

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

chapter 271-275

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"Go die."

Seol Lihyang glared at me, voice cold, eyes twisted in anger.

But I just grinned, thinking, This isn't so bad either, and opened my mouth.

"For someone born with a Pure Yin Physique... I didn't expect to hear such words from you, Seol Lihyang, a true bundle of talent."

"No matter how amazing my physique is, compared to you, Cheon Hwi, it's barely like having cold hands and feet."

"Isn't that a bit of an exaggeration?"

Chuckling, I took Seol Lihyang's hand. Just like she said, her temperature felt cool, almost like someone with poor circulation.

And just as I felt her coolness, it must've felt warm to her.

As I held and gently rubbed her hand for a while, her sharp gaze slowly began to soften.

With a clearly gentler tone, Seol Lihyang finally spoke.

"So? Why did you suddenly bring up talent and all that? Just in case—it was aimed at me, wasn't it? If it was, next time we kiss, I'm going to bite your tongue."

"Isn't that a bit extreme?"

"I'm talking about your tongue, Cheon Hwi, not mine."

"Oh dear. That's even more extreme."

I shrugged and gave her a simple explanation of what had happened today.

Seol Lihyang listened quietly until the end, then slowly opened her mouth.

“So basically, isn’t this just because you suck at teaching?”

“...”

“Well, I mean—maybe not talent, but you clearly don’t have much experience. You’ve sparred with me and Sister Sowol plenty of times, but our weapons and martial arts are completely different from theirs. And it’s not like you were formally teaching us—just pointing out weak points during sparring.”

She was right.

It was simply sparring—pointing out flaws like “this part is weak”, or “if you strike here, it’ll be sharper.”

So how to resolve those issues—that was something each of them had to figure out on their own. It wasn’t something I could help with.

It's not like I know much about assassination techniques, poison arts, whip techniques, or sound-based arts anyway.

Tang Sowol had Tang Jincheon, and Seol Lihyang had a ton of martial arts manuals she'd brought from the Ice Palace, so I'd never really worried.

But that only worked because both of them were geniuses.

For an average person—or someone with less talent—this kind of haphazard teaching was horribly inefficient.

Come to think of it, I've thought plenty about defeating people, but I can count on one hand the times I ever sparred with the intent of teaching someone.

Occasionally I'd help Tang Sowol or Seol Lihyang with guided sparring... or back before the regression, there was Jin Baek from the Wudang Sect, who had died in my place—he lingered in my thoughts.

I remember when I visited Wudang before; I stayed a few days and taught him properly.

Those three were it—the only ones I'd truly tried to teach.

Tang Sowol and Seol Lihyang were undisputed geniuses. And while Jin Baek might have lacked some innate ability, his mental strength was extraordinary.

Actually, even his talent wasn't that lacking. He might not have been on par with Wudang's next sect leader, but he was a fairly promising late-stage young warrior.

To be rated that highly within a prestigious sect like Wudang was proof that he had real talent.

It's just that his mental toughness overshadowed everything else.

Before the regression—he was the one going around saying he'd restore the sect's martial arts, claiming the techniques had been lost, even though the people had survived.

In truth, the martial arts hadn't been lost. They'd just been corrupted—tainted by the killing intent of those who had survived long wars and sect exterminations.

Even once-noble Taoists had swung blades filled with murderous intent and resentment, and even devout monks had no hesitation in staining their hands with blood.

That was the era—where everyone struggled just to survive, and the entire world was steeped in demonic energy.

Even in such times, Jin Baek had tried to erase all traces of killing intent and restore the original sword path.

Well... he failed due to his ambiguous talent, but the fact that he kept a righteous heart in those circumstances was already impressive.

In any case, that's how it was. This is my first time trying to teach someone truly average, or even less than average.

And since I plan to stay near the Diamond Arhat for a while, I'll likely need to keep helping out with the young warriors in the training grounds from time to time...

“This is the situation. Honestly, I have no idea where or how to begin.”

“Mm. Yeah, it's kind of complicated. But...do you really have to stay close to that Elder?”

“Yes. I don’t know all the details, but I’m certain.”

“What kind of vague logic is that... Oh, right.”

Seol Lihyang’s expression was one of disbelief, but then she nodded, as if remembering something—probably the mental restriction.

“Okay, I get the circumstances. But do you really have to teach well?”

“Hmm???”

“You said the important thing was the pretext, right? Then it doesn’t matter if you’re not that good at teaching.”

“That’s true, but... if I’m doing it anyway, I want to do it properly. More than anything, I’ve never seriously taught anyone before, so I’d like to gain some experience. You never know; it might help in the future.”

“In the future? Ah... Right, your martial arts—didn’t you say you created your own original techniques? It would be a shame for those to disappear. Are you thinking of taking on a disciple someday?”

“Whether it’s a disciple or a child, either would be fine.”

“Mmm... like Sister Hwarin said, if you have enough kids, one of them is bound to have sword talent.”

“Isn’t that a bit premature?”

“You’re the one who brought it up first, Cheon Hwi.”

Seol Lihyang shrugged, then sat with her back to me.

Freshly washed, her long black hair hung down to her waist, damp and gleaming in a way that looked different from usual.

“Dry it.”

“What were you thinking, coming out barely dried? What if I wasn’t here?”

“I can just wait until you show up.”

“At that point, dry it yourself...”

Shaking my head, I sandwiched her hair between my palms and gently rubbed it with internal energy.

Not hot enough to catch fire—but warm enough to dry the moisture thoroughly, vibrating with inner power.

It wasn't something like Heat Flame Art. I couldn't learn something like that at this point. What I used was an application of the Samadhi True Flame I'd learned from Seo Mun-Hwarin.

Originally meant for willpower training, but these days, I mostly used it to dry people's hair after they bathed.

Just like how, in summer, Seol Lihyang often got treated like an icebox.

And so, while carefully drying her hair, she spoke up again—not long after.

She must've been thinking over our earlier conversation.

“In the end, the root of the problem is that you've never taught anyone before, right? Then what can you do? Just take it slow and improve little by little.”

“Sss... Still—”

“It's greedy to expect someone who just picked up a sword to become a peerless master overnight, right? You just have to go step by step. Besides, your real goal isn't to educate the future of the Murim Alliance, is it?”

“Uh...?”

“The real goal is to get close to the Elder, Diamond Arhat, right? So if you're going to go so far as to do something you normally wouldn't, why not just ask him directly how to do it better? It'll reduce the distance, increase favor, and help you learn something new—three birds with one stone.”

