with Tang Sowol back toward our rooms.

“Ugh, I’m so full.”

“Gross, Master Cheon.”

“Oh, come on. Didn’t we already see everything there was to see in that cave? Let’s not make a fuss over something this minor.”

“I-I was considerate back then! We didn’t share any... embarrassing moments!”

“True. You made sure to go back and forth that long distance every time nature called. I found it rather inconvenient.”

“Ahhh! Stop! No more talking about that! At least not in front of me!”

Tang Sowol let out a high-pitched scream and began slapping my back repeatedly. She didn’t use internal energy, but she also didn’t hold back, so it stung quite a bit.

And yet, for some reason, seeing her react so fiercely was amusing.

After a while of playful bickering, Tang Sowol suddenly let out a long sigh, as if all her energy had drained away.

“Haaa... Honestly, I’m still reeling. The conversation went in a completely different direction than I expected, and to think that the curse of the *Toxin Spirit Physique* could be resolved so easily...”

“Well, life’s like that sometimes.”

“Not usually. Things don’t usually fall into place so neatly. Be honest with me, Master Cheon. How long have you been planning this?”

“Planning what?”

“The whole engagement thing!”

She bit her tongue while saying “engagement” and ended up tearing up as she covered her mouth.

“You really need to be more careful.”

“...Just answer me, please...”

She spoke weakly, clearly trying to avoid biting her tongue again. Seeing her like this, I chuckled and shook my head.

“I didn’t plan to become your fiancé. How could I have known that saving your life would lead to marriage talk? Even you didn’t see it coming, did you?”

“...True.”

“But yes, if you’re asking whether I intended to leave you indebted to me... the answer is yes.”

“...Ah...”

Tang Sowol let out a small sound of realization, her voice soft and weary.

“Just out of curiosity... when did it start?”

When, huh... Excluding memories of my previous life, it would have to be...

“From the moment I first saw you.”

“...?”

Tang Sowol tilted her head, not quite grasping what I meant.

So, I added a brief explanation.

“When I met your gaze, heard your voice, and saw that awkward smile of yours—I knew.”

“W-Wait, Master Cheon?! What do you mean by that?!”

Tang Sowol’s panicked voice echoed behind me, but I pretended not to hear as I quickened my pace.

Even for me, it would’ve been too embarrassing to face her right now.

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After finishing his meal, Tang Jincheon returned to his office. He glanced briefly at the documents scattered across his desk before muttering aloud.

“None of this seems reliable. Don’t you agree?”

“Of course. In a world where the head of a clan ditches his guards and charges off alone, it’s difficult to judge everything based on just the Beggar’s Sect’s information.”

“Still holding a grudge, are you? Don’t blame me; blame your slow feet.”

Standing a little off to the side was a middle-aged man in green robes with a tightly sealed mouth—Tang Yujin, his half-brother and personal bodyguard. Tang Jincheon chuckled at Yujin’s subtle act of defiance.

“You may look fierce, but your antics haven’t changed one bit.”

“In comparison to you, Clan Leader, I have a gentler appearance. Also, they say sudden changes in a person signal impending death. I plan to live long, so that wouldn’t do at all.”

“That’s true. That’s exactly why I investigated Cheon Hwi-da.”

“It seems both you and Sowol are quite fond of him. Why not go ahead and call him your son-in-law?”

“They haven’t even had an engagement ceremony yet. Maybe later, but certainly not now.”

Seated in his chair, Tang Jincheon quietly began reading through the information about Cheon Hwi-da recorded in the documents.

Although it was hastily commissioned and thus neither properly filtered nor neatly organized, the report was sufficient to grasp the overall flow of events.

“An orphan born in a remote village on the outskirts of Zhejiang Province. He begged for a living as a child and later joined a local criminal group called the Red Sand Gang, where he clumsily took up the sword... up to this point, it’s just a typical life story.”

Zhejiang Province, which had become something of a headquarters for demonic sects following the formation of the Black Lotus Sect, was a place where such stories were common.

However, what followed in Cheon Hwi-da’s history was far from ordinary.

After joining the Red Sand Gang and beginning a life in the underworld, he suddenly disappeared for several days.

When he reappeared, he had killed all of the martial artists in the gang, including its leader, and vanished with their valuables. It was a feat too incredible to believe, considering the boy had supposedly never had an opportunity to learn martial arts. Whether it was his combat skills or his execution, it was hard to fathom how he could have accomplished it.

And that wasn't even the end.

Following that incident, Cheon Hwi-da continued to travel through various villages in Zhejiang Province, repeatedly wiping out infamous criminal gangs.

“There were so few survivors that I wondered if it was personal revenge, but aside from the Red Sand Gang, there was no apparent connection.”

Other than the fact that those sects were notorious for their cruelty, there was hardly any commonality between them.

Moreover, it was difficult to see his actions as heroic, since he took all valuables worth looting.

It was as if he were carefully selecting targets without any potential for consequences and robbing them clean, much like a wandering martial artist from the unorthodox sects might do.

For a while, Cheon Hwi-da stirred up quite a commotion across Zhejiang Province, only to suddenly disappear—until he resurfaced in an underground market in Hubei Province.

Apparently, he had been in such urgent need of a rare poison antidote that he paid an exorbitant price for it. This likely occurred the day before he kidnapped Tang Sowol.

A few days later, there were testimonies from Yugyeong Village of him purchasing enough food and daily necessities for two people, and with that, the trail led to the present day.

“Yujin, what kind of person do you think Cheon Hwi-da is based on this?”

“Someone born among the wicked, who became even more wicked. But judging by how you’re asking, he probably wasn’t, right?”

“Indeed. At the very least, he didn’t behave wickedly toward just anyone.”

Tang Jincheon still remembered the first moment he met Cheon Hwi-da.

The boy's intense killing intent was so overwhelming that it was hard to believe he wasn't already a master martial artist. His eyes, which seemed capable of cutting through anything, carried a resolve that wouldn't crumble even when drenched in blood.

However, all of that melted away in front of Tang Sowol, like snow on a spring day.

While staying at the Tang Clan, Cheon Hwi-da didn't cause any trouble and focused solely on his training, a sight that was pleasing to see.

His sword was sharp, yet it was always directed outward.

Although slightly different, Cheon Hwi-da's demeanor was something any warrior of the Tang Clan would find familiar.

Perhaps that was why Tang Sowol felt drawn to him.

“Even so, there were too many unresolved questions, so I arranged a meal with him.”

“And it didn’t go well, I take it?”

“Well, it went both well and not so well.”

“Could you stop beating around the bush and just explain it clearly?”

“Yujin, how about making an effort to think for once?”

“I gave up on competing to become an heir thirty years ago because I hated that sort of thing.”

“Ha! If you put it that way, there’s nothing more for me to say.”

Tang Jincheon took a sip of tea before continuing.

“I confirmed that the problem I feared doesn’t exist. But I couldn’t ask for further details.”

“Even the renowned Poison King can’t?”

“Precisely because I am the Poison King. Would you believe it if I told you that Cheon Hwi-da seemingly cured Sowol’s Heavenly Poison Body when I couldn’t?”

“What do you mean...?”

Tang Jincheon recounted the breathing technique he had heard from Cheon Hwi-da to his perplexed half-brother.

At first, Tang Yujin blinked in confusion, unsure of what he was hearing. But soon, his eyes sharpened.

Although he lacked talent in poison techniques and specialized in stealth, he was still a highly skilled martial artist.

He could tell that the breathing technique Cheon Hwi-da shared carried profound martial principles.

“Are you saying that Cheon Hwi-da taught you this technique?”

“He claimed it was a fortuitous encounter. I still need to verify the technique, but I doubt there will be any major issues.”

“Is there really a martial artist outside the Tang Clan skilled enough in poison arts to possess such knowledge?”

“There was one among our predecessors. You know the one—they called him the ‘Poison Doctor.’”

“That was nearly two hundred years ago! He’d be more of a grand predecessor, wouldn’t he?”

“Even if the man dies, his knowledge remains. Remember, it was because of the Poison Doctor that we first learned what the Heavenly Poison Body really was.”

Tang Sowol wasn’t the only person to be born with the Heavenly Poison Body. Others had appeared in the past, but they either lived without realizing their condition or failed to find proper poison techniques to utilize it.

However, the Poison Doctor, born into a family of physicians, was different.

He quickly recognized the peculiar nature of his constitution and, armed with extensive knowledge of both medicine and poison, sought to turn his condition into a strength.

Since medicine is, in essence, a form of poison, and poison can also be used as medicine, he believed he could use his body's unique traits to save countless lives.

With that thought in mind, the Poison Doctor wandered the martial world, earning a great reputation for curing many people. It was during this time that the Heavenly Poison Body became widely known.

“Although his methods diverged from ours, there are records that his medical skills were, in fact, a highly advanced form of poison arts. They say the only thing he couldn't cure was his own infertility.”

“Judging by what you're saying, it seems he eventually succeeded in that regard, didn't he?”

“Thanks to that, Sowol was able to find some peace of mind.”

“Hah, if this really is an insight passed down from the Poison Doctor, we'll need to carefully consider how to repay such a favor. Did Cheon Hwi-da ask for anything in return?”

“He didn’t ask for anything.”

“What??”

“Oh, before that, when I asked how he wanted to be compensated for saving Sowol’s life, he only said he’d like to have a meal with her.”

“Wait, what...?”

“He said something about needing family, or ‘companionship.’ He mentioned it while looking at Sowol.”

Tang Yujin was at a loss for words. Seeing his brother’s dumbfounded expression, Tang Jincheon chuckled softly.

“To be honest, I still find it suspicious. Even if the breathing technique is something derived from the Poison Doctor, where did he gain his martial arts abilities? How did he know that Sowol was in danger from unorthodox sect members? How did he learn Sowol’s exact location, and was the Purple Flower Poison Enhancing Grass he found in the cave truly just a coincidence...?”

“But you’ve decided to trust him anyway.”

“I found his words about wanting to become family rather striking. And, ultimately, he has done a great favor for the Tang Clan, hasn’t he?”

Saying so, Tang Jincheon gathered the documents on his desk into a pile and burned them with a flash of fire.

“That’s why I’ve decided to arrange for Sowol to be engaged to him.”

“Sounds like a good idea. A talent like that should be tied to us if possible. However, there’s still the issue of the elders’ opinions, as well as Sowol’s feelings on the matter...”

“You needn’t worry about that.”

Although Tang Jincheon had explained to Sowol the benefits of bringing Cheon Hwi-da into the clan, the truth was that his decision had been based on a single reason from the start.

“Sowol already seems to have taken a liking to Cheon Hwi-da. As for the elders, they may have some complaints, but ultimately, they will follow my judgment. After all, once the side effects of Sowol’s Heavenly Poison Body were revealed, they agreed that matters of marriage would be left to her and me.”

“If that’s the case, it shouldn’t be an issue. Still, it’s surprising that Sowol has feelings for Cheon Hwi-da... then again, considering what happened, it’s understandable.”

She had left the clan with high hopes, eager to step into the martial world, only to be told by someone younger than her to go back home.

Naturally, she had refused, but the next day, she was defeated in direct combat by the same boy and subsequently kidnapped.

For Tang Sowol, who had grown up as the youngest child of the Sichuan Tang Clan, adored by all and born with an innate talent due to her Heavenly Poison Body, the experience must have been a tremendous shock.

Yet, the situation she had feared never came to pass. Instead, the month she spent living in the cave had been more enjoyable than she had expected.

In the end, there truly had been someone targeting her life, and Cheon Hwi-da had taken up his sword to fight for her.

Later, she learned that one of the enemies had been a martial artist of peak-level mastery, meaning Cheon Hwi-da had genuinely risked his life to protect her.

Recalling all of this, Tang Yujin nodded.

“I can see how anyone would fall for him under those circumstances.”

“Coming from someone who has taken four concubines, that sounds particularly insightful.”

“If you’re envious, why not remarry? It’s already been over ten years since my sister-in-law passed away, and even the youngest, Sowol, is all grown up now.”

“I’m not interested.”

Tang Jincheon swept aside the ash that had piled up on the desk before speaking again.

“While I do intend to arrange the engagement, I’m not planning to rush into marriage right away. We still need to observe Cheon Hwi-da a bit longer. Sowol’s feelings might change over time, too.”

“That’s what engagements are for. But we can’t keep watching forever. Do you have a timeframe in mind?”

“Ten years.”

“...Ten?”

“It takes ten years to truly judge a person’s character.”

“Isn’t that a bit too long? By then, Sowol will be thirty.”

“People are already gossiping that her marriage is delayed. At this point, waiting a bit longer won’t make much difference.”

“Just admit it already, Clan Leader... no, Brother.”

“There’s no need to rush into a marriage anymore, so why should I? I just want my daughter to stay by my side a little longer.”

“But she’s marrying into our clan anyway. It’s not as if she’ll be leaving.”

Tang Jincheon snorted at Tang Yujin's exasperated response.

“How would a man with only sons understand the feelings of a father with a daughter?”

“You're not the only person in the world with a daughter, Brother. You're just unusually overprotective, and you should recognize that.”

“I'm rather average, thank you very much.”

Pretending not to hear Tang Yujin's retort, Tang Jincheon raised his voice as if to drown it out.

While Tang Yujin usually respected his brother as a reliable clan leader, a close older sibling, and a steadfast warrior, he couldn't help but sigh whenever a matter involved Tang Sowol.

“Haa... I wonder what you'll do if Sowol and that Cheon Hwi-da end up causing trouble.”

“What did you just say?”

“Well, Cheon Hwi-da may be young now, but who knows what might happen in the future? Do you really think nothing will happen if you keep them bound by an engagement for so long, especially when they’re both in their prime?”

Tang Yujin trailed off, but his meaning was clear.

Tang Jincheon’s eyebrows twitched as he struggled to control his rising breath before responding.

“If that happens, one of them will have to die.”

“Are you planning to make Sowol a widow?”

“Ah, I misspoke. What I meant was, I’ll teach them a lesson in a duel.”

“That doesn’t sound much different.”

“Still, if it’s a sparring match and not a life-or-death duel, they won’t end up dead. Besides, Cheon Hwi-da isn’t an ordinary kid, is he?”

Tang Jincheon calmly refilled his empty cup with tea. However, instead of drinking it immediately, he rubbed his fingers over the cup’s rim, sprinkling in a pinch of purple powder, turning the tea into a mildly poisonous concoction.

As Tang Yujin sighed at the sight of his brother turning ordinary tea into poison tea out of sheer habit, Tang Jincheon murmured in a composed tone.

“Anyway, since he’s going to be part of the Tang Clan, he’ll need to develop some basic poison resistance. I’ll start by training him with poisons that won’t be life-threatening...”

“This is all for Sowol and Cheon Hwi-da’s sake,” Tang Jincheon added, listing off various types of poisons under his breath.

Watching his half-brother in silence for a while, Tang Yujin let out a long sigh.

“I should probably prepare a special elixir for him in advance...”

For the first time, Tang Yujin felt a pang of sympathy for Cheon Hwi-da.

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Out of the blue, Tang Sowol presented me with a rare elixir as a gift.

“...?”

“This isn’t something I’m giving you myself. Uncle asked me to deliver it to you, Cheon Hwi-da. But, if you want to thank me, I won’t stop you.”

Even though it clearly wasn’t something she had prepared herself, Tang Sowol puffed up proudly. Seeing her exhale through her nose in satisfaction, I chuckled quietly and nodded.

“I’ll think about it.”

“How about skipping the thinking and just acting on it right now?”

“I’ll think about that too.”

“Tch!”

Along with the black elixir pill was a letter. Curious, I opened it. In short, it was a note thanking me for saving Tang Sowol and asking me to take care of her in the future.

However, it didn't specify exactly what kind of elixir this was.

“It seems to have quite an impressive aura. Do you know what kind of elixir this is?”

“Hmm, this is *Hundred Poisons Pure Blood Pill*.”

“I've never heard of that before.”

“It's a rare elixir that's difficult to make, so it's almost never distributed outside the Tang Clan. It's no wonder you don't know about it.”

“Is it a powerful elixir?”

“Of course. *Hundred Poisons Pure Blood Pill* is an elixir made by carefully combining a hundred different poisons. The poisons cancel out each other's

toxicity, leaving only medicinal properties behind. While it doesn't greatly improve internal energy, it's extremely beneficial for the body."

"I've heard of something similar before. In the Hebei Peng Clan, there's an elixir that aids in external martial arts cultivation. Is this a similar type of elixir?"

"It's similar but slightly different. *Hundred Poisons Pure Blood Pill* strengthens the organs and meridians, but it doesn't enhance bone or muscle growth."

"Hmm."

If it has such an effect, it's a perfect elixir for me right now.

Improving my external martial arts quickly would certainly be ideal, but even if I can't, I can take my time and train gradually.

The meridians, however, are different.

Unlike the sons of prestigious martial arts families, who undergo foundation-building rituals at a young age, consume countless rare elixirs, and learn high-level martial arts, I lacked a proper foundation.

The reason I suffered so much due to my internal energy in my past life wasn't without cause. My meridians were narrow, and the internal energy I accumulated was turbid. The higher I climbed in martial arts, the more restricted I felt by these limitations.

Although I managed to resolve the internal energy issue by mastering Raging Wave Death-Stealing Art, which allowed me to refine my energy by converting killing intent into power, the problem with my meridians remained.

No matter how delicately I could control my energy, the narrowness of my meridians meant I couldn't channel large amounts of internal energy at once.

Because of this, I had sought out various elixirs. But all I could find were mediocre ones, none of which had a significant impact.

Hundred Poisons Pure Blood Pill alone wouldn't completely resolve the fundamental problem, but since it was considered a precious elixir even within the Tang Clan, it would certainly improve my condition.

"I'll have to visit and thank your uncle sometime."

"Uncle holds a rather special position within the Tang Clan, so unless you're with Father, you won't be able to meet him anytime you want."

“Well, if I stay here long enough, there’s bound to be a chance encounter. That’ll be good enough. Now, if you don’t mind, I’ll take the elixir.”

“W-what? R-right now?”

She probably didn’t expect me to take it immediately. Tang Sowol blinked her black eyes in confusion. Amused by her dazed expression, I chuckled and swallowed the pill.

Since it was a potent elixir, I had braced myself for some difficulty in absorbing it.. but after circulating my energy through the *Small Heavenly Circulation* twice, over seventy percent of its energy had already been absorbed into my meridians.

So, this is what they meant by saying it wouldn’t significantly enhance internal energy. There didn’t seem to be anything more I needed to do.

I didn’t feel any immediate difference, but over time, the absorbed energy would gradually strengthen and widen my meridians.

“Hoo...”

I exhaled deeply and opened my eyes, only to find Tang Sowol's face filling my vision.

We weren't so close that our breaths could touch, but we were near enough that I could see my reflection in her eyes.

With her hands on her hips, Tang Sowol glared at me from up close.

"Cheon Hwi-da, what sort of thoughtless behavior is it to suddenly take an elixir in the middle of a conversation?"

"Well, elixirs should be taken as soon as they're obtained, shouldn't they? Of course, that assumes you're in a safe place or with someone you trust."

"No one's going to take it away, so why the rush? What reason could you possibly have for being in such a hurry?"

"It's not just elixirs. Even food was often snatched from me. There are people in the world who pick up their swords just because they're hungry, and I was one of them."

"Ugh! If you say that, what am I supposed to do now?"

I smiled faintly at her grumbling and nodded.

“Still, you have a point. I’m no longer a wretched beggar or a wandering swordsman barely surviving on a single blade. I’m now the prospective son-in-law of the Tang Clan.”

“W-what?”

“At the very least, I should act in a way that wouldn’t embarrass my betrothed, don’t you think?”

Tang Sowol’s eyes darted around nervously, as though she didn’t know where to look. Her lips quivered slightly, as if she wanted to say something but couldn’t bring herself to speak. It was quite amusing to watch.

Just as I was enjoying her flustered reaction, she seemed to come to a decision. Slowly, she opened her mouth, her expression now determined.

“T-then, although it might be a little early, how about I show you around and let you experience what’s expected of you as my fiancé?”

“What’s expected of me as your fiancé, huh... That phrase sounds rather suggestive. Should I expect something inappropriate?”

“I’ve always wondered... do you not feel embarrassed at all? How can you say such things with a straight face?”

“Because I know what it’s like to regret missing an opportunity after hesitating. So now, I choose not to hesitate.”

For a brief moment, I gazed at the air, recalling memories from my previous life.

Just then, Tang Sowol’s expression turned slightly sour, and she spoke in a cold tone.

“Hmph. So, someone once made you regret, huh?”

“There’s no one now, so you can stop pouting.”

“What’s that supposed to... Oh...”

Her eyes widened in realization, and she began fidgeting nervously, stealing glances at me as though she'd said something wrong. She wasn't entirely off the mark.

Seeing her look flustered, I shrugged nonchalantly and spoke in a calm tone.

“Don't worry about it. It's really nothing. Now, back to the topic at hand—am I right in thinking what I'm thinking? If so, hurry up and give me an answer.”

“All I meant was that, as the Tang Clan's future son-in-law, you should know about the clan's inner workings. That's all it is, so don't get your hopes up for anything strange.”

“Too bad. Still, getting to tour the Tang Clan sounds good. To be honest, I was getting a little bored, going back and forth between my room and the training grounds. Can we start right away?”

“Of course. Then how about we begin with the medical hall, which should be the place you'll be most familiar with? If you come with me, I can show you places you wouldn't normally have access to.”

“I am curious about that. But is this really related to what a son-in-law is supposed to do?”

“The Tang Clan’s medical hall is just as important as our poison hall. You’ve experienced it firsthand, haven’t you? The fine line between poison and medicine.”

“Indeed. Even if I won’t be working directly in the medical hall, I need to understand how it operates.”

“Exactly! After the medical hall, we can visit the forge and the poison hall. Then we’ll stop by the training grounds where the inner guards practice, and finally, we’ll end at the guest hall, where the clan’s hired warriors reside. That should bring us right to dinnertime!”

“I’d love to see everything. But are you sure it’s fine to show me all this? Despite the engagement talk, it’s still just a verbal promise for now.”

“Hehe. It’s not about what’s said—it’s about who says it. No one in the Tang Clan takes Father’s words lightly, not even Father himself. Besides...”

“Besides?”

“Even if you were to see everything, the Tang Clan’s expertise isn’t so shallow that you could replicate it just from looking. So stop worrying and just follow me.”

Tang Sowol laughed softly, then took a few steps forward before turning back to look at me, her eyes brimming with expectation.

Her gaze was so openly beckoning that I had no choice but to step beside her. Only then did she seem satisfied, resuming her steps with a pleased expression.

“Do you see that tree over there? I planted it when I was little. I wondered if a seed would really grow into a tree, so I secretly planted it... and, lo and behold, it actually sprouted.”

“Hmm, I see.”

I gave a vague response, half-listening to her cheerful chatter as we walked side by side.

“Hey! You weren’t really listening, were you? You just gave me a random answer!”

Ah, I’ve been caught.

Though she grumbled a bit, Tang Sowol still led me through the Tang Clan, starting at the medical hall and ending at the guest hall, just as she had promised.

Back when I was with the Black Lotus Sect, I had risen to the rank of a branch leader. Because of that, I had thought, *How impressive can the Tang Clan really be?*

But I was wrong.

The Tang Clan was far more impressive and infinitely more complex than I had imagined.

The Black Lotus Sect was an organization formed by gathering unorthodox martial artists, so naturally, it operated by the law of strength.

As such, its members valued power above all else, whether it was martial strength, wealth, or some other form of influence.

Perhaps because of that, craftsmen and physicians didn't receive much respect in the Black Lotus Sect.

After all, they didn't fight directly, and their work benefited others rather than themselves.

But the Tang Clan was different.

Maybe it was because they revered the art of poison and hidden weapons, or perhaps it was simply a difference between the orthodox and unorthodox sects.

Whatever the case, it was clear that those who worked for the Tang Clan carried a sense of pride and fulfillment.

By the time we finished the tour of the guest hall, I finally understood something: Tang Sowol hadn't just wanted to show me around; she had wanted me to see the Tang Clan for what it truly was.

I began to comprehend why the Tang Sowol of my previous life had been so attached to her clan, why she had been so obsessed with revenge, and why she had wanted to build something with me.

Now, I could see it more clearly.

“This is a good place. The Tang Clan.”

“Isn't it? It's your home now, too, you know.”

“Home, huh...”

Come to think of it, while I had stayed in many places over the years, I never really had a place I could call home.

“Hmph! Do you understand now what kind of person you kidnapped?”

Tang Sowol tilted her chin upward slightly, smiling smugly. Her posture caused the line of her neck to stand out, drawing attention. Seeing this, I nodded seriously in response.

“Yes. The next time I kidnap someone, I should only do so if I’m confident I can escape from the entire Tang Clan.”

“Couldn’t you start by considering a peaceful solution instead?”

“I tried that, but you wouldn’t listen.”

“Ah...”

Embarrassed, Tang Sowol quickly averted her gaze. I moved to stand in front of her, so that wherever she looked, her eyes would meet mine.

“When having a conversation, you should look the other person in the eye.”

Startled, Tang Sowol reflexively slapped my shoulder. She didn't use internal energy, and her strength was controlled, so it didn't hurt.

“What was that for?”

“When words don't work, you resort to force. Isn't that something you taught me?”

“If I recall correctly, you still lost to me despite that approach.”

Tang Sowol narrowed her black eyes in annoyance and began lightly hitting my shoulder repeatedly, as if trying to dispel her embarrassment.

Slap! Slap!

Although it didn't hurt, we inevitably drew attention.

Well, it couldn't be helped. Anyone from the Tang Clan would naturally be curious seeing me and Tang Sowol playfully bickering like this.

"Is that him?"

"He looks younger than my son."

"Come now, he must be an impressive person, just like the young lady."

"They seem to get along well."

"Well, considering how much the Clan Leader pampered her when he brought him here..."

They probably thought they were whispering, but to martial artists like us, their voices were perfectly audible.

Tang Sowol, who had been fervently smacking my shoulder, froze mid-action and slowly lowered her hand. The atmosphere grew slightly awkward, and she cleared her throat with an exaggerated cough.

“Ahem. Anyway, we’ve completed a full circuit. Shall we head back now?”

“Let’s do that. It’s just about time to train a bit and then get some sleep.”

“You really love training, don’t you, Cheon Hwi-da?”

“Who truly loves training? It’s just something that needs to be done. It’s necessary.”

“Necessary, huh... But, you know, too much solitary training isn’t good either.”

“Hmm?”

“Martial arts aren’t something you perform alone—they involve interacting with others. So, what I’m saying is...”

Tang Sowol fidgeted, as if hesitant to speak, but eventually, she seemed to resolve herself and looked straight at me, opening her mouth to say something—

Only to have her words drowned out by a shout from the distance.

“Sowol-ah!!!”

Turning toward the source of the voice, I saw a man in green martial robes running toward us, waving enthusiastically.

His face bore a striking resemblance to Tang Sowol’s.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

“Sowol-ah!!!”

“.....!”

Tang Sowol, who had been about to say something, froze with her mouth slightly agape. The timing of the shout was so impeccable that it completely cut her off.

Turning toward the source of the voice, I saw a man in green martial robes running toward us, waving enthusiastically.

His face closely resembled Tang Sowol's.