She was right.

Since it had come to this, I might as well ask the Diamond Arhat for help.

I jumped to my feet.

“Thank you. That solved everything I was worrying about. I’ll go right away—”

“Hey! Cheon Hwi! Where do you think you’re going just like that?!”

“???”

I was just getting pumped up when I froze, startled. Seol Lihyang suddenly pushed her head in front of me.

“Dry my hair properly before you go.”

“Right.”

I wonder if this is how Seol Lihyang felt when I’d cool water for her just because she said “water” during summer.

Still, that was then, and this is now. How can you expect me to give up ice water in the middle of summer?

Following Seol Lihyang's advice, I asked the Diamond Arhat to teach me how to instruct late-stage young warriors.

When I began by saying I couldn't understand those without talent, he gave a wry smile, but as I continued, his expression gradually brightened.

Thanks to that, I spent over ten days at the training grounds with him, watching the martial arts of the Murim Alliance's warriors.

It didn't take long before the training grounds were packed.

"I didn't expect things to turn out like this."

"Haha. A young man at the Flowering Stage, and already a rising star, offering to evaluate their swordplay—how could anyone with pride not take a peek?"

“Please don’t tease me, Elder. Anyway, the problem now is... what do we do with all these people?”

“I’ll talk to someone and see if we can borrow a larger training ground. You just do what you always do.”

The Diamond Arhat stepped away for a bit, then returned and led us to a new location.

Surprisingly, it was somewhere familiar—the Grand Training Arena used during the Yongbong Gathering.

It had certainly grown larger in scale, but once something’s decided, it must be done.

What should’ve taken half a shichen, or at most one shichen, ended up taking just over two—but at least it was done.

My body was fine, my internal energy intact—but mentally, I was a bit worn out.

“I’m a little tired.”

“Seems the White Moon Sword Lord doesn’t enjoy crowded places.”

“Exactly. If these were corpses instead of people, I wouldn’t be nearly as exhausted.”

“...You still say things that are hard to understand, sir.”

A joke, huh?

Well, if it wasn’t a joke, they’d just think I was some bloodthirsty lunatic.

I suppose the fact he took it as a joke meant I’d earned some trust over the past few days.

Of course, from my perspective, I meant it. I’d just seen that many corpses before the regression.

This too—was all because of the Heavenly Demon.

As I nodded to myself, the Diamond Arhat suddenly stood.

“If you’d like, would you care to rest at my residence for a while, sir?”

“I’m not interested in men.”

“That’s not what I meant. Besides, I’m a monk.”

He let out a long sigh and continued.

“It’s just—before I became an Elder, when I left Shaolin and worked under the Murim Alliance, I received a gift from the Potala Palace.”

“A gift from the Potala Palace... That only brings ominous images to mind. Aren’t they devotees of Esoteric Buddhism?”

“Haha! It’s true the monks of the Potala Palace hold Esotericism dear, but I said it was a gift, not a curse. It’s harmless—no, it’s actually good for the body.”

“What on earth did you receive to speak so confidently?”

“A small bell. Strangely enough, when you hear its sound, it clears your mind. It’s said to be blessed.”

“There’s something like that?”

“I was skeptical at first, just like you... but its effect is real. Since you said you’re tired, why not listen for a bit before you go?”

Putting his hands together, the Diamond Arhat said so with a smile. After a moment’s thought, I nodded.

“Very well. If you say so, Elder, I’m curious now. I’ll accept your hospitality.”

“This way, please.”

As if he’d been waiting for that, he led the way.

His residence was quite lavish in appearance—probably constructed with care by the Murim Alliance, befitting an Elder.

But once inside, what I felt was an austere simplicity.

It felt less like a house, and more like a temple.

He had arranged the place like a shrine, and led me to a room with a small Buddha statue. Probably served a role similar to the Main Hall.

I was looking around absently when he proudly took out a small bell, just the size of a palm.

And the moment I saw it—

Ah.

I understood why the pre-regression Diamond Arhat had suddenly gone mad, like a completely different person.

Demon Bell.

The sound that little bell makes drives people insane.

All to steal their body.

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"The world has gone to hell."

It was a rather exaggerated expression, but not entirely wrong.

Half of the Orthodox Sects had been wiped out. The imperial army, only realizing the situation too late, was annihilated along with the capital. The alliance between the Orthodox and Unorthodox factions, which they had formed with such difficulty, continued to suffer one defeat after another.

Countless lives were lost, and even civilians with no connection to the fighting were fleeing in terror, scattering in all directions.

Naturally, food, weapons, and all kinds of supplies became scarce. Even gold, which had never once lost its value in the history of the Central Plains, was gradually losing its shine.

It was only natural. In times like this, a handful of rice or a sturdy sword was more desperately needed.

A time when everyone could only think of their own survival. The very tail end of such an age.

The problem wasn't only the Demonic Cult.

"The Outer Murim is stirring up trouble again, aren't they?"

"Even now, when they've come deep into the Central Plains and are rampaging, we still call them the Outer Murim?"

"We've always called them that, so what can we do?"

Tang Sowol shrugged. Her hair was pure white, and she kept her bangs long to cover half her face.

Yet even so, her beauty couldn't be hidden. The fact that I momentarily forgot to breathe was likely due to being poisoned—by her.

“Well, whether they're Outer Murim or Central Plains Murim, they're all going to get smashed by the Heavenly Demon in the end anyway.”

“I suppose so. I heard that recently, the Southern Barbarian Beast Palace tried to expand into Hunan Province but was severely beaten down by the Heavenly Demon and had to hole up again.”

“Hmph. So they're content with just Guizhou Province? How naïve. I doubt the fanatical members of the Demonic Cult would spare them just because they're from the Outer Murim.”

“They're probably trying to negotiate with the Demonic Cult. Whether it'll work or not... Well, it has nothing to do with us either way.”

“True. Whether it's Guizhou or Yunnan, it's all too far away now.”

The Orthodox-Unorthodox Alliance was steadily losing ground after each defeat.

At this rate, within a month or two, they'd have to retreat all the way to Hebei Province. And by then, there'd be nowhere left to retreat to.

And in times like this—no, because it was times like this—the once-silent Outer Murim began to go berserk.

To seize even a little more of the Central Plains, and to lend a hand in a way that wouldn't offend the Heavenly Demon, the undisputed strongest being of the age.