“Sowol-ah! Sowol-ah! Sowol-ah!”

The man, repeatedly calling out her name, rapidly closed the distance between them.

Judging by his attire and appearance, I could roughly guess who he was, so I subtly increased the distance between myself and Tang Sowol.

“Ah...”

Perhaps predicting what was about to happen, Tang Sowol tightly shut her eyes. Meanwhile, the approaching man's eyes gleamed as he executed a light body movement technique, rapidly reducing the distance.

Pabat!

In the blink of an eye, he was standing right in front of Tang Sowol, tears welling up in his eyes.

“Oh no! Your face has become so thin! How much hardship must you have endured for this to happen?”

“I didn’t lose that much weight, though...”

“My dear sister! I’ve heard everything. Thank goodness you’re safe! Are you sure you’re all right? Just to be safe, shouldn’t you visit the medical hall for a check-up?”

“I’m a little tired, but I wasn’t injured. You don’t need to worry, brother.”

“All right. If you say so, I’ll believe you. I don’t know which scoundrels dared to lay a hand on the bloodline of the Tang Clan, but don’t worry—I’ll make sure they live to regret it!”

“Um, it wasn’t scoundrels; they were martial artists from an unorthodox sect. And they’re all dead already, thanks to Cheon Hwi-da here.”

“Unorthodox martial artists, scoundrels—it’s all the same. But if he saved you, then this young hero isn’t just your benefactor, but mine, and the Tang Clan’s as well. Forgive my delayed greeting. I’m Tang Cheong. Ever since the Yongbong Gathering, I’ve been called the Dark Dragon.”

With a bright smile befitting the description of a cheerful young man, Tang Cheong cupped his hands in greeting.

For someone who hailed from a prestigious family and had earned the moniker of ‘Dragon,’ indicating his considerable martial prowess, he seemed refreshingly approachable.

Just as I was about to return the gesture and introduce myself, Tang Sowol cautiously interrupted in a hesitant tone.

“Um, brother, actually, there’s something else I need to tell you...”

“Haha! Are you talking about snacks? Of course, I brought some! Even though I just returned from a mission, I made sure to buy your favorite snacks on the way back. You always pester me for sweets whenever I return from somewhere, so... here.”

Tang Cheong pulled out a small pouch from his sleeve. Seeing how nonchalant he was, Tang Sowol jumped in place out of frustration.

“That’s from ages ago! That’s not what I was trying to say! Brother! What I meant to tell you is that Cheon Hwi-da isn’t just my benefactor—he’s also my fiancé, appointed by Father!”

“Haha! Enough with the jokes. Fiancé? That’s ridiculous...”

“It’s true.”

“.....?”

Tang Cheong turned to me with a creaking motion, like a rusty sword being drawn from its scabbard.

“F-fiancé?”

“Pleased to meet you, brother.”

“B-brother?!”

Tang Cheong’s voice rose in disbelief. Facing him, I cupped my hands in a polite greeting.

“My name is Cheon Hwi. I am honored to have formed a meaningful bond with Tang Sowol. I look forward to your guidance.”

“What did you just say?! A meaningful bond?! Don’t tell me...”

“What did you just say? Did you just call me *Sowol-soja* (young lady)?” Tang Sowol cut in.

“I didn’t say that, Tang Sowol.”

Tang Cheong gave his sister a bewildered look, as if to ask whether that was really important right now, while Tang Sowol tilted her head in confusion.

I felt a bit guilty, but there was no helping it. Since this was my first meeting with my future brother-in-law, I had tried to maintain proper decorum, but that proved to be easier said than done.

Just as the awkward tension between us seemed to stretch endlessly, the surrounding area began to buzz with onlookers, prompting me to speak first.

“Let’s move to a different place. There are too many people here.”

Both Tang Sowol and Tang Cheong nodded, still wearing similarly dazed expressions.

Even though I had regressed twenty years into the past, Tang Sowol was still only in her early twenties at this point in time.

After the Tang Clan’s destruction in my previous life, her hair had turned white from grief, and her mastery of poison arts had advanced to the point where her eyes gleamed green.

Yet, beneath the loose robes of the Tang Clan, I could still see the familiar soft curves, her distinctive features, and even the sound of her voice—all of it was almost identical to the image of her I remembered.

However, just because I was familiar with the Tang Sowol of my previous life didn’t mean I knew everything about her.

After all, what I knew was only the version of Tang Sowol who had lost everything to the demonic sects.

Naturally, I knew almost nothing about her family.

At most, I had only heard bits and pieces—stories about how the Poison King had met a tragic end, and vague mentions of how her brothers cherished her.

But now, standing face-to-face with Tang Cheong, I realized something.

They cared for her far more than I had imagined.

As we retraced our steps back the way we came, Tang Cheong, who had been smiling warmly at me earlier, now wore a wary expression, as if he were facing a thief.

“Was what you said earlier true? Are you really Sowol’s fiancé?”

“It’s hard to believe. Did Father really approve of this?”

Why is it so hard for him to believe? Feeling slightly exasperated, I nodded.

“Yes. While the engagement ceremony hasn’t taken place yet, it was the Poison King himself who brought it up.”

“I see. I suppose it must be because of her Heavenly Poison Body... Anyway, let me properly introduce myself again. I’m Tang Cheong, the young master of the Sichuan Tang Clan and Sowol’s older brother.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you. My name is Cheon Hwi.”

“Oh! Sowol talked about me?”

“That’s actually not true.”

“Eh...”

Tang Cheong clicked his tongue and kicked a pebble on the ground. The stone flew in an oddly precise trajectory, embedding itself deeply into a nearby tree.

The power and accuracy of the strike were impressive—almost as if he were subtly showing off his martial prowess.

Judging by the energy I felt, Tang Cheong's level was that of a fully matured master at the *peak* stage. Naturally, he would be far stronger than the centenarian swordmaster I had fought before.

After all, since he had reached this stage through orthodox martial arts, there would be few, if any, flaws in his technique. And at the peak level, there was a significant gap in skill between those who had just entered the stage and those who had fully mastered it.

Tang Cheong, who had been grumbling for a while, suddenly smiled brightly.

“Well, if Father personally brought it up, there must have been a good reason. And it's true that our clan owes you a great debt.”

“That's correct. Thanks to this situation, I've received an offer beyond my expectations.”

“Haha! No matter who it is, anyone would be lucky to have my sister, so don’t feel too self-conscious!”

Without a word, I turned to look at Tang Sowol. My expression was meant to convey, *Is he always like this?*

Sensing my gaze, Tang Sowol, who seemed unable to bear the situation any longer, quickly covered her face with both hands and gave a small nod. Her plump cheeks peeked out between her fingers, and her ears, which had partially emerged from her hair, had turned bright red in the short span of time.

So he’s always like this, huh...

“Anyway, can you tell me exactly what happened to my sister? I rushed back as soon as I received the urgent message, so I don’t know the full details.”

“That’s not difficult. Let’s start with how I... uh... kidnapped Tang Sowol.”

“Wait. What did you just say?”

“Young lady?”

“No, not that! Did you just say you kidnapped her?! Why are you talking about something so outrageous so casually?!”

“It couldn’t be helped. Tang Sowol wouldn’t listen to me.”

“Explain everything from the beginning—leave nothing out!”

“Understood. In that case, I’ll begin with the reason I left my hometown...”

“You can skip that part! Start from the moment you first met Sowol!”

Tang Cheong raised his voice, shouting in frustration. I shrugged my shoulders slightly in response.

Man, he’s got a lot of demands.

I began recounting the story as he requested, starting from when I first encountered Tang Sowol.

“...And that’s how it happened.”

“You subdued Sowol and kidnapped her? Found a Purple Flower Poison Enhancing Grass by chance? Fought thirty unorthodox martial artists? And one of them was even a peak-level master?”

Despite my sincere explanation, Tang Cheong stared at me with an expression that could only be described as that of someone looking at a con artist.

“This is unbelievable. Do you seriously expect me to believe all that? You might as well claim that you learned about her Heavenly Poison Body from a dream or something!”

“How did you know? One night, I had a terrible nightmare, and when I woke up, the breathing technique for dealing with the Heavenly Poison Body was stuck in my head.”

“...What?”

Tang Cheong frowned deeply, his expression becoming visibly displeased. Seeing his reaction, I quickly jabbed Tang Sowol in the side with my elbow.

Poke, poke.

Although Tang Cheong's glare grew sharper, it didn't last long, as Tang Sowol opened her mouth to speak.

"Haa... That last part was nonsense, but the rest of what he said is true, brother. It all sounds absurd, but I experienced every part of it myself. Even Father arrived just as the fight ended, so he can confirm it."

"That must have been incredibly dangerous. I'm relieved you're okay—truly."

Tang Cheong heaved a sigh of relief. Then, after a moment's pause, he added in a slightly annoyed tone.

"I did ask him to explain what happened, but somehow, he makes it sound like I didn't believe a word of it when he said it. Funny, since I got a different vibe when you were talking."

"That's probably because your attitude toward me seemed... a little different."

“Well, of course. If you can’t trust your own family, who can you trust? Anyway, since you’ve been calling me ‘brother,’ I’ll call you ‘little brother.’ But keep in mind, we’re not close enough for me to call you ‘brother-in-law’ just yet.”

His boldness was so overwhelming that instead of feeling slighted, I found it amusing. Tang Cheong nodded approvingly, looking rather pleased with himself, before cautiously asking,

“So, little brother, do you belong to any particular sect? What about your family? You seem quite young—how old are you? And where are you headed now?”

Despite his careful tone, he made sure to ask all the questions he wanted.

“When I came to my senses, I found myself thrown into the world with nothing but my own body. I have no family, nor do I belong to any sect. As for my age, I turned fifteen this year. Right now, I’m heading to the training grounds assigned to me.”

I responded without hesitation, and it wasn’t Tang Cheong who reacted—it was Tang Sowol.

“Huh? The training grounds assigned to you?”

“Yes. Just a little while ago, you were about to ask me for a sparring match, weren’t you? This works out perfectly.”

“Um... That’s true, but that was only because I wanted to...”

“Only because you wanted to be alone with me? I didn’t realize you had such impure intentions.”

“I wasn’t planning anything inappropriate!”

“Then what were you planning to do?”

“Everything except anything inappropriate!”

As we walked, exchanging lighthearted banter, Tang Cheong alternated between looking at us with pride and a tinge of melancholy, his expression complex.

“So, this day has finally come. It’s only natural—she can’t remain a child forever.”

“Brother? I was only thinking of having a sparring match.”

“A sparring match! Of course! I can’t believe I didn’t think of that!”

Tang Cheong’s slumped shoulders straightened, and his half-lidded eyes lit up with renewed vigor. He turned to me with a sharp yet eager gaze.

“Little brother, how about a sparring match with me?”

“No thanks. I don’t believe you’ll end it with just a sparring match.”

“What kind of person do you take me for?! I am Tang Cheong, the young master of the Sichuan Tang Clan, known as the Dark Dragon!”

“Impressive. I’m just a prospective son-in-law of the Tang Clan with no title of my own.”

“Kuh! Fine! If you spar with me, I’ll reward you with an elixir regardless of the outcome. How about that?”

“Tempting offer, but I’ve already received a Hundred Poisons Pure Blood Pill recently, so I won’t need another elixir for a while.”

“What?! You already got one? Who... No, never mind. If elixirs won’t entice you, how about a new sword? Our blacksmiths are among the best.”

“A sword?”

I glanced down at the weapon hanging from my waist.

It was a sword I had taken from the leader of the Red Sand Gang. While it wasn’t a bad weapon, it couldn’t compare to a blade crafted by the Tang Clan.

On top of that, the sword had seen plenty of use and was beginning to dull from lack of proper maintenance.

“All right, I’ll do it.”

Already, I was looking forward to it.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

Only the three of us—Tang Sowol, Tang Cheong, and I—stood in the empty training grounds.

At the center of the grounds, Tang Cheong stood a few steps back, loosening his wrists as he began to speak.

“Let’s briefly go over the rules. Since this is just a sparring match, poison and lethal strikes are forbidden. I also won’t use any sharp weapons or hidden weapons with blades. Given the disparity in skill, we should probably limit the use of internal energy as well. What level do you think is appropriate? I’ll follow your lead, little brother.”

“Let’s stick to the level of a first-rate martial artist, and we’ll refrain from using *sword energy*. Does that sound fair?”

“Very well. The spar will end when one of us fully subdues the other or if either of us concedes. Agreed?”

“Let’s start right away.”

“Haha! You’re in quite a hurry, aren’t you, little brother?”

“That’s how eager I am.”

After saying that, I glanced to the side. Tang Sowol, now relegated to the sidelines, looked sullen, seemingly displeased with her current situation. I couldn’t help but smile at her expression.

“What’s with that face? What’s bothering you now?”

“Bothering me... well, I suppose I can’t complain too much. It makes sense that things didn’t go according to my plan. After all, you’re no longer just a kidnapper or a benefactor—you’re my fiancé now. It’s true that I wanted to get to know you better, but I’m also genuinely happy to see my brother again.”

“If it’s all right with you, I’ll make time for you after the sparring match, until sunset... or even after, if you’d like.”

“Fufu, thank you. But that’s not what I’m upset about.”

“What is it, then?”

“You’re getting a bit too excited, don’t you think? I could get you a sword, too, and I’d spar with you anytime you wanted.”

As she said that, Tang Sowol averted her gaze slightly and added in a softer voice,

“Please... enjoy spending time with me a little more, like I did with you.”

For a brief moment, a strange sensation stirred deep in my chest. It wasn’t quite anger, but something warm and prickly that resembled it.

However, I didn’t know what to say in response. After a moment’s hesitation, all I could manage was a small nod.

Tang Sowol seemed to understand, as she nodded in return. Yet, the atmosphere remained awkward, and neither of us could do much to break the tension.