As just mentioned, the Southern Barbarian Beast Palace had secured its power all the way from Yunnan to Guizhou Province, and the Thousand Poison Gate had stirred up chaos by penetrating even deeper into the Central Plains. Only after the Poison Demon was taken down by Tang Sowol did they retreat.

The Ice Palace of the Northern Sea had remained quiet for some reason... but the Potala Palace had also seized the opportunity and was steadily devouring the Central Plains—though in a rather peculiar way.

“I heard the Blood Buddha has appeared.”

“Already? It hasn't been that long since he was killed in the last battle, has it?”

“Yeah. Someone must've shaken that damned Demon Bell somewhere.”

Tang Sowol's tone was unusually rough—but I could understand how she felt.

Fighting an enemy that resurrects endlessly must be maddening, even for a Flowering Stage warrior.

All the more so in a bleak situation like this, where each time you return, familiar faces have vanished one by one.

“How anyone could see that grotesque thing and call it ‘reincarnation’...”

“Well, if he likes reincarnation so much, we’ll just have to kill him as quickly as possible so he can do it again.”

“Hearing that from none other than the Poison Dance Empress is terrifying.”

“Hehe. Don’t worry. My poison won’t be aimed at you, Blood Wolf.”

Tang Sowol lifted her chin smugly. Her confident gesture made me smile, but unfortunately, the moment didn’t last.

“If the Blood Buddha has reappeared, who’s going to deal with him this time?”

“It won’t be me, so rest easy. Most likely... it’s the Azure Heaven Sword Lord’s turn.”

“I see.”

“Even if it were my turn, don’t worry too much.”

“Hm?”

“Even if the Blood Buddha tries to break into my mind using dark sorcery, how could he take over my body when it’s already filled with something else?”

“Vengeance, is it? I won’t tell you to give it up, but be careful not to be consumed by it.”

“That’s not the only reason...”

“In this twisted world, I don’t think I could go on living without you.”

“Hmm. That deserves a passing grade.”

Tang Sowol nodded with a strangely satisfied expression.

Together, we blankly stared out at the street.

I saw warrior monks walking quickly with their heads lowered, and people throwing stones or hurling curses at them.

“They’ve done nothing wrong... yet people go this far.”

“Everyone knows. But when temporary relief through hurting others becomes the only entertainment left...”

Tang Sowol spoke calmly.

In Buddhism, there are many kinds of rituals. Naturally, many tools are used for them.

Among them is something called Demon Bell.

It's not a bell struck with a hammer, but one that's shaken in the hand, hence the name Demon Bell, and when used with a vajra, it's also called a Diamond Bell.

But its original meaning had long since been distorted.

In today's world, when one says Demon Bell, they almost always mean Demon Bell— a demonic bell.

A bell of enchantment, just as the name implies.

Its sound makes the listener feel peaceful, washing away all worldly thoughts... but before long, one becomes obsessed with the sound.

They begin craving it all day long. And anyone who interferes with that—be it parent or child—is seen as the enemy.

Once someone reaches that point, it's already too late.

Just like an opium addict, listening to the bell becomes their sole purpose in life. Eventually, they lose all reason.

And when that demonic energy from the bell seeps into the very marrow of the bones, the ancient ghost sealed within it awakens—

The Blood Buddha.

He was once the master of the Potala Palace, the one responsible for driving them into the depths of Esoteric Buddhism. A long-dead spirit who possesses the bodies of those ensnared by the bell.

Just before the end of his natural life, he sealed himself inside the bell using a grand ritual imbued with all the truths of Esoteric Buddhism.

By deceiving and eventually possessing others' bodies, he extended his life again and again.

To me, he's nothing but a parasite... but he called it reincarnation, spoke proudly of it, and whenever he appeared, the Potala Palace would swarm to him like bees, treating him as their Supreme Grandmaster.

Right. Up to that point, it would just be distasteful—but not a problem.

There were lunatics everywhere now that the world had fallen apart.

The real problem was that whenever the Blood Buddha revived, he quickly regained strength on par with the Flowering Stage—or close to it.

And then he'd use that power to claim he was creating a Pure Land on Earth, slaughtering everyone who wasn't a Buddhist.

For reference, his definition of a Buddhist was someone who followed the teachings of the Potala Palace. He even called Shaolin monks mere demons pretending to be monks.

No matter how many times the Blood Buddha was slain, he would just come back—an endless war of attrition.

Of course, if the bell were destroyed, his twisted reincarnation would end—but no one knew where it was.

Once, we were lucky enough to capture an elder from the Potala Palace and interrogate him.

According to him, only the Blood Buddha knows the bell's location. Even the current Grandmaster doesn't know.

At this point, I was curious why the Blood Buddha had remained dormant for so long... but I had a pretty good guess.

The bell had either been sealed away somewhere, left unused because no one knew its purpose, or stored like a sacred relic—never shaken, since it had once belonged to him.

Then the Demonic Cult invaded, throwing the world into chaos, and in that confusion, the bell found its way back into the world.

Originally, such wicked power would've been vulnerable to Buddhist martial arts—Shaolin or Mount Emei could have dealt with it quickly.

But no. Despite having deviated from the true path, the Potala Palace was still a branch of Buddhism. The techniques of Esoteric Buddhism, which gave rise to the Blood Buddha, were twisted interpretations of Buddha's teachings.

Because of that, the bell—and the Blood Buddha—could not be suppressed by orthodox Buddhist sects.

In fact, they seemed even more vulnerable to the bell's temptation.

So as the Blood Buddha rampaged and his notoriety spread, the prestige of the Buddhist sects plummeted.

It was a time when unity was desperately needed, yet they bickered and faltered from within.

Still, I could understand. Most of the Buddhist elders had been killed by the Heavenly Demon, and those who survived were half-mad with vengeance—but not mad enough to act, still paralyzed by fear.

So their pent-up frustration was vented on the most convenient targets.

“Tch. I really don't like this. It's bad enough that a dog's grown a tail, but now it's barking at the wrong person.”

“Are you going to step in?”

“Even if you try to stop me, it’s too late. My mind is made up.”

“My, these days it feels like people are dropping dead left and right, yet you're the only one who dares speak that way to me, a Flowering Stage master.”

“Got a problem with it?”

“I’ve always liked people who have a bite to them. That temperament—it’s just like poison, isn’t it?”

A compliment—one I wasn’t sure whether to be pleased about or not. Tang Sowol didn’t care, stepping beside me and urging me on.

“What are you standing there for? Let’s go.”

“Apologies. I was momentarily captivated by your beauty. If only I could see the other half of your face too.”

“Ugh...”

Tang Sowol flinched, subtly adjusting her hair to hide even more of her face.

But soon, seeing my expression, the corners of her lips lifted slightly.

“You’re such a tease.”

“Didn’t you say you liked that kind of man?”

“Correct answer. Good job.”

Her voice was brusque, but warm and clear. She began walking forward, and I naturally matched her pace.

The disturbance settled quickly after a few swings of the sword. With Tang Sowol stepping in as well, things should be peaceful for a while.

Or so I thought.

But that fleeting calm didn't last.

Because the Azure Heaven Sword Lord—Nangung Jong—who had gone to defeat the Blood Buddha, returned as the Blood Buddha.

The reason was simple. The Potala Palace had aligned with the Demonic Cult.

And through that alliance—they had gained the Heavenly Demon's support.

Nangung Jong.

When I saw him again, his entire body was dyed blood-red, as if drenched in gore.

And then—the Diamond Arhat proudly took out a small bell.

As the bell shook, a strange aura flowed through its clear chime.

The moment my forcibly stilled mind recognized the sensation, I understood everything.

Why the pre-regression Diamond Arhat had suddenly gone mad.

Why the Blood Buddha and the bell had never appeared until the Murim Alliance was shattered by the Demonic Cult's invasion.

Demon Bell

I fixed my eyes on the small bell in the Diamond Arhat's hand—and instantly drew my sword.

Because I drew it so abruptly, some of my internal energy leaked out, causing a fierce gust of wind.

A chaotic wind tore through the room. A streak of sword light shot out from the center.

Even for someone like the Diamond Arhat, who stood at the peak of Sub-Perfection, it should've been impossible to react at this distance.

If I cut down the bell now, I could prevent countless future tragedies. I could cripple the momentum of the Potala Palace.

But—

Clang!

Though hastily struck, the sword energy wasn't shallow—it was clearly defined.

And yet—it was blocked.

The Diamond Arhat, who shouldn't have been able to react, had reacted.

He covered the bell with his hand, blocking my sword with the back of his own.

His hand, now soaked red as if bathed in blood, trembled—and his lips curled into a grin.

“So, I’ve been found out?”

The situation had taken a turn for the worse.

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Before I knew it, the Diamond Arhat’s hand was soaked in red, as if drenched in blood. His lips curved into a wide grin.

“So, I’ve been found out?”

The model monk from just moments ago was nowhere to be seen. The smile before me exuded a chilling sense of wrongness.

His eyes bulged grotesquely wide, and the blood that began from his hand soon spread past his arm, staining his entire body.

Though not a drop of blood had been spilled, the deranged monk looked like he'd been drenched in gore.

With a deep sigh, I let his name escape my lips.

“...The Blood Buddha.”

“So you do know me.”

“I happened to come across records of the madman who led the Potala Palace into corruption.”

I had only ever seen him from afar before the regression, but the memory was still vivid.

A grotesque monk wrapped in blood-soaked robes, spouting lunatic proclamations—there was no way I could forget that sight.

Hearing my composed tone, the Blood Buddha nodded.

“Corruption and madness, is it? I suppose that's how I must appear to the ignorant... But how strange. My existence should hardly be known in the Central Plains.”

“Just because you’re not well known doesn’t mean no one knows of you.”

“O deluded child... I see the stains of murder upon your soul. Are you now claiming that someone like you, a demonic cultivator hiding beneath the skin of an Orthodox warrior, has ties to Shaolin?”

“I’d rather not hear that from a madman wearing a monk’s skin.”

“Hmph. I don’t even know where to begin correcting you.”

With an unnervingly calm tone, the Blood Buddha flicked his wrist. The small bell in his palm—the Demon Bell—was instantly pulled back into his sleeve.

Cl-click.

A tongue-click escaped me instinctively.

Damn it. Hidden in his robe like that, I wouldn’t be able to track the bell’s location, and even if I did, he could easily twist his body to keep it protected.

I should've destroyed the bell with the first strike.

No—realistically, that would've been impossible. Until the moment he took out the bell and offered to let me hear it, I hadn't suspected the Diamond Arhat of being the Blood Buddha.

In fact, if I'd suspected anything, it was that something might happen to him soon, so I'd planned to stay close and keep watch.

I'd been completely fooled.

I managed to avoid the worst possible outcome, but half the plans I'd built so far had turned to dust.

That strike just now—that was the best attack I could have launched at the time. But the Blood Buddha, wary of the possibility, had defended against it.

That's all there was to it.

No use regretting what's already done. Focus only on what must be cut down from here on.

Hoo.

I exhaled slowly, mixing a trace of regret and irritation into my breath, releasing it from my body.

The sensations extending from my sword grew sharper.

Just as I'd been able to feel every shift within the reach of my killing intent, I could now sense everything within the range of my willpower.

The Blood Buddha's presence was truly strange.

It felt as if the clean, bright qi of the Diamond Arhat was still present—yet layered atop it was something thick, heavy, and reeking of blood.

Was it because he had taken another's body? Two distinct presences radiated from him, even contradicting one another.

The discomfort of this dissonance made me grip my sword tighter.

While I was ready to strike again, the Blood Buddha was still mulling something over.

Lightly tapping his palm with his opposite fist, he suddenly widened his eyes.

“I see! It would be faster if I just explained from the beginning.”

“Huh?”

While I was ready to fight, it seemed the Blood Buddha had been pondering how to continue his speech from earlier.

Even if my earlier strike didn't pierce him, I was still a warrior at the Flowering Stage. He couldn't possibly look down on me this openly.

“First off, I am not a monk. After countless reincarnations, I am destined to become Maitreya Buddha in a far future age. I've never worn a monk's skin... Ah, unless you're talking about this body? In that case, I suppose you're not entirely wrong.”

“You lunatic. Is that what’s important right now?”

“Of course it’s important. I understand that I may appear mad to those not yet enlightened, but such views are simply due to ignorance. I shall forgive you with a heart full of great compassion.”

...No. The Blood Buddha wasn’t looking down on me.

Quite the opposite—he couldn’t afford to. That’s why he was taking the time to explain himself.

Maybe he was just excited to finally be free of the bell after so long, thrilled to meet someone who recognized him.

Or maybe he was simply insane and truly believed he was Maitreya.

Or... perhaps he was secretly preparing something—like one of his esoteric Buddhist techniques.