Apparently, Tang Cheong didn’t appreciate the awkwardness.

“Let’s get started already.”

With a displeased expression, he furrowed his brow, clearly eager to move things along. The playful aura he had earlier was gone, replaced by a sharp, refined presence.

As soon as I reflexively drew my sword and assumed a stance, Tang Cheong's lips curved into a satisfied smile.

“Unlike Sowol, I'll be quite the difficult opponent.”

“I figured as much, judging by your moniker.”

Although Tang Sowol had mastered hidden weapon techniques to a high level as a Tang Clan warrior, her true specialty lay in poison arts.

That's why I had been able to deal with her relatively easily before, simply by preparing an antidote in advance.

However, judging by Tang Cheong's title, *Dark Dragon*, it was clear that he primarily used hidden weapons. Given that he was already a fully matured peak-level master, even without poison arts, he would be a formidable opponent.

Still, this was a sparring match, not a life-or-death duel. That gave me a chance.

I gathered my internal energy, letting out a faint killing intent that naturally seeped from my body. Normally, I would have concentrated it on a single target, but this time, I spread it across a wide area.

“What’s... this?”

Tang Cheong’s expression stiffened slightly as the faint killing intent filled the surroundings. However, once he realized it wasn’t directed at him but merely diffused outward, he let out a small laugh.

I took half a step forward with my left foot and asked,

“Do seniors offer their juniors three chances in sparring matches?”

“For a warrior like you who takes sparring seriously, that would be an insult. No such courtesy here.”

“Too bad.”

With a faint smile, I kicked off the ground.

Tat!

Thanks to my slightly widened meridians, my energy flowed more smoothly, allowing me to move faster. The scenery blurred as I rapidly closed the distance.

However, closing the distance didn't mean I could reach Tang Cheong.

As soon as I approached, Tang Cheong retreated, leaving only hidden weapons behind in his wake.

Due to the short distance, I couldn't discern exactly where they were aimed.

Fortunately, I had prepared for such situations by spreading my killing intent throughout the area. Anything moving within range would inevitably disturb the energy field of Raging Wave Death-Stealing Art.

I spotted the incoming hidden weapons with my eyes and sensed them with my energy perception, then swung my sword.

Cheng! Chae-chaeng!

I deflected the *iron coins* flying toward my right shoulder and stepped back to avoid the metal ball aimed at my foot, but it didn't end there.

Behind the metal ball was another small projectile, hidden from my view. It ricocheted off the first ball and flew toward my wrist.

Ah, it's a Mother-Child Sphere. Hidden weapons designed to confuse the opponent by using two projectiles of different sizes.

While the initial projectile could be used as a simple distraction, it was rare for someone to consider the angles so meticulously. Even among unorthodox sect warriors, such precise hidden weapon techniques were uncommon.

I swiftly pulled back my sword and gripped the hilt tightly, twisting it so that the pommel protected my wrist.

Kaang!

The small sphere struck the pommel and bounced off into the distance. If it had hit me directly, my wrist wouldn't have broken, but it would have gone numb, making it difficult to hold my sword.

If that had happened, the spar would have ended right there.

After regaining my stance, I saw Tang Cheong narrowing his eyes from a distance.

“You’re skilled.”

“The Tang Clan’s martial arts are certainly impressive, but the techniques themselves are similar to those I often saw used by unorthodox warriors.”

“Ah, that’s right—you’re from Zhejiang Province, aren’t you?”

“Yes”

To the unorthodox martial artist, martial arts are nothing more than a tool for winning. Poison and hidden weapons are common, but so are methods like taking hostages, bribery, and pretending to be friendly before stabbing someone in the back.

There’s even a saying that “the one who gets tricked is the fool,” which should tell you all you need to know.

Well, it was especially bad during the period when orthodox martial artists had disappeared, leaving only the unorthodox sects. Things improved somewhat once the Black Lotus Sect firmly established itself and secured control over Zhejiang Province.

Even unorthodox organizations need some degree of order if they want to maintain stability.

As I nodded quietly to myself, Tang Cheong grinned and said,

“Then, be on your guard. What I’m about to show you is a martial technique you’ve never seen before. Although I haven’t sharpened my weapons, once a hidden weapon leaves my hand, there’s no way to stop it.”

“Please be careful as well, brother. Unlike your hidden weapons, I can stop my sword mid-swing, but I’m not very good at holding back.”

“Haha, you’re quite provocative once you draw your sword, aren’t you, little brother?”

“It’s just a habit. No deeper meaning.”

“Ah, yes. Among unorthodox martial artists, there are plenty who act like they’ll die if they’re looked down upon. It seems you’ve picked up some bad habits too.”

Clicking his tongue in mock disapproval, Tang Cheong suddenly swung his arm.

This time, he openly threw his weapons, but it was impossible to tell exactly what he had thrown, where they were aimed, or even when they had been thrown.

The loose-fitting robes characteristic of Tang Clan attire concealed the contours of his shoulders, and more than half of his hands were hidden.

Sswaeaaek!

Because of the peculiar shape of the iron coins, they flew in erratic trajectories. The *Mother-Child Sphere* skimmed low across the ground, appearing as though it might hit the floor at any moment. Meanwhile, a needle—*Umoh-chim*—was hidden among these weapons, aiming directly for one of my pressure points.

The last weapon, the needle, would have been difficult to detect without using my dispersed killing intent as a form of sensory feedback.

Even being able to sense it didn't guarantee I could respond to everything.

If Tang Cheong had imbued his weapons with killing intent, I might have been able to read their trajectories more easily... but this was a sparring match. Without the aid of killing intent, I had to rely purely on my eyes and senses to track his hidden weapons—and Tang Cheong's skill was impressive.

The *Mother-Child Sphere*, in particular, would have been nearly impossible to predict, even if there had been killing intent attached to it.

With that in mind, I decided to do what I did best.

I hurled myself directly into the barrage of hidden weapons.

“What the?!”

Tang Cheong's shocked voice reached my ears, but I ignored it. Focusing my internal energy into my legs, I unleashed it all at once.

Paaang!

The sudden burst of energy from my *Yongcheon-hyeol* (a vital acupuncture point on the sole) made my feet tingle, but I didn't care. I swung my sword in a wide arc.

Chaeng!

With a clear metallic clang, the iron coins bounced off my blade and clattered to the ground.

I hadn't precisely aimed my swing; if I had tried that, I wouldn't have been able to deflect even half of the weapons. Rather than directly targeting the hidden weapons, I had simply placed my sword where I predicted they would fly.

Since this was a sparring match, we were only aiming for non-lethal areas, and there were only so many spots where one could aim to safely subdue the opponent. I had simply swung my sword toward one of those areas.

"Hup!"

Instead of withdrawing my sword after the swing, I spun my body around in sync with its position. This time, I focused my internal energy into my arms and the fabric of my sleeves.

Puhong!

The wide sweep of my sleeve tore through the air, creating a loud whooshing sound accompanied by a gust of wind.

Naturally, Tang Cheong had imbued his needle with internal energy... but the delicate weapon couldn't withstand the sudden shockwave I created. Its trajectory wavered, and its power diminished significantly.

This wouldn't have been possible if Tang Cheong hadn't agreed to limit his internal energy use.

With its course disrupted, the needle either veered off target or lost its momentum entirely, allowing me to catch it harmlessly on my back and arm.

Since the needles weren't coated in poison and weren't aimed at my pressure points, there was no reason to be overly concerned.

Other than a slight sting, they didn't impair my movements at all.

Next, I turned my attention to the *Mother-Child Sphere* flying toward my lower body. The large and small spheres, which had seemed like they might hit the

ground, instead collided with the floor and each other, spreading out over a wide area.

They covered a range too large to block with a single sword, and dodging wasn't an option either—I was too late, having focused on deflecting the previous hidden weapons.

However, the more intricate a technique is, the more it falls apart once it's disrupted.

I extended my right leg forward and twisted my body sideways. At the same time, I stretched out my arm, slipping my sword between the scattered spheres.

Thung!

A solid impact traveled through the hilt. I had targeted one of the spheres I had taken note of earlier and struck it with my sword tip. The sphere bounced away and collided with another one.

That sphere, in turn, hit yet another, and the sequence continued, causing the spheres to ricochet wildly off each other.

This was similar to how Tang Cheong had scattered the spheres widely earlier. The only difference was that instead of spreading them out in a controlled manner, I had aimed to create as much chaotic collision as possible.

Tadadak!

A fierce series of clattering sounds, like crackling sparks, echoed as the spheres scattered in all directions.

Some flew overhead, others hit the ground, and still more bounced away into the distance.

I succeeded in dispersing most of the attack, though I couldn't block everything.

I twisted my body sideways, minimizing the area exposed to the incoming spheres, but a few still struck my forearm and thigh.

Fortunately, since they hit me at an angle rather than head-on, the impact was manageable.

That should be enough.

Smiling faintly, I steadied my trembling legs and kicked off the ground once more.

Tat!

As I closed the distance again, Tang Cheong threw more hidden weapons. I dodged what I could, deflected what I couldn't, and braced myself for those I couldn't avoid.

This time, I didn't pause—I kept using my movement technique to close the gap.

While Tang Cheong could easily throw one or two hidden weapons on the move, launching dozens at once required him to stop for a brief moment.

By pressing forward without stopping, I gradually reduced the distance between us.

One step. Another step. Each time I drew closer, my body accumulated more cuts and bruises, but none were serious enough to stop me.

Finally, I reached striking distance. Tang Cheong gave a wry smile.

“You know, little brother...”

“I don’t. And if you don’t mind, I’m tired, so please don’t talk to me right now.”

“The Tang Clan prefers people with tenacity—people like you.”

“Then how about letting me land a single hit?”

“Please don’t say scary things while holding a real sword.”

Tang Cheong, realizing that there was no more room to throw hidden weapons at such close range, shifted his stance into a ready position for close-quarters combat. He adopted the primary posture of the *Fist Arts of the Tang Clan*, a style designed to deal with enemies in melee range.

"Close-range fighting, huh? That’s something I’m confident in as well," I thought, as I readied my sword, intending to target just the edge of his robes—nothing too serious.

Clang!

“...Huh?”

My sword clattered to the ground. No, more accurately, only the hilt remained in my hand. The blade had broken off mid-swing and tumbled to the floor.

With all the fights I'd been through lately and the sheer number of hidden weapons I had deflected during this sparring match, the accumulated stress on the blade had reached its limit. It wasn't entirely surprising that it couldn't withstand one last powerful swing.

“Ha...”

Still, of all times, I hadn't expected it to break now.

Had this been before my regression, I could have extended *sword energy* and compensated for the broken weapon. But this was only a sparring match. Tang Cheong hadn't gone all out with his internal energy, and he had been careful not to use lethal hidden weapons, so I couldn't exactly complain about my bad luck.

Admitting defeat was the only reasonable course of action.

With a long sigh, I sheathed the broken sword and politely cupped my hands in a gesture of surrender.

“I concede.”

“Huh? Oh... oh. Yes, I see. That was a good spar, little brother.”

Tang Cheong, looking somewhat bewildered by my abrupt surrender, relaxed his stance and returned my respectful gesture.

Thus, the sparring match ended with my defeat. Just as we were wrapping things up, Tang Sowol, who had been nervously watching from a distance, rushed over with an indignant expression.

“Brother! How could you turn someone who just finished recovering into a patient again?”

“P-patient?”

Tang Cheong, flustered, glanced at me while Tang Sowol pointedly gestured toward my arms and legs.

“Look at him! He’s trembling like a drenched baby bird!”

“...It’s not that bad.”

I tried to protest in a calm tone, though I couldn’t completely deny that my limbs were trembling slightly from the repeated impacts of the *Mother-Child Sphere*. Still, her comparison seemed a bit exaggerated.

Regardless, it appeared my words didn’t reach Tang Sowol at all.

“I’ll take Cheon Hwi-da to the medical hall. Brother, please take care of cleaning up here!”

“Well, you see, Sowol... little brother’s martial skills were better than I expected, so I couldn’t...”

“Hmph! Even so, you should have shown some restraint! You’re older, more experienced, and much stronger. How could you bully someone younger like Cheon Hwi-da so harshly?”

Tang Sowol cut off her brother's excuse with a pout and pulled me forcefully toward her.

Pwoop.

She practically hugged me, holding me close to her side.

Truthfully, ever since I regressed and found myself back in this younger body, I'd been feeling quite dissatisfied with my physical state—being shorter, weaker, and lacking the strength I once had.

“...Hmm.”

But now, as I felt the soft sensation pressing against the back of my head, for the first time, I didn't mind being in this smaller body.

Noticing my reaction, Tang Cheong's expression twisted into a scowl.

“Sowol, shouldn't you go and greet Father now that you're back?”

“Brother, I’ll go see Father after I’ve taken Cheon Hwi-da to the medical hall. Isn’t it proper to check on someone’s health before anything else?”

“S-Sowol...?”

Ignoring her brother’s protests, Tang Sowol simply turned away, pulling me along. Left behind, Tang Cheong slumped to the ground with a dejected look on his face.

Watching his pitiful figure, I buried my head a little deeper into Tang Sowol’s shoulder and gave a subtle nod of satisfaction.

Molkang.

“...Mm.”

Though I had lost the sparring match, I couldn’t help but feel like I had won something.

Tang Cheong watched with a mix of frustration and bewilderment as his one and only younger sister held onto Cheon Hwi-da as if he were her precious child. He sighed, stood up, and tried to gather his thoughts.

As he brushed himself off, something caught his eye.

Swish.

“...Huh?”

His eyes narrowed as he noticed the cut in his sleeve.

Cheon Hwi-da's sword had broken before it could reach him, meaning the blade hadn't even touched his robe.

Then what was this neatly sliced fabric?