“But child... while I may forgive you, the Maitreya within me cannot.”

Still in a calm voice, he drew forth a vajra infused with red light from his robe.

I didn't know what he planned to do, but I wasn't late to react this time.

KWA-RANG!

My thunderous step shook the ground.

The full power of Origin Thunder Saber surged forward, pushing aside the scenery around me as I closed the distance to the Blood Buddha.

My sword's aura, which had briefly flared outward due to the sudden draw, was now condensed—refined into a pure white blade.

I held the sword level at shoulder height, drawn back like a taut bowstring.

As I reached a step before the Blood Buddha, I stomped down hard, pouring every ounce of power into the thrust.

Taesan Piercing Sword.

A concentrated thrust filled with intent to pierce, aimed directly at the Blood Buddha's eye.

In life, the Blood Buddha had certainly reached the Flowering Stage. But before my regression, he'd only ever shown power near the entry level of that stage.

Sometimes, he hadn't even seemed like a full-fledged master.

And of course, no one had ever called him an Unbreakable Vajra Body.

The reason was simple.

While the Blood Buddha retained all his enlightenment and could forcibly elevate his realm through unknown means, he couldn't escape the limitations of his new host body.

The Blood Buddha had only been powerful after taking over Namgung Jong's body—and now, having possessed the Diamond Arhat, he was unusually sturdy once more.

But Master Jeong Hyeon of Shaolin once said—Unbreakable Vajra Body wasn't some great level of mastery, but simply a state that had not yet been broken.

The Diamond Arhat had trained enough to be a candidate for the Diamond Arhat seat itself. However long ago the Blood Buddha had taken his body, enough time had passed for him to reclaim the Arhat's original level of mastery.

The way my sword had been repelled earlier, and the information I'd gathered before the regression—everything pointed to this:

The current Blood Buddha had attained the Unbreakable Vajra Body.

But that didn't mean he was invincible.

Shreeeek!

My white-hot sword pierced toward his eye. This blade—the same one that had once pierced even the Heavenly Demon's body—now dug into the Blood Buddha's flesh.

I felt a strong resistance. Perhaps even his eyes had been trained?

Still, compared to the rest of his body, they were relatively soft.

The blade pushed in, at least the length of a knuckle. If I just pressed harder, I could pierce his skull, destroy the host body, and rip the bell from his robes to smash it.

I gritted my teeth, ready to drive the sword deeper—

But the Blood Buddha's lips curled upward faintly, even as blood streamed from his impaled eye.

Just like the peaceful smile he'd worn while impersonating the Diamond Arhat.

“How foolish, child. Om.”

A strange sensation rippled through my skull, as if something had begun to vibrate from within.

At the same time, the Blood Buddha thrust his red-glowing vajra directly into his own heart.

Fwoop! KWA-BOOM!

A blast of bloody energy erupted from his chest.

It was powerful enough to shatter the surrounding walls. I tried to hold my ground, but mid-thrust as I was, I was blown away.

My body crashed through a wall and was flung outside. I spun in the air to absorb the shock and landed, quickly scanning my surroundings.

“White Moon Sword Lord?!”

“Isn’t that the Elder’s residence?! What the hell happened in there?!”

“Did they fight or something...?”

“If it was a fight, why would the White Moon Sword Lord be the one sent flying?”

Apparently, I'd landed outside the building. Passersby murmured among themselves, staring my way.

Their reactions were far too calm.

But if they loitered here any longer, they'd all be caught in the crossfire.

I drew upon my internal energy and shouted.

“Leave this place immediately! And summon the Alliance Leader, Master Tang Jincheon, and the Poison King!”

“Y-Yes, sir?”

They still didn't seem to grasp the situation. But that wouldn't last long.

Jingle...

A soft chime rang from the half-collapsed building.

At the same time, the eyes of the onlookers went unfocused—as if entranced by something.

The sound had no effect on me, as my internal energy and willpower protected my mind.

But those untrained... they were all mesmerized to some degree by the bell.

Then came the chanting of Buddhist scripture—not the calming kind, but the eerie kind that made every hair on your body stand on end.

Chanting as he stepped out of the building came the Blood Buddha.

His body was dyed in blood. My sword mark remained on one eye, and the vajra he'd stabbed into his heart now protruded from his chest.

As sunlight touched it, the vajra darkened and crumbled into dust.

Where the vajra had been—there was now flawless skin, dyed red, but without a single wound.

Unlike before the regression, he didn't laugh maniacally or spew incomprehensible nonsense.

He scanned the entranced crowd, then nodded in satisfaction.

“Come, my children. Salvation is here.”

“Ah... aaah...”

“Namo Avalokiteshvara... Namo Avalokiteshvara...”

Several onlookers, eyes glazed, began stumbling forward—then suddenly rushed toward the Blood Buddha at full speed.

From their movements, they didn't seem intent on fighting. So I grabbed the ones closest to me by the scruff and threw them far away. Those I couldn't reach—

Hrrngh!

I extended my will, swung my sword horizontally.

The blade stretched farther than its length, slicing just deep enough into the ankles of the charging crowd to drop them to the ground.

Even then, some of them clawed at the dirt, trying to crawl closer.

So I gathered my killing intent and knocked them all unconscious.

“What pitiful creatures...”

“Like hell I want to hear that from you. Weren't you planning to kill them anyway?”

“Not kill. I’m merely guiding them to the next life. Don’t you see? They’ll all become one with me, and together we’ll enter a Pure Land.”

He spoke with a serene voice.

But I remembered what he’d done before the regression. Enchanting people, taking their bodies, or smashing their skulls to absorb their jing, qi, and shen.

The red energy cloaking the Blood Buddha was both Buddhist energy and the gathered essence of countless others.

I said nothing and raised my sword again.

That finally woke a few high-level martial artists nearby. They weren’t fully under the bell’s spell yet, and they began dragging the dazed civilians away, shouting:

“W-we’ll call for reinforcements right away!”

At last, they’d realized something was deeply wrong.

We were in the heart of the Murim Alliance. Soon enough, the Alliance Leader, Tang Jincheon, and Seo Mun-Hwarin would be here.

No matter how far the Blood Buddha had advanced into Unbreakable Vajra Body, he couldn't withstand four Flowering Stage warriors.

Surely, even he knew that. And yet, the Blood Buddha simply looked up at the sky, calm as ever.

"The weather is nice."

"Yes, perfect weather for killing an old rat."

"This body is quite excellent. It trained in Buddhist martial arts, has both inner and outer strength, and is hardened to the point that the flesh is tougher than steel... But still, not quite as good as the body of a young genius who reached mastery at an early age."

I ignored whatever nonsense he was spouting and slashed.

My white-hot blade tore into the Blood Buddha's body again and again.

Cutting, stabbing, slicing—deeper, and deeper still.

At first, the Blood Buddha tried to respond, but soon he couldn't keep up. He simply took the hits, swinging his fists blindly.

Though the Diamond Arhat's body was tough, he was a Sub-Perfection warrior. He couldn't bring out its full strength.

Still, it was ridiculously sturdy.

Kaang! Kadeuk! Kagak!

Clashing metal and flesh—sounds hard to believe came from a sword and human skin.

Despite the force behind each strike, they barely left a scratch. And even those quickly healed, as the dark red energy rippled over his body.

I tried aiming for the eyes again, but having been hit once, he no longer left that opening.

I'd fought many martial artists with hardened bodies, but none who felt this impervious to my blade.

But I couldn't stop now.

I knew—Unbreakable Vajra Body was merely the name for something not yet broken.

I struck his arm again, deliberately aiming for the same spot, accumulating damage.

If it doesn't break, hit it until it does.

Just as I was about to launch a fiercer assault—

The Blood Buddha's twisted smile deepened.

"I'll say it again, child. What a beautiful day it is."

As he spoke, the world turned red.

Startled, I looked up.

Blocking out the sun was the vajra he had destroyed earlier—now hovering in the sky, radiating crimson light.

He had stopped punching and was weaving complex mudras with his fingers.

Some were familiar—gestures I'd seen in statues of the Buddha.

While I paused for a moment, he completed dozens of mudras and spoke again.

“A perfect day to be reborn.”

The vajra in the sky plummeted toward my crown.

It was fast—like a lightning bolt.

But not so fast I couldn't react. I raised my sword to intercept—

Whoosh.

My blade passed right through it, slicing only empty air.

Then the vajra struck my head.

There was no pain. But my vision went dark for an instant...

When I opened my eyes again—I was standing in front of the old Ironblood Hall compound, a place I thought I'd never see again.

And waiting at the gate was Seol Lihyang—no, it was the Demonic Sound Ice Witch.

“Ah...”

I had been too focused on the Blood Buddha's Vajra Body to realize it, but—

He was far more versed in esoteric arts than martial techniques.

Realizing the situation, I let out a deep sigh.

Then, as per the long tradition of the martial world, I uttered the words:

“...He's using Sorcery.”

Never thought I'd be the one saying those words.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

In the martial world, there are a few long-standing, unspoken traditions.

Things like: a grown adult shouldn't butt into the affairs of late-stage young warriors, or even if someone's young, if they're stronger than you, you call them "*Great Hero*," or that the Tang Clan's poisons and stealth arts are revered while the Sal Valley's poisons and stealth arts are dismissed as cowardly tricks.

These traditions are written nowhere, yet they've been established through atmosphere, survival instinct, and political reasoning—an unwritten code, so to speak.

It wasn't for nothing that Seo Mun-Hwarin was once pointed at and criticized. Despite her age and cultivation, she jumped into the Dragon and Phoenix Gathering—a playground for the late-stage juniors.

Because I had ties to Seo Mun-Hwarin, and because I've always been someone with a bit of a rebellious nature, I never thought much of these unwritten rules.

But now that I've experienced it myself, I found myself subconsciously seeking the shelter of those long-held traditions.

"He's using sorcery...!"

I never thought a day would come when I'd utter those words.

Well, generally speaking, there are two types of “sorcery” often mentioned:

Real sorcery and fake sorcery.

Most of it is fake. Orthodox warriors—especially those like myself, paragons of virtue—tend to take immense pride in the martial arts passed down by their sects.

So, when they witness some lofty technique they can't comprehend, they deny their own inferiority by shouting:

“Sorcery!”

I used to hear it all the time before the regression. Since I wasn't affiliated with the Tang Clan back then—just a wandering warrior or part of the Black Lotus Sect—people cried sorcery over everything I did.

Even if I merely stole a bit of their martial essence or disrupted their flow with killing intent, they'd yell “sorcery!”

Ultimately, the kind of sorcery I was accused of was always the fake kind—accusations born of insecurity and resentment.

But real sorcery exists.

Though rare even among demonic sects, it is practiced. And in the case of the Demonic Cult, about three or four in ten practitioners can use genuine sorcery.

True sorcery doesn't just refer to incomprehensible techniques. It truly affects the human psyche and creates strange, supernatural effects.

For instance, soul manipulation techniques, which disrupt a person's rational mind and turn them into puppets. The Black Lotus Sect often used them during interrogations.

There's also Illusion-Eye Demon Magic, a technique frequently used by the Demonic Cult, which causes hallucinations and auditory delusions just by making eye contact, disrupting judgment.

Broadly speaking, poison-induced core cultivation could be classified as sorcery as well.

There are many kinds of sorcery, but they all share one thing in common: they affect the mind.

Unlike martial arts, which begin with strengthening the body, sorcery works on the mind.

That's why I now call what's happening to me sorcery.

Hah...

The Ironblood Hall in the distance, and Seol Lihyang—the Demonic Sound Ice Witch—pacing nervously near the entrance, seemingly unaware of my presence.

The scene was familiar. And yet, it was something I could never see again.

“This is insane.”

Before the regression, I heard someone in the Orthodox–Unorthodox Alliance say: Sorcery is essentially a more convenient corruption of Taoist spells or Esoteric Buddhist techniques.

And though the Blood Buddha may be insane, he's a master of Esoteric Buddhist sorcery—enough to hijack bodies and reincarnate repeatedly.

I'm sure he's prepared horrors beyond anything I can imagine in order to shatter my mind.

But pain, rage, and despair—they've long walked beside me like old friends.

Whatever comes, I'm not going down that easily.

I'll endure and endure again, and eventually, I'll find the opening—strike it—and tear myself free from this nostalgic yet hollow illusion.

With renewed resolve, I stepped forward.

And—

“What the heck? You were taking so long I thought maybe you'd lost a limb or something, but you're fine. You're going to rest today, right? Just so you know—if you say you're training all night again, I'll kill you.”

“???”

Not the angry accusations I was expecting.

Seol Lihyang greeted me warmly—surprisingly so.

For reference, assuming I'd lost a limb means she was deeply worried, and threatening to kill me meant "please don't make me worry like that again."