“...Sword wind?”

A gust of wind imbued with the sharpness of a blade. While it wasn't lethal, it was capable of slicing through clothing and hair.

This wasn't something just anyone could do. Only those who had achieved a state of *Sword Unity* or something equivalent could unleash such a technique.

“But... Cheon Hwi-da's level should be no more than first-rate.”

This went beyond what Tang Cheong could comprehend with his current understanding of martial arts.

He continued to stare at his sleeve for a while, then scratched the back of his head.

“I have a lot to ask Father...”

Muttering to himself, Tang Cheong began walking toward the Patriarch's hall, where Tang Jincheon would be. However, after taking only three steps out of the training grounds, he abruptly turned back.

“...Might as well clean up before I go.”

With a sullen expression, Tang Cheong started picking up the scattered hidden weapons one by one.

In the Tang Clan, hidden weapons were never left for servants to clean up, as there was always the concern of them being leaked outside the clan.

Sigh.

At that moment, Tang Cheong felt a little resentful toward the world.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

Tang Sowol forcibly dragged me to the medical hall and laid me down, despite my insistence that I was fine.

Looking at her, I asked in a slightly grumpy voice,

“So, when can I expect to receive my sword?”

“Perhaps after you greet Father, you’ll go find the smiths. They may have some quirks, but they’re people who keep their promises. However, for now, your arm needs to heal first. In this condition, even if you get the sword, you won’t be able to swing it properly.”

“It’s just a bruise. Nothing serious like a broken bone. I’ll be fine by tomorrow.”

“Brother said he would make it regardless of whether you won or lost. So why did you push yourself so hard? Even knowing it was a spar, you made those watching feel so anxious.”

“Well... wouldn’t it be because I wanted to look impressive in front of my fiancée?”

“Asking me that directly already means it’s not true, right?”

“Oops, caught me. Honestly, I already gave the reason during the spar. I’m just not very good at holding back.”

“Does that make any sense, considering your skills?”

“Since we’re on the topic, I’m curious. Tang Sowol, what do you think of my skills?”

“They’re strangely strong for someone at your stage. It’s like your achievements can’t keep up with your talent.”

“Talent, huh. I wouldn’t say I lack it, honestly.”

“Saying you don’t lack it seems too humble. Even if I may not look it, I’m the daughter of the prestigious Tang Clan, renowned among the Five Great Clans. I grew up with the best food and trained in the finest martial arts, yet I still couldn’t surpass you.”

“But you lost to your brother, didn’t you?”

“Do you even hear yourself? Brother is at least ten years older than you and me, and he’s received the title of ‘Dark Dragon,’ given only to the most outstanding talents of this generation. Compared to that, how long has it been since you seriously started learning martial arts?”

Tang Sowol let out a scoff, as if finding the situation absurd. Though a bit off, her observation wasn’t entirely wrong. Right now, my physical body and internal energy can’t keep up with the enlightenment I gained after experiencing regression.

Since she doesn’t know about my regression, Tang Sowol must think I possess some absurd level of talent.

Of course, having previously reached the Peak level with a foundationless martial art, I can say I do have decent talent. But it’s nowhere near the incredible level she imagines.

“Half of what you see in me, Tang Sowol, probably comes from my resolve rather than innate talent.”

“If determination alone can make someone strong, what’s the point of learning martial arts?”

“That’s not what I meant. How should I explain this... Ah, let’s try a hypothetical spar.”

“A spar?”

“Let’s say you had to fight that old swordsman I dealt with before, along with the lackeys he gathered. But this time, assume you didn’t immediately consume the *Purple Flower Poison Enhancing Grass* and instead kept it for later use in poison techniques.”

“Wait a moment... Okay, go on.”

Tang Sowol closed her eyes, seemingly deep in thought. Was she seriously imagining the scenario right now? Chuckling at her earnest expression, I continued.

“I’m not beside you. The encirclement is tight enough that even escaping would be difficult. Now, what would you do in that situation?”

“Hmm... Heroically fight to the death? That’s not an acceptable answer, is it?”

“Do you think that’s a solution? Unless you plan on making me a widower, I’d prefer if you focused on survival.”

“Even so, I honestly don’t see a way out. Relying solely on hidden weapons would be tough. With poison, I could take down about four first-class fighters and perhaps thirty of the lesser ones, but...”

“What’s the problem, then?”

“The old swordsman himself. I’m confident in my abilities. Compared to yours, I may fall short, but among those at the same level, I’m exceptional. However, he’s a master at the Peak level, isn’t he?”

“And what of it?”

“Pardon?”

“A Peak master is still human. If a sword pierces their heart, they die. If their neck is severed, they die. If they’re poisoned, they die. You should be capable of handling even someone stronger than you.”

Hearing that, Tang Sowol frowned slightly.

“It ultimately comes down to time. High-level martial artists can use their internal energy to slow down the spread of poison. In some cases, they might even be able to expel it entirely.”

“So you’re saying you’d be defeated before the poison could take full effect?”

“Yes, since they’d have come prepared to deal with me. Whether they brought antidotes or poison immunity pills, they wouldn’t face me without countermeasures.”

“Fair enough.”

“Of course, once poisoned, their combat strength would drastically drop since they’d have to expend internal energy and concentration to suppress the poison. If I could keep them at bay with hidden weapons and use my movement techniques

to maintain distance until they couldn't endure any longer, I might have a chance. But they aren't alone, are they?"

"One more thing: it won't be easy to keep them in check with hidden weapons alone. Unless you can create complex trajectories like my brother, simply throwing many projectiles quickly won't be enough."

"What about movement techniques?"

"The Tang Clan's movement techniques are excellent. In terms of speed, you might be slightly slower or roughly equal to them. But as I mentioned earlier, you'd still be surrounded. Maintaining distance for an extended period would be extremely difficult."

"Ugh... What should I do...?"

Tang Sowol muttered to herself, contemplating various strategies. But no matter how hard she tried, no viable solution seemed to come to mind, and her furrowed brow only deepened.

Resisting the urge to smooth out her creased forehead, I waited patiently for her to respond. After a long moment, she finally exhaled a deep sigh and opened her eyes.

“I don’t know. No matter how I think about it, I can’t come up with a good answer.”

“Is that so? From my perspective, there are a few methods you could try.”

At my words, Tang Sowol pursed her lips and glared at me.

“Really? While it’s true that you managed something similar in the past, wasn’t that only possible because you bought enough time for me to face the old swordsman one-on-one?”

“I wasn’t talking about myself. I was talking about you.”

“Oh.”

“Of course, even if I had to fight them alone, I’d still be confident in winning.”

Tang Sowol silently prodded my bandaged arm.

“Ow.”

“Does it hurt a lot?”

“It’s bearable.”

“Then bear with it.”

Though she said that, she stopped poking me. Instead, she crossed her arms and spoke with a teasing expression.

“So, how would you fight, oh great hero?”

“It’s simple. First, I’d force my way into the midst of the lackeys. Even evil martial artists don’t swing their weapons at their allies without cause, unless their own life is at stake.”

“Isn’t being surrounded at sword’s reach more dangerous than being surrounded at a distance?”

“Not necessarily. The number of people who can surround you at any given time is limited. And since they wouldn’t have trained in coordinated formations, they wouldn’t be perfectly synchronized either.”

Unless in special cases, weapons are wielded by human hands, meaning their techniques are limited. If the number of opponents is fixed, and their techniques predictable, there’s no need to be overly intimidated.

“Also, being amidst their ranks would act as a form of deterrence against the old swordsman. As I mentioned earlier, even rogue martial artists don’t betray their allies without reason. Though they might switch sides quickly, they’ll still need a valid excuse.”

If he rashly swung his saber at both me and his lackeys, the martial artists he’d gathered would turn on him in an instant. To them, it would seem like he betrayed them first. They wouldn’t quietly accept it; they’d either flee or retaliate in desperation.

While I held out among the lackeys, the old swordsman would be forced to fight cautiously.

“No matter how impressive a martial art is, if its fluidity is disrupted, its power is halved. And the lackeys’ skills wouldn’t easily touch me. For a time, the most dangerous place becomes the safest.”

“And after that? You’d still have to face a stronger opponent in an exhausted state.”

“If they’re stronger than me, whether I’m tired or not wouldn’t matter much. Actually, if I’m tired, I might even be able to lull them into complacency.”

As I said that, I traced a diagonal line across my chest with my finger, outlining a scar that had recently formed.

“Taking a hit to deal a fatal blow is risky, but highly effective.”

Tang Sowol stared at me in stunned silence, her mouth slightly open. Shrugging, I added,

“Wouldn’t that be better than passively enduring and dying? At least it’s a strategy worth trying. Even if one mistake could cost me my head.”

“Somehow, this conversation got long. The point is, don’t think of me as some unreachable person.”

“Why not? Do you dislike being admired?”

“Of course not. I’m human too, so being respected feels good. But right now, you clearly see me as someone above you.”

I didn’t like that.

I was just a lucky rogue martial artist who, by sheer chance, managed to break through the wall of transcendence.

Meanwhile, Tang Sowol had reached the Flowering Stage (*Hwagyeong*) and was one of the few absolute masters who had resisted the Heavenly Demon until the very end.

At present, I may be ahead of her thanks to the insights I gained before my regression, but Tang Sowol has the potential to become far greater than me—and she must.

Twenty years. It may sound like a long time, but when considering that she must grow strong enough to face a monster like the Heavenly Demon, it’s far too short.

In the worst-case scenario, I might have to drag Tang Sowol and flee, even if it means being resented for life...

But after spending a short time in the Tang Clan, I realized something. No matter what, Tang Sowol would seek revenge.

Even if I had no intention of doing so, unless I severed her tendons and shattered her core, she wouldn't stop. Perhaps, even if she were crippled, she wouldn't give up.

Ultimately, before the Heavenly Demon and the Demonic Cult march upon us, we need to become as strong as possible. If she continues to unconsciously see herself as beneath me, that will be a problem.

I couldn't explain everything in detail, so I tried to convey my thoughts with one statement.

“So don't set me as your limit.”

“Huh?”

“I want to walk alongside you, not become the wall that blocks your path.”

“A limit...”

“Tang Sowol can become a martial artist far stronger than Cheon Hwi-da. And the same goes for me. Don’t overestimate me, and don’t underestimate yourself.”

Tang Sowol fell silent, seemingly lost in thought. After a long moment, she finally parted her lips to speak.

“There might be a way, Cheon Hwi-da.”

“Hm?”

“You mentioned that the *Purple Flower Poison Enhancing Grass* wasn’t consumed but kept for later use, right? In that case, instead of absorbing it, I’ll burn through it all at once. Doing so will temporarily amplify my poison techniques.”

“That’s dangerous.”

“Yes, it will be. Even with my innate poison immunity, I might not be able to withstand the toxicity, and my body could collapse.”

“Nine times out of ten, that’s exactly what will happen.”

“But I’d be able to take down everyone present.”

Tang Sowol had arrived at the same idea she did before my regression. I gave her a nod of approval.

“Exactly. The strength you’ve seen in me is nothing more than that. Don’t dwell on it too much and focus on your own training.”

“And you’d come running to save me when I collapse, wouldn’t you?”

“What?”

Interrupting me, Tang Sowol added with a playful smile.

“Wouldn’t you? Since you fell for me at first sight and kidnapped me, you’d come running no matter what.”

“It’s the same for me. If Cheon Hwi-da were in danger, I’d rush to save you too. That way, instead of gaining strength from some tragic resolve, it would come from trust in one another, wouldn’t it?”

“What are you trying to say?”

“I mean, Cheon Hwi-da, don’t belittle your own abilities.”

Her triumphant expression, as though she had gotten the better of me, was irritating, yet it made me chuckle.

It wasn’t a bad feeling.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

It was shortly after my arm, injured during the recent sparring match, had healed.

“Young Hero Cheon, would you mind coming out with me for a while today?”

Tang Sowol suddenly appeared at the training grounds where I was practicing and made this unexpected request.

Seeing her face early in the morning wasn't a bad way to start the day, but her sudden visit and spontaneous suggestion were a bit abrupt.

“Right now?”

“Of course not. You just woke up, your hair is a mess, you only washed your face briefly, and you're dressed in your usual, casual training attire. Naturally, I meant later, around lunchtime, so we could have a meal together.”

“...?”

For a moment, I couldn't understand what she was saying, so I quietly studied her appearance.

Her neatly tied black hair was fixed in place with an elegant hairpin. It wasn't overly extravagant, but it exuded a subtle elegance. Upon closer inspection, her hair gleamed with a smooth luster, without a single tangle. Messy hair, she said? Clearly, it had been meticulously combed and treated with fine oil—though she likely hadn't done it herself, her maidservants must have.

Then there was her face. Her skin had always been flawless, but with a light application of makeup, her natural beauty was even more radiant. No one could possibly describe her as disheveled. Again, her maidservants must have helped her

prepare.

Lastly, her clothes... but really, what more could a martial artist need besides practical attire?

After organizing my thoughts, I looked directly into Tang Sowol's black eyes and opened my mouth.

"I think you've done quite well already. Don't be too hard on your maidservants."

"Pardon? What do you... Wait a moment. Did you think I was talking about myself just now, Young Hero Cheon?"

"Weren't you?"

At my question, she let out a disbelieving scoff.

"Good grief. Honestly, this is ridiculous."

"Just explain what you mean."

“Look here, Young Hero Cheon. I was talking about *you*.”

“Me?”

As I blankly repeated her words, Tang Sowol strode toward me with quick steps. Due to my not-yet-fully-grown body, I had to look up at her slightly.

...Humiliating.

Grumbling inwardly, I sheathed my sword, and in that brief moment, Tang Sowol reached out and began tidying my hair.

“What is this mess? It looks like a bird’s nest!”

“Isn’t it normal to get sweaty after morning training? I was planning to wash up properly and then have breakfast.”

“I know that. You come to breakfast with wet hair every morning these days.”

After roughly finishing tidying my hair, Tang Sowol gently rubbed the corner of my eyes with her thumb.

“If you’re going to wash your face anyway, do it thoroughly. How can you walk around with eye crusts like that?”

“I was just swinging my sword lightly to wake myself up. I wash properly when I meet other people, so it’s fine.”

“Haah...”

Tang Sowol let out a deep sigh, then took half a step back and spread her arms wide, as if inviting me to take a good look at her.

“Young Hero Cheon, I’m here, aren’t I? I go through all this trouble every morning just to see you, yet you can’t even make yourself presentable?”

“Hmm.”

She wasn't wrong. Normally, Tang Sowol would only come to see me after finishing her own work, usually in the evening. Lately, however, she had been making brief morning visits as well.

"We are engaged, after all. Though the formal betrothal ceremony hasn't taken place yet, it will happen soon. Eventually, we'll get married and spend the rest of our lives seeing each other's faces every day, fighting and making up."

"Well... I suppose that's true."

"But I don't really know what it means to act like a proper fiancée. So I decided to try doing what I think a proper fiancée should do. Visiting you every morning is part of that."

I never would have guessed that was the reason. Then again, while I hadn't clung to her so closely, I had spent quite a long time with the pre-regression Tang Sowol.

During that time, we had seen both the best and worst of each other, and our difficult lives had hardened us.

Furthermore, while I didn't know where he was or what he was doing now, I knew that the monster known as the Heavenly Demon would one day set the world ablaze.

Although it wasn't an immediate concern, it was only natural that I felt a certain sense of urgency.

But for Tang Sowol, the situation was completely different.

She was barely in her early twenties, had only recently entered the martial world, and had already experienced numerous crises, including an abrupt engagement.

Even if I didn't know everything about her, it was obvious that she still held expectations and fantasies about the world—far more than I did.

In hindsight, wasn't I also struggling, not because of the Heavenly Demon or anything grand like that, but simply because I wanted to live a happy life with Tang Sowol?

I reflected briefly on whether I had been too indifferent, but before I could dwell on it further, Tang Sowol, who had been exuding a sulky atmosphere just moments ago, suddenly broke into a playful smile.

“Actually, never mind. Now that I think about it, you might as well stay the way you are, Young Hero Cheon. After all, I'm five years older than you. If I continue tidying your hair and wiping your eyes like this, isn't that also something a proper fiancée should do?”

“I’ll just be more mindful from now on.”

“Hehe, that’s a good decision. While you claim you don’t meet anyone regularly, you still have me, don’t you? Even if I don’t go overboard, I still try to dress neatly just to show myself to you.”

With that, she took half a step back, spread her arms wide again, and spun around in place, as if to show off her appearance. I couldn’t help but let out a chuckle.

Meanwhile, Tang Sowol, now even more confident, continued with a bold and unabashed expression.

“In any case, since that’s settled, you’ll have to accompany me today.”

“It’s no longer a request but a demand, huh? But are you even allowed to go out?”

“Pardon? What do you mean by that? Unlike you, Young Hero Cheon, I don’t go around kidnapping people.”

“Didn’t you almost get yourself killed the first time you left the house? I doubt the Poison King will allow it so easily.”

They were still investigating whether there were any other parties involved or if there was a mastermind behind the incident.

Once the investigation concluded, they planned to make an example out of it to prevent such incidents from happening again...

According to what Tang Sowol had told me before my regression, while there were minor collaborators, there wasn't any significant mastermind, so the matter would likely be settled soon.

In any case, from the Tang Clan's perspective, the situation with Tang Sowol wasn't entirely resolved yet.

If she tried to go out during such a time, even I would say it's a bad idea.

After listening to me, Tang Sowol tilted her head, then soon made a face as if she had realized something.

“Oh! Of course, I didn't mean we'd go far. I was just talking about strolling through the marketplace in Chengdu.”

“Chengdu isn’t exactly a small village.”

Even before the Tang Clan established itself, Chengdu had been the largest city in Sichuan Province. No matter how influential the Tang Clan was, treating the entire city as their backyard was a bit much.

“Oh, it’s fine. The Tang Clan has people everywhere in Chengdu. It’s practically our backyard. Father even gave his permission, though we’ll have escorts following us.”

“Is the influence of the Five Great Clans really that extensive?”

“Well, um, actually, the Tang Clan is a bit less influential compared to the other Five Great Clans. Due to the nature of our martial arts, we tend to be a bit more reclusive.”

“...”

“For example, the Namgung Clan, which is the largest among the Five Great Clans, practically rules Anhui Province like kings. They’re said to have noble lineage, though I’m not sure if that’s entirely accurate.”

In the past, I had picked up a sword purely to make a living. I wasn't interested in honor, so I avoided unnecessary conflicts with orthodox martial artists.

I mostly traveled around Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Guangdong Provinces, steering clear of orthodox territories whenever possible.

Most of the orthodox martial artists I met later had been defeated by the Demonic Cult and were in decline. Though I had heard that the orthodox factions were once highly powerful, I didn't realize it was to this extent.

Meanwhile, the unorthodox world was so preoccupied with internal conflicts that the formation of groups like the Black Lotus Sect was remarkable in itself.

"Fine. You said around lunchtime, but when exactly should I come?"

"Hmm... I'll come find you when I'm ready. Just take it easy until then."

"No. This time, I'll come to you."

"Pardon? But I might take a while getting ready. You could end up waiting for quite some time."

“Then I’ll wait. So far, you’ve always come to find me. This time, I’ll come to you.”

“Oh my...”

Tang Sowol smiled brightly and nodded.

“Alright! Then I’ll be waiting happily for you, Young Hero Cheon.”

After making our promise, she walked away with light steps. Only after she had left the training grounds did I resume swinging my sword.

When I went to find Tang Sowol at the appointed time, I was told she was still getting ready and to wait outside for a bit.

I had already been warned that it might take a while, so I didn’t mind waiting. However, as I glanced down at my outfit, I couldn’t help but frown slightly.

“This is uncomfortable.”

I was wearing a long green robe made from Sichuan silk, known for its exorbitant price.

While it felt luxurious against my skin and looked elegant, the long and flowing fabric constantly clung to my body, making movement cumbersome.

When I had asked my attendant to prepare something appropriate for a stroll with Tang Sowol through the marketplace, she had enthusiastically brought out this attire.

And it wasn't just one outfit—she had laid out over ten different robes with the help of another attendant, all in varying shades of green, and told me to choose.

To my eyes, they all looked more or less the same, but I picked one anyway. Then, they brought out several pairs of shoes to match the robe.

Even after I chose a pair of shoes, it didn't seem to end, so I hastily tied my hair back and slipped away.

Do the children of every prestigious family endure this sort of thing from a young age? How do they manage it?

Though I had handled a fair amount of money during my time with the Black Lotus Sect after reaching the transcendent level, most of it had gone toward acquiring new martial arts techniques and elixirs.

Of course, there were limits to what money could buy, and even after spending most of it, I still lacked what I needed.

In hindsight, the sect's leadership had truly been petty. Though they had a vast library of martial arts techniques and occasionally awarded high-quality manuals as rewards, they would dismiss me by saying none of them suited me.

Granted, my division, the Ironblood Hall, had a reputation for being made up of troublemakers despite their skill, so it's true that we weren't well-liked. Moreover, it was understandable that the Black Lotus Sect Leader, who was also a master of the Flowering Stage, sought to keep Ironblood Hall's leader in check, as he was similarly ostracized by the unorthodox world.

Still, refusing to reward us despite our accomplishments seemed overly petty for someone who claimed to be the supreme figure of the unorthodox world.

Although it didn't matter much now after my regression, just thinking about it made me seethe inwardly.

Creak—

Finally, the door, which had been tightly closed, opened, and Tang Sowol appeared.

She didn't look significantly different from when I saw her in the morning. However, with her slightly more vibrant makeup, her ornate gown, and matching accessories, her entire atmosphere had changed.

The Tang Sowol I knew had always been a martial artist, but the person before me now was unmistakably the daughter of a prestigious family.

Though it was clearly the same person, she felt unfamiliar. As I stared blankly at her, our eyes met, and she too seemed to be taken aback by my appearance.

“Ha!”

“Pfft!”

Simultaneously, we both burst into laughter, dispelling the awkward atmosphere in an instant.

After sharing a hearty laugh, Tang Sowol, wiping tears from her eyes, tilted her chin up in a mock haughty manner.

“Shall we go, Young Hero Cheon?”

“Who am I to disobey?”

Nodding, I moved to stand beside her.

As we walked together, the escorts following behind us frowned deeply, as if witnessing something they shouldn't have.

...Must be single.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

This happened back when I was part of the Black Lotus Sect, working under the alias *Blood Wolf*.

My direct superior at the time, the Ironblood Hall Leader, was, in many ways, the worst. But occasionally, she did share some useful advice.

One of the things she said was that people live their entire lives learning something.

How to walk, how to speak, how to make friends, how to wield a sword, how to work, how to maintain relationships, how to care for one's family, how to find wisdom in the words of the ancients, and so on.

There are countless things to learn in this world—so many that one lifetime isn't enough to master them all. Naturally, some people will learn things that others won't, and even when learning the same things, some will progress faster or slower than others.

But despite that, people must never give up and must continue to learn. Especially if they are dissatisfied with their current situation.

'Only by doing so can you become a better person.'

The Ironblood Hall Leader's voice, when she said that, was filled with regret.

What could have left such a powerful warrior, who had reached the Flowering Stage, with such a deep sense of regret? At the time, I was merely a wretched swordsman who knew nothing, so I couldn't understand.

I only remember being moved by her words, urging me not to repeat her mistakes.

That's how I came to learn reading and writing for the first time. Thanks to that, I was able to read martial arts manuals and learn more techniques.

Next, I learned arithmetic, so I could avoid being scammed when trading. After that, I stopped chasing down and killing swindlers who had cheated me.

In addition, I learned how to drink while keeping pace with my comrades, how the Black Lotus Sect operated, and occasionally, I even picked up new martial arts.

While my swordsmanship was honed through real combat, and my inner cultivation was something I developed by reflecting on my own life, my movement technique was something I had learned from the Ironblood Hall Leader.

Yes, our final moments together had been the worst, but the process leading up to it wasn't entirely bad.

From her, I didn't just learn how to wield a sword—I learned how to live in this world. Though she would have vehemently denied it, the Ironblood Hall Leader had been something akin to both a parent and a mentor to me.

However, one thing I didn't learn from her was what to do when you go out on a date with your fiancée to a bustling marketplace.

She had lived her whole life as a single woman and died that way, so even if I had asked, she wouldn't have been able to teach me.

For that reason, I found myself feeling a bit lost and uncertain as I looked at Tang Sowol.

“Do you have a specific place in mind that you want to go to?”

“Nope! But this is just like taking a stroll in front of our house, so why overthink it? Let's just start by getting something to eat, then we can walk around and sightsee.”

“Well, that works.”

Nodding, I walked alongside Tang Sowol. After passing through the main gate of the Tang Clan estate, it didn't take long before we found ourselves amidst a bustling and lively scene.

After walking a bit further, we entered a quiet and relatively empty main street.

It wasn't that the street was in a bad area—on the contrary, it seemed to be in a high-end district.

The people walking around were all dressed in expensive-looking clothes, the carriages passing by were luxurious, and the buildings on both sides of the street were tall and imposing.

“Looks expensive.”

“It's fine. I wasn't planning on asking Brother Cheon to pay anyway. Besides, the place we're going to is run by the Tang Clan, so as long as you're with me, everything will be free.”

“I wasn't planning on paying either. I already spent my entire fortune on buying you those dumplings.”

“Oh my, are you still upset about that? But my stance hasn’t changed. Those pills were not food.”

“If it fills your stomach, it’s food.”

“Coming from someone who eagerly devoured the meals prepared by the Tang Clan’s chef, that’s not very convincing.”

“I only ate because I was hungry. Because I was hungry.”

“You said it was because you’re still growing, right? Hehe. That’s true—you still have a lot of growing to do, Brother Cheon.”

Tang Sowol smirked as she placed her hand on the top of her own head, pretending to measure her height against mine.

Sure, I might be a little shorter than her at the moment. But that’s only a temporary setback. Before my regression, I had been at least a hand’s width taller than her.

No, this time, I would grow even taller. I had started learning proper martial arts at an earlier age and hadn’t been skipping meals, so it was only natural.

“Wait five years, and we’ll see.”

“So, you mean we’ll still be going out together like this in five years? I’m looking forward to it.”

“Honestly, I think I preferred it when you treated me like an old geezer.”

“Come on. It wouldn’t have made much of a difference. There are several reasons why I’m so comfortable around you, and it’s not just because of your age.”

Saying that, Tang Sowol clasped her hands behind her back and walked ahead of me, only to suddenly spin around and face me while walking backward.

“First of all, I realized you’re not as scary as you looked when I first met you, Brother Cheon.”

“I’d love to tell that to the people who died by my hand.”

“Even if you exude killing intent toward others, I’m an exception, aren’t I? That’s enough for me.”

“Haah...”

Tang Sowol answered without hesitation, speaking in a calm tone.

“And second, it’s probably because you’re head over heels for me, isn’t it?”

“It’s not to that extent.”

“Most people don’t risk their lives for someone unless they’re deeply in love. And it’s even rarer for someone to refuse all other rewards just to ask for the person they saved. Honestly, for a moment, I felt like I was the heroine of a romance story.”

“If you look hard enough, I’m sure you’ll find a few people like that. Men are simpler creatures than you think, Tang Sowol.”

“Maybe there are others like that. After all, I’m pretty, and I’m the daughter of the Tang Clan. But the important thing is, you were the first.”