So yes, this was her being affectionate.

I couldn't comprehend the situation for a moment, so I took a slow, careful look at her.

Her face was far more mature than the current Seol Lihyang. Her black hair was longer, and her dark eyes held deep, repressed emotions.

Her complexion was pale enough to be worrisome, and deep shadows were cast beneath her eyes.

Her Pure Yin Physique had begun to emit a far more direct sensuality, affected by seduction techniques.

A woman who seemed fragile, even devastated—but whose affection for me reached me with pure clarity.

The woman before me was the Demonic Sound Ice Witch.

The same woman who once held a pear in her hands, resting in my embrace with her eyes closed.

And the moment I remembered that—

I found myself pulling her into a hug, tightly, as if never wanting to let go.

Squeeze.

“Wh-What’s with you all of a sudden?! Did something really happen, Blood Wolf? Should I call the Clan Leader? Or take you to the Medicine Hall?”

“Just... just stay like this for a while. That’s enough.”

“Uh, okay. As long as you're alright.”

There was confusion and awkwardness in her voice.

But soon, her hands—previously hesitating—gently tapped my back.

Just like in the past, when I'd be struggling alone, and somehow she always knew and came to offer her warmth.

I thought I was prepared—but not for this kind of situation.

The feeling of her skin, the scent that filled my nose, the emaciated body—except for one area affected by her uncontrollable Yin energy—and her skin, cool to the point of cold.

Even more than the blurry memories from the past, this felt unmistakably like Seol Lihyang.

I didn't know why the Blood Buddha showed me this illusion—how he accessed memories protected by the mental restriction—or whether he could see this scene too.

Thoughts swirled through my mind like soap bubbles.

But no matter how large the bubble, it always floats atop water.

And the water beneath it all...was longing.

A deep, aching yearning—something I couldn't share with anyone, something I wasn't even sure was real, something I'd kept buried alone.

Now, it rose again and took form.

I didn't let go of Seol Lihyang for a long time.

“Ehehe. Did you miss my embrace that much? I mean, even a sword-obsessed maniac like you can't stay indifferent when I push this close.”

Once we broke the hug, Seol Lihyang smirked, her shoulders lifted in smugness.

She must've had a lot bottled up.

Thinking back to my Blood Wolf days, I could understand.

Back then, I was obsessed with the sword and sick of the tangled grudges of the martial world.

It wasn't until she was on the brink of death that I finally learned to face my own feelings. It must've been incredibly frustrating for her.

Still, that smug expression was annoying no matter how you looked at it.

"Fine. Like you said, Ice Witch, I should rest for a while. I guess that means we won't be slicing fruit together anytime soon."

"...What?"

"I was thinking of picking up another pear on the way today, but it's good I didn't."

“Wha—Blood Wolf, what the hell?! Wait! Stay right there. I’ll go get one!”

“You eat it. I’ve got no appetite.”

“Y-Youuu...!”

Seol Lihyang stomped her feet in frustration at my declaration that there would be no “night activities” for a while.

To be fair, back then, she couldn’t control her Yin energy, so I’d been helping her suppress it.

It dealt with the immediate danger, but also caused some unexpected side effects.

Her desires grew a little stronger due to the excessive Yin influence—and she developed a slight dependency too.

I ignored her, like a puppy denied a treat, and walked deeper into the Ironblood Hall.

The layout was familiar. But the details inside were not.

There were many servants moving about. And some familiar faces—people I recognized as servants from the Tang Clan, just in different clothes.

Unlike my memories—where unused parts of the building were often cracked and crumbling—everything here was clean and well-maintained.

No cold wind blowing in through broken walls, and firewood that used to be strewn about was now neatly stacked in the storage.

It looked nice, sure—but it felt a little off.

Clearly, it wasn't a perfect replica of my memories.

I organized everything I saw in my mind as I walked.

At some point, Seol Lihyang had gone quiet and was now dragging her feet with a gloomy expression. And before I knew it, I had arrived at the Clan Leader's office.

Gulp.

I swallowed dryly and gripped the doorknob. If I opened this door, Seo Mun-Hwarin would probably be inside.

Not the current her, but the version from before the regression—the leader of Ironblood Hall.

And with her came the image etched into my Heartscape—her final moments.

A snowy white field. A single camellia falling upon it. And red petals spreading across the pure white ground.

Perhaps because this place was such an accurate recreation of Ironblood Hall—even if there were minor discrepancies—that image came rushing back.

I steadied my wavering mind and opened the door.

Inside was—

“Hey. That’s enough, Poison Empress. This is my office, not your playroom.”

“Oh my, Ironblood Hall Master, could it be you’re getting shy? Don’t worry—it’ll suit you perfectly. I picked it with care. Even the Sword Demon won’t be able to look away.”

“I-Is that so? Still, this is a bit much...”

Waist-length white hair. A petite frame. A cute face and speech that didn’t match her age.

She was slightly taller than her present self and carried herself with more dignity, no longer as bound by her rejuvenated body.

But yes, that was definitely Seo Mun-Hwarin.

And she wasn’t alone.

White hair as well—but instead of letting it flow freely, it was pinned neatly with a hairpin.

Long bangs covered half her face.

The visible eye shimmered deep green, hinting at her martial realm.

Her green martial outfit, while clean, was worn—almost as if she'd cared for it dearly, despite having only one.

Tang Sowol. The Poison Empress.

The woman who poisoned me beneath the full moon, and who died with an unfulfilled promise—her heart pierced by the Heavenly Demon.

Seo Mun-Hwarin was not alone. Tang Sowol was with her.

There was no sign of Seo Mun-Hwarin hiding some lewd outfit she'd tried to gift her with.

They were simply both there.

Smiling, waiting for me.

Two people who could never meet. Who could never exist together.

Only then did I understand.

The true nature of the illusion the Blood Buddha was casting.

And how those under the spell of the Yoryeong had their bodies stolen so easily.

“...So this is the Pure Land, huh.”

The Blood Buddha wasn't shattering people with painful memories.

He was slowly melting their will... with the sweetest fantasy.

And that's why no one could resist.

Jingle...

Somewhere nearby, a gentle bell rang.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

What determines value?

It doesn't matter whether it's an object, a person, or a martial art.

What is the standard by which we assign value to something?

Back when I was still called Blood Wolf.

When I only knew how to swing a sword and couldn't even read, Seorin once threw that question at me.

If I gave a satisfactory answer, she said she'd obtain at least a low-grade elixir for me. After much thought, I answered.

My answer at the time was desire.

No matter how rare a gem is, if no one wants it, it's no different from a pebble. No matter how beautiful someone is, they won't appeal to someone of the same sex. Even if it's a divine and peerless technique, to a commoner, it's nothing more than a pipe dream.

So the most important thing is how much it is desired.

In other words, desire is the origin of all value.

That belief hasn't changed to this day.

And now, Blood Demon poses a similar but slightly different question.

"How much value is there in a world where all desires are fulfilled?"

While I was briefly lost in thought, recalling the past, a soft voice reached my ear.

Jingle—

“Oh my? There you are, Sword Demon. I’ve been looking all over for you.”

“...I thought I was somewhere fairly easy to find.”

“That’s true. When you leave the room, the first thing you see is the veranda. But even that short moment it took to reach your side felt like a thousand days to me. So yes, I really have been looking for quite a while.”

Tang Sowol, smiling brightly, sat next to me.

The sun had long since set, and the sky was now dark, with the moon and stars twinkling above.

Ever since I saw Poison Dance Empress Tang Sowol staying with the Ironblood Hall, I’d been wondering how this illusion was supposed to work. Before I realized it, so much time had passed.

Thanks to that, just when I had finished sorting my thoughts and was about to catch my breath, Tang Sowol came looking for me.

Not too close, not too far. But close enough to feel each other's presence.

Following my gaze, which had been absentmindedly fixed on the sky, Tang Sowol lifted her head and spoke.

“Am I intruding?”

“No. I've never once considered you an intrusion, Tang Sowol.”

“Hehe. That's such a sweet thing to say. For you, Sword Demon, to say something so unlike you... It makes me feel comfortable enough to speak freely.”

“What is it you want to say?”

Jingle.

“What else? About the pavilion you mentioned before. I’ve found a suitable site. Shall we go see it together sometime?”

Tang Sowol shrugged lightly. With that movement, some of her silver-white hair slid down.

As my gaze naturally followed the motion, Sowol’s brows drew a graceful curve.

“You remember, don’t you? The pavilion with a good view of the moon. The one you mentioned when you proposed to me. You said once it was built, the three of us would live together at the Tang Clan.”

“Yeah. I did say that.”

The Tang Clan wasn’t annihilated. Yet here was Tang Sowol, her hair turned white, mentioning the final promise we’d made.

I gave a bitter smile and nodded.

Surprisingly, in this world, not only is the Poison Dance Empress staying with Ironblood Hall, she’s supposedly promised to marry me along with Seol Lihyang and Seorin.

What a convenient dream this is.

Seorin hasn't renounced the unorthodox path, so she's still the White-Haired Rakshasa and Ironblood Hall Master.

Seol Lihyang is still renowned as the Demonic Sound Ice Witch, a top-tier unorthodox master.

Even if Tang Jincheon had once told Sowol that he'd prioritize her will in marriage matters, and even if he were lenient toward her...

Would he really allow her to marry a mere unorthodox drifter like me—especially alongside two infamous unorthodox women?

Well. If we're nitpicking that much, we'd have to question how Tang Sowol, Seol Lihyang, and Seorin are even in the same place to begin with.

All three are appearing in their past forms, not their current selves. And regardless of actual age differences, they all maintain their final appearances from just before their deaths.

Even the titles are inconsistent.

Seol Lihyang and Seorin still call me Blood Wolf, but Tang Sowol calls me Sword Demon.

If I consider the fact that I only became known as the Sword Demon after I went on a killing spree following their deaths... it's truly a contradiction.

And yet, it's all happening before my eyes.

A dream that shows me only what I want to see, without any logic or causality.

I've figured out what this place is. But I still don't know how to escape it.

Just as my thoughts were beginning to tangle again, Tang Sowol, who had been sitting at a reasonable distance, suddenly leaned in close.

Jingle.

Warmth wrapped around one of my arms. As our breath brushed against each other's cheeks, Tang Sowol whispered,

“When I'm with you, Sword Demon, I feel certain that even someone like me can be happy. Do you feel the same?”

“Of course.”

As I replied, she slowly lifted her face. Quietly, as if urging me, she leaned her face forward. My hand moved naturally.

I brushed aside the bangs covering half her face, then caressed the melted scar beneath.

This was the most powerful and certain form of affection between me and Tang Sowol.

We were each other's missing pieces.

Without her, I was nothing, and without me, she would slowly rot away.

Thus, we were only whole when we were together.

So it had been.

But for now, just for a little while, I want to close my eyes to everything.

Because I haven't yet had time to fully prepare my heart.

Because I'm still not confident in the method I've come up with.

And during the few days I've spent in this dream, I've learned something else.

The artificiality of this world doesn't end with the reunion of those I thought I'd never meet again.

No matter what I do, everything turns out well.

If I need something, no matter how events unfold, I end up getting it.

For example: I once bought dumplings at the market without thinking and told the vendor to keep the change.

That small act of generosity apparently paid for the vendor's mother's medicine. He wept with gratitude, and the entire village praised my virtue.

As a bonus, a ridiculously beautiful woman—supposedly the vendor's daughter—offered to repay me with her body.

Jingle—

I don't remember her well, but I must have encountered her at least once, either in this life or a past one.

Because everyone who appears here seems to be someone I remember, consciously or unconsciously.

A single good deed leads to a hundredfold reward. And of course, it comes with a beautiful woman.

It's childish and one-dimensional wish fulfillment, but beneath it, there's a pleasure I can't completely deny, even as I mock it.

How many men truly dislike wealth, fame, power, martial prowess, and women?

Regardless of my values or experience, these pleasures are imprinted in my instincts.

If I feel like staying indoors, it starts raining. If I want to go out, the weather clears.

I even tested it—and found the weather and even the seasons would shift according to my will.

On top of that, Seol Lihyang is stronger than she was before the regression, but Tang Sowol and Seorin are stronger in the way I remembered them.

I even challenged them to spar, hoping to use this for training...

But the moment I focused to exploit an opening, they'd blunder in ridiculous ways and create that opening themselves.

It was meaningless for cultivation, but the way Sowol and Seorin fussed over me afterward was kind of cute.

Not just that—everything in this world flows in a way that benefits me.

The Heavenly Demon was destroyed in mutual annihilation with the Imperial Family, the Tang Clan unanimously chose Tang Sowol as their next head, and Seol Lihyang, who had suffered numerous side effects from her flawed Yin techniques