“I won’t bother asking whether you feel embarrassed saying you’re pretty out loud, since you clearly don’t look embarrassed in the slightest.”

“Chit.”

Tang Sowol clicked her tongue lightly, then turned back around to face the road ahead as she continued speaking.

“And lastly... No, on second thought, maybe I shouldn’t say it.”

“Once you start, stopping halfway only makes me more curious.”

“It’s just that, now that I think about it, it might come across as rude to you, Brother Cheon.”

“Tang Sowol, what could you possibly say that would offend me? Did you forget that I’m from Zhejiang Province?”

Hearing that, Tang Sowol tilted her head in confusion and asked,

“I don’t mean anything by this—I’m just genuinely curious. What kind of place is Zhejiang Province that you say things like that?”

“It’s the heartland of the unorthodox world. But that probably doesn’t mean much to you, does it? Hmm, how should I explain this?”

After thinking for a moment, I recalled a fitting story and began to speak.

“First of all, I’m an orphan.”

“Huh... Oh...”

“There’s no need to look so concerned. Both of my parents passed away when I was too young to remember their faces.”

“That just makes it harder to know how to react.”

“It’s fine. Things are about to get even more difficult.”

I chuckled as I said that, and Tang Sowol slowed her pace to walk beside me again, as if signaling her intent to listen carefully.

“It’s not that remarkable of a story. In Zhejiang Province, it’s common for ordinary civilians to be ruined by rising unorthodox martial artists.”

A husband working outside was killed by a rogue martial artist over a trivial matter. Unable to let her child starve, the grieving wife gritted her teeth and began working as a lowly servant for the man who had killed her husband. Unfortunately, she was later beaten to death by a drunken customer.

The orphaned child, left alone in the world, survived by begging in the streets until, after growing up a little, they sought a way to make a living. Eventually, they ended up serving the very people who had killed their parents.

“What do you think that child would have heard while working for those people?”

Tang Sowol’s face had gone pale, and she kept her lips tightly sealed. I patted her on the shoulder to comfort her.

“Ah, I shouldn’t have shared such a grim story during our outing. Don’t worry. In the end, I killed them all myself.”

“Was it... revenge?”

“No. It was survival. As I said, I don’t even remember my parents’ faces.”

Had I stayed there any longer, I would have been worked to death, or used as a disposable pawn in a dangerous mission.

Before my regression, there had indeed been several times when I came dangerously close to dying.

While talent played a part in how quickly I grew stronger, my environment was undoubtedly a significant factor.

If I didn’t want to die, I had no choice but to become stronger.

“That’s why I said it’s fine. At the very least, I know you, Tang Sowol, don’t speak out of malice.”

Tang Sowol bit her lip briefly, then looked up at me with glistening eyes.

“Brother Cheon, may I continue what I was about to say earlier?”

“Of course.”

“Actually, I was wondering if I could teach Brother Cheon things you don’t know.”

“Huh?”

“Not the ways of the unorthodox, but the ways of the orthodox... No, that sounds too grand. I just wanted to show you a normal way of life.”

“What’s the point of a martial artist seeking normalcy? That’ll only dull the sword.”

“A sword doesn’t always have to be sharp, does it? The way I see it, you always keep your edge up, except when it comes to me. You feel like an unsheathed blade.”

“I won’t deny that. But can something like that even be taught? I’ve lived this way my whole life, and I don’t see anything wrong with it.”

“I’m not saying I’m absolutely right, or that I want to change you. That would be too presumptuous. I simply want to show you.”

“Show me?”

“Yes. If the reason you don’t know another way of life is because you’ve always walked your path, then I’d like to show you that there are other paths—and that they aren’t so bad. And if possible, I want to be the one to show you.”

Suddenly, I remembered the Ironblood Hall Leader, who had once taught me even trivial things.

‘Live a life for yourself, not just a life of survival, whenever you get the chance.’

I hadn’t understood what she meant until I was on the verge of death.

And now, Tang Sowol was saying something very similar.

I found myself staring blankly at her side profile. Her face was slightly redder than usual, and her breathing was uneven, as if she was nervous after making such a bold statement.

I couldn't help but smile.

“Haha!”

“What's so funny? I was being serious!”

“Nothing. I was just surprised by how unexpectedly sentimental your words were. Did you rehearse that in advance?”

“N-no!”

Tang Sowol averted her gaze, flustered. That reaction was unexpected.

Imagining her practicing her words alone, mumbling to herself, made me feel amused.

“Is that so? You didn't rehearse it?”

“Ugh! That expression... It’s annoying, you know? Let’s just go inside. We’re eating here!”

Tang Sowol stopped in front of a large tavern with a signboard that read *Myeongwolru (Bright Moon Pavilion)*.

“Since it’s still daytime, I was planning to order food without alcohol. That’s fine, right?”

“I don’t mind. But this place looks quite fancy. Were you planning to show me the life of a wealthy person, rather than a normal one?”

“You’re trying to tease me, aren’t you? But Brother Cheon, since the moment you became my fiancé, you’ve already ensured that you’ll never have to worry about money. At least, not as long as you can spend as much as I do.”

“Is that true?”

“Probably? Even if I have to share the money I receive with you, it won’t be a problem. There’s more than enough.”

After touring the Tang Clan estate, I had realized that the wealth of the Five Great Clans was beyond imagination.

Unlike the unorthodox sects, which desperately hoarded wealth, they didn't seem to lack funds.

Now that I thought about it, I wouldn't need to hoard money either.

If I ever needed a large sum of money, I could use it to buy martial arts techniques, swords, and elixirs... But those were all things I could already get from the Tang Clan.

"...Now that I think about it, having money seems pointless."

"Then how about we figure that part out together? Let's start by having a meal."

"Alright."

Tang Sowol took my arm and led me into the tavern.

Feeling the warmth of her hand, I decided that, for today at least, I would forget about martial arts and the Heavenly Demon.

We enjoyed a meal of spicy Sichuan cuisine while chatting, and afterward, we wandered through the marketplace, snacking on treats and watching street performers display their skills.

We continued to explore various parts of Chengdu, purely enjoying ourselves.

Who knows how much time passed?

Before we knew it, the sun had set, and the streets grew dark as the shops began to light their lanterns.

Though neither of us said anything, we both began retracing our steps back to the Tang Clan, walking a little closer than before.

Upon arriving at the Tang Clan, unexpected news was waiting for us.

“Sowol, we’ve identified the mastermind behind those who tried to harm you.”

“What?”

“What do you mean...?”

There was a mastermind?

Something was beginning to unfold differently from what I remembered before my regression.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

Even though night had fallen, the Tang Clan estate appeared busier than it had been during the day. There was an odd, tense atmosphere in the air.

“Is something going on?”

“I’m not sure. Anyway, we were supposed to have dinner with Father and Brother tonight, so we can ask them about it then.”

“Hm.”

Nodding, I followed Tang Sowol past the outer residence and into the inner residence. It was at that moment that we locked eyes with Tang Cheong.

“Prepare everything carefully. Since the Patriarch will personally accompany you, focus more on hidden weapons than poison, understood?”

Tang Cheong, who appeared to be instructing martial artists at least twice his age with a serious expression, brightened up as soon as he noticed us.

“Sowol! My dear sister!”

Pausing his conversation with the warriors, Tang Cheong strode quickly toward us, spreading his arms wide.

“Rejoice! We’ve uncovered the mastermind behind those who dared to target your life!”

“Oh, so that’s what happened.”

Tang Sowol nodded as if understanding everything, while I couldn’t help but freeze in shock.

It was because, before my regression, she had told me there hadn't been any mastermind behind the attack.

Back then, even though Tang Jincheon, the Poison King himself, had vowed revenge and personally set out to exact it, the matter ultimately fizzled out after dealing with a few minor accomplices.

But now, they claimed to have found the mastermind. Something was unfolding differently from what I knew.

The Tang Clan wouldn't falsely accuse someone of being the mastermind without reason, so something unexpected must have occurred to alter the course of events.

“Ah.”

I see.

In the past timeline, it had been widely known that Tang Sowol returned to the Tang Clan in a critical state. Rumors about her being severely injured, even having her face disfigured, had spread far and wide.

In contrast, this time, the incident had only caused an uproar within the Tang Clan when contact with her had been lost. To the outside world, it likely appeared as if she had simply returned early from a mundane trip into the martial world.

At best, those who knew more might assume that a man had appeared, prompting the Poison King to personally bring the two of them back.

Only the Tang Clan and possibly the Beggar's Sect, whom they had sought assistance from, knew the full truth.

In other words, before the mastermind could fully grasp how things had concluded, they were exposed.

In the previous timeline, the widespread rumors about Tang Sowol would have given the culprit enough time to make a clean getaway.

Of course, this might not be the case. I wasn't particularly skilled at complex reasoning. Still, if Tang Cheong's words were true, and there really was a mastermind who had targeted Tang Sowol's life...

I needed to see for myself who these people were.

“Don’t worry too much. They dared to touch a direct member of the Tang Clan. Father himself will act, so not a single one of them will escape.”

Although Tang Cheong was smiling, his voice was as sharp and cold as a drawn blade. No one held grudges as fiercely as the Tang Clan.

Nodding inwardly, I asked,

“Brother, can you tell me who they are?”

“Hm? Since you were involved, I suppose there’s no reason to keep it from you.”

Tang Cheong nodded, perhaps recalling how I had assisted Tang Sowol. His tone was noticeably softer than usual as he continued.

“You’ll hear the full details from Father during dinner, but to get straight to the point... It’s the *Demonic Cult*.”

“What?”

“Those lunatics, obsessed with revenge, have crept back into Zhongyuan and dared to plot against Sowol.”

For a moment, my mind went blank.

At this point in time, it wasn't surprising that the Demonic Cult was being dismissed by others. From the very beginning, it was a group formed by powerless commoners driven by a desire for revenge after being trampled by martial artists.

Their numbers weren't large, and their combat prowess was, at best, on par with a single martial sect. Who would consider them a threat?

Had the Heavenly Demon, that unparalleled genius, not rewritten all of the Demonic Cult's martial arts and armed those vengeful souls with swords, they would have remained insignificant.

But for the Demonic Cult to appear now...

I didn't know why they had targeted Tang Sowol, but if the young man I had seen at the end—the Heavenly Demon, who looked far younger than his true age due to undergoing *Reversal Rejuvenation*—had already risen to the position of cult leader, then their objective was clear.

They were laying the groundwork for their invasion of Zhongyuan.

As that thought struck me, my jaw clenched involuntarily.

Grit.

If it was truly the Demonic Cult that had scarred half of Tang Sowol's face, nearly taken her life, and snatched away what little happiness she had managed to grasp at the end of her difficult life...

Then it was only right to return the favor.

Suppressing the killing intent that threatened to spill out, I opened my mouth.

“Brother, when will the sword you promised me be ready?”

“Oh, uh, ahem! I heard it was completed while you were out, so you should be able to pick it up now if you go to the forge.”

“Thank you. I'll make good use of it.”

After giving Tang Cheong a polite nod, I turned to Tang Sowol.

“Since it’s ready, I’ll stop by the forge for a moment. I’ll come to your room in time for dinner.”

“Huh? Oh, yes, sure... Alright.”

Leaving the bewildered Tang Sowol behind, I headed toward the forge, which I had toured once before.

Deep within the inner residence of the Tang Clan, hidden away in an isolated corner, was a spacious building with an enormous waterwheel.

The sound of water flowing softly, diverted from the river into the Tang Clan estate solely to power the bellows, tickled my ears.

To an outsider, it might have seemed like a ridiculous, massive construction project. But for the Tang Clan, this was undoubtedly the best solution.

The Tang Clan is often referred to as the forefather of poisons and hidden weapons.

While not all poison techniques and hidden weapon arts originated from the Tang Clan, it's undeniable that they refined and developed them to an unparalleled degree.

These two elements—poisons and hidden weapons—are the twin pillars supporting the Sichuan Tang Clan. However, they also have a significant weakness:

Poisons and hidden weapons rely heavily on their unpredictability.

While a strong foundation is essential for all martial arts, poisons and hidden weapons are particularly vulnerable to countermeasures.

If an opponent knows which poison is being used, they can prepare an antidote in advance. And if they know what type of hidden weapons to expect and how they'll be thrown, it becomes much easier to defend against them.

Thus, the Tang Clan has always maintained a strict policy of secrecy.

Although they sometimes purchase rare poisons or ingredients from the outside, most of their poisons and antidotes are produced and formulated internally at

the *Hall of Ten Thousand Poisons*, making it nearly impossible for outsiders to deduce their compositions.

Likewise, they didn't build their forge by the riverside like most others. Doing so would have risked leaking information about their hidden weapons. But without a waterwheel-powered bellows, the forge's fire would be too unstable.

So, someone in the Tang Clan had come up with an idea: since the estate was large enough, why not dig a channel to bring the river into the forge?

The scale of digging a channel large enough to power a waterwheel must have been enormous, but the Tang Clan's wealth made it possible.

At least, that's how Tang Sowol had proudly explained it to me the last time we visited.

What had impressed me, however, was something else entirely.

Typically, technology advances through exchange. Even martial arts evolve through sparring, as evidenced by the existence of open sparring matches.

Yet, despite maintaining such a high level of secrecy, the Tang Clan had developed technology that was unmatched.

Even the assassins of *Sal Valley*, a group so ancient that no one could trace their origins, had to admit defeat when it came to poisons and hidden weapons in front of the Tang Clan.

Among hidden weapons, there are cases where their craftsmanship alone, regardless of martial prowess, determines their power.

For example, though I had never seen them myself, there were tales of *Soul-Chasing Flying Butterflies*, which flew unpredictably like butterflies while scattering poison.

Or *Invisible Steel Threads*, razor-thin steel wires drawn so fine they couldn't be seen by the naked eye.

And then there were hidden weapons that exploded without warning, such as *Ink-Smoke Needle Barrels*.

Before my regression, Tang Sowol primarily used poison techniques, not only because she had a natural affinity for poison, but also because, after the Tang Clan's annihilation, it had become nearly impossible to reproduce the clan's secret hidden weapons.

With high expectations, I arrived in front of the forge. Through the wide-open doors, a wave of heat washed over me, accompanied by the clamor of metal being struck from all directions.

The sight of molten metal, freshly pulled from the furnace and glowing red, being struck by hammers until sparks flew like tears was almost mesmerizing.

A little further away, I noticed some elderly smiths carrying roughly shaped hidden weapons toward the back, where they would likely be completed.

Since I had already been given a tour by Tang Sowol, I was permitted to enter this far. However, the areas where complex and rare hidden weapons were completed were restricted to direct members of the Tang Clan.

I approached a young apprentice who was bustling about with various tasks and called out to him.

“Excuse me, do you have a moment?”

“Ah, y-yes! Uh... may I ask who you are?”

The apprentice, who looked to be around my age, responded promptly but cautiously, perhaps startled by my silk robes, which I was wearing for the outing.

“I heard that the young master prepared a sword for me, and that it’s ready.”

“Oh! You must be the one who saved our lady! Please wait a moment—I’ll go inform my master!”

The apprentice gave a quick bow before dashing off to speak to a burly middle-aged man. He gestured animatedly as he relayed my story.

Though I couldn’t hear them clearly over the constant ringing of hammers, it was obvious that the apprentice was talking about me.

At first, the middle-aged man, who seemed used to such interruptions, paid little attention. But then he flinched, turned toward me, and after putting down his hammer, disappeared for a moment before returning with a sword I hadn’t seen before.

Though I hadn’t yet drawn the blade, just from the hilt and scabbard, I could tell it was an impressive weapon.

As he stood before me, the smith, with deep-set eyes, spoke.

“You’re brimming with killing intent.”

“Was it that obvious?”

“When a person exudes an aura like that of a sword, most martial artists would say they’re drenched in killing intent.”

“I thought I was suppressing it, so that’s a bit surprising.”

“I’ve spent my life forging blades. Even if it isn’t pointed at me, I can recognize an unsheathed sword when I see one.”

With those words, he handed me the sword.

“It’s forged from *White Lotus Steel*. Would you like to draw it?”

“Of course.”

I unsheathed the sword, focusing on the feel of it in my hand.

The grip was comfortable and secure, while the scabbard offered no resistance as the blade slid out. The silver gleam of the blade reflected my face, and the sharp edge was pleasing to behold.

It wasn't made from any rare material, just high-quality steel that had been repeatedly tempered.

As such, the craftsmanship of the smith was evident. It was clear that this man was a skilled artisan.

Had the materials been better, it could easily have been called a masterpiece.

“It's an excellent sword. I'd heard that the Tang Clan had many outstanding smiths, but I didn't expect such a fine weapon to be crafted in such a short time.”

“Though the Tang Clan focuses on poisons and hidden weapons, that doesn't mean our warriors don't wield swords. I'm glad it meets your satisfaction.”

The smith offered a faint smile before asking in a casual tone,

“So, what will be the first thing you cut with that sword?”

“My enemies. The ones who dared to target my fiancée.”

“I see... the lady’s enemies.”

The smith nodded and curled one corner of his mouth into a smirk.

“For a first target, I can’t think of anything more fitting.”

I couldn’t agree more.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

“Does the new sword suit your taste?”

Tang Sowol, now dressed in a more comfortable outfit after changing out of her elaborate going-out attire, spoke in a slightly thorny tone.

“Just curious—did you perhaps get a bit sulky because I went to fetch the sword alone?”

“How old do you think I am? I wouldn’t sulk over something like that. Though, since you said you wanted to act like a proper fiancé today, it would’ve been nice if you’d finished things in a more ‘fiancé-like’ manner.”

“Well, you *are* five years older than me, so I doubt something like this would upset you too much.”

At my comment, Tang Sowol’s lips began to pout more and more, as if she’d just been struck by something.

Seeing her obviously sulking expression, I chuckled softly and added,

“I like mature women.”

“...Could you be more specific?”

“Alright. Specifically, I like women who look good in green clothes, who like to boast about being older but still act childishly, who go out of their way to guide their suddenly acquired fiancé around, and who take him out, wanting to show

him the things they like.”

“Hmph. Fine, I’ll let it slide this time, seeing how sincere you’ve been today.”

Tang Sowol nodded with a mock-haughty air, but did she realize that her cheeks were already turning red?

I didn’t bother pointing it out. Watching her fanning herself for no reason or awkwardly gazing off into the distance was too amusing to interrupt.

As we neared the agreed meeting place, Tang Sowol spoke in a low voice.

“Brother Cheon, you’re planning to follow my father when he goes after those who tried to kill me, aren’t you?”

“I am.”

Instead of answering, Tang Sowol remained silent, her expression resolute, as if she had made up her mind about something.

Before long, we arrived at the reception hall. I lightly announced our presence before opening the door, and a familiar scene greeted us.

The table was filled with food—not too excessive, but not lacking either—and Tang Jincheon waited for us at the head seat.

The difference from last time was that Tang Cheong and a middle-aged man I didn't recognize were also present, creating a strangely heavy atmosphere.

Although Tang Jincheon often found time to have dinner with Tang Sowol despite his busy schedule, it didn't seem like he had called us here today just for a casual meal.

No, that was certainly not the case. Tang Cheong's presence was understandable, but there was no way an unfamiliar face would be here without reason.

Tang Sowol, sensing the unusual mood, spoke cautiously with a slightly tense expression.

“Uncle, you're here too.”

“As you might’ve guessed, we have something rather important to discuss today.”

The middle-aged man shrugged. He didn’t have an imposing or overbearing demeanor, yet something about his presence was subtly intimidating.

Still, his lighthearted speech and mannerisms made him seem peculiar in many ways. Judging by Tang Sowol’s address, it was clear who he was.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. My name is Cheon Hwi, and I’ve recently become engaged to Tang Sowol.”

“I’m Tang Yujin. I usually serve as the Patriarch’s personal bodyguard, so you probably won’t see me around much. But it’s nice to meet you. I trust you found the gift I sent useful?”

“Yes. It was exactly what I needed, and I’ve made great use of it.”

“That’s good to hear. Staying in good health is essential.”

I didn’t catch his muttered remark, so I tilted my head slightly in confusion, but before I could dwell on it, Tang Jincheon cleared his throat and spoke.

“Ahem. Now that introductions are done, take your seats.”

“Yes.”

I took a seat next to Tang Sowol, causing Tang Jincheon’s eyebrow to twitch slightly. However, he quickly regained his composure, as if he was already used to this sort of thing.

“Well then, as Yujin mentioned, there’s something we need to discuss. It’s not exactly a pleasant topic, though.”

Naturally. I was already on edge, and hearing the full details would probably make it hard to keep eating.

After taking a bite of braised pork belly and nodding in satisfaction, Tang Jincheon finally began speaking.

“By the way, Sowol, I heard you went out to the marketplace with Brother Cheon today...”

He started with casual small talk—asking about our outing, whether the new sword suited me, and how life in the Tang Clan had been treating me.

As the meal progressed, the lighthearted atmosphere gradually gave way to something more serious. When we were nearly finished eating, Tang Jincheon's demeanor shifted.

“Now, let's get to the main topic.”

He didn't exude any aura or release his energy, but his presence became distinctly more pronounced.

For a martial artist at the Flowering Stage, merely being their true self was enough to create pressure and establish authority.

This wasn't Tang Jincheon, Tang Sowol's father, speaking—it was the Patriarch of the Sichuan Tang Clan.

“We've identified the mastermind behind the attempt on Sowol's life. They're agents of the Demonic Cult.”

“I've heard as much from Brother. But I have a question.”

“Go ahead.”

“Where did this information come from? It’s been a while, and we hadn’t heard anything until now.”

“That’s true. We initially hired the Beggar’s Sect to investigate, but all they found were people who had unknowingly aided the attackers by lending them money or providing carriages. None of them knew the real mastermind. At that point, we were about ready to give up...”

So far, everything was in line with what I had heard before my regression.

“Then, out of nowhere, we received word from the Hao Sect. They claimed that the ones responsible were Demonic Cult members hiding in Guangdong Province, who had incited some unorthodox martial artists with a grudge against the Tang Clan. They also insisted they had no direct involvement.”

“That’s rather sudden. Why the Hao Sect?”

“I thought so too. That’s why I forwarded the information to the Beggar’s Sect for cross-verification, and they confirmed it was entirely accurate.”

I see. Now it made sense.

Unlike in the previous timeline, the culprits had missed their window to escape and had been detected by the Hao Sect. Fearing the Tang Clan's wrath, the Hao Sect must have promptly handed over the information to avoid being implicated.

After all, Guangdong Province, where the culprits were hiding, was home to the Hao Sect's main branch. They wouldn't want to be suspected.

As I nodded internally, Tang Jincheon continued in a calm voice, as if stating something obvious.

"Tomorrow, I will personally reduce those bastards to nothing but a handful of poison dust."

"Please allow me to join you."

"Hm?"

“They didn’t just try to kill Tang Sowol—they also tried to kill me. Whether it’s gratitude or vengeance, returning what you’ve received is the way of the martial world, isn’t it?”

“That’s true, but... are you certain you’re up for it?”

“I was taught that revenge isn’t something to be entrusted to others.”

Hearing that, Tang Jincheon’s tone softened slightly as he shook his head.

“It’s a bit sad to hear you say ‘others.’ Soon, you’ll officially be part of the Tang Clan.”

“Then let’s follow the Tang Clan’s motto: repay kindness twice over, and repay grudges tenfold. I have yet to repay this grudge tenfold.”

“Hah...”

“Well, if you insist that much, I suppose it’s fine. We’ll leave before noon tomorrow, so be ready.”

It was an easy acceptance, as expected.

At this point, the Demonic Cult was severely underestimated, and rightfully so.

In truth, they were weak. The only reason they had ever become a serious threat was because of the Heavenly Demon, not because the cult itself was strong.

Even during their full-scale invasion of Zhongyuan, there hadn't been another master at the Flowering Stage among their ranks besides the Heavenly Demon. That said it all.

Against minor agents of the Demonic Cult, there was no real need for someone as powerful as Tang Jincheon to act personally.

This was merely a demonstration of the Tang Clan's strength—a way to set an example by utterly crushing those who had dared to target the daughter of the Tang Clan.

Their philosophy was to repay both kindness and enmity to an excessive degree. This was how the Tang Clan handled the complex web of favors and grudges that bound the martial world.

Since they had overwhelming force on their side, my participation wouldn't change the outcome. That's likely why they accepted my request without hesitation.

Tang Sowol, who had heard this story before, listened with a calm expression. After a moment's thought, she spoke up.

"Father."

"Yes?"

"May I join you as well?"

"You too?"

"Yes. As Brother Cheon said, we are the ones seeking revenge. No matter how capable you are, Father, we can't simply entrust this to others. Besides..."

"Besides?"

When Tang Jincheon prompted her, Tang Sowol hesitated briefly before speaking, her face slightly flushed.

“I can’t just stay home and wait while Brother Cheon goes. After all... we’re no longer strangers.”

Tang Jincheon’s expression grew complicated, and Tang Sowol hurriedly added,

“Besides, you’ll be with us, Father. There’s nothing for me to be afraid of.”

“Hm.”

It was a transparent attempt at flattery, but even knowing that, it seemed to have worked.

Tang Jincheon’s lips twitched slightly, as if he was struggling to suppress a smile. After maintaining a solemn expression with some difficulty, he finally nodded.

“Very well. On one condition—you must tell me how much of the *Purple Flower Poison Enhancing Grass* you’ve absorbed.”

“It’s almost completely absorbed. Even now, I can use my poison arts to a decent extent, and in three days, it should be fully absorbed, allowing me to exert my full strength.”

“Perfect. It’ll take at least three days to reach Guangdong Province, so focus on resting and absorbing the poison during the journey.”

“Yes!”

Tang Sowol beamed brightly, like someone who had just received a gift, and Tang Jincheon couldn’t help but smile contentedly.

It was then that Tang Cheong, who had been silent until now, spoke up.

“Father, as for me—”

“Cheong, you’ll stay here and guard the household. The Poison Blood Division and the elders will remain, but we can’t leave the estate entirely unguarded.”

“No, I understand. I was just going to ask you to bring back a souvenir on your way back.”

“What?”

“I heard that Guangdong’s *Hundred Flowers Wine* is quite famous. Supposedly, it’s brewed by monkeys. Doesn’t that make you curious about how it tastes?”

Tang Cheong shrugged nonchalantly, wearing a brazen expression as Tang Jincheon stared at him in disbelief.

“I just thought it would be perfect as celebratory wine.”

“Well... I suppose it *is* a cause for celebration.”

Tang Jincheon reluctantly agreed.

Wait, do they have a tradition of celebrating every time they settle a grudge or repay a favor?

I tilted my head in confusion, but before I could think too much about it, Tang Jincheon let out a deep sigh and spoke.

“Sowol. Cheon.”

“Yes?”

“What is it?”

“Once this matter is resolved, we’ll hold your engagement ceremony.”

With a reluctant tone, Tang Jincheon continued.

“After the engagement ceremony, you may call me father-in-law. And I’ll stop calling you ‘Cheon’ and start calling you ‘son-in-law.’”

“Understood, father-in-law.”

“Not now! After we return and finish the engagement ceremony!”

“Of course, father-in-law.”

“Urgh...!”

Tang Jincheon clutched the back of his neck.

I wished he wouldn't look at me as if he were trying to kill me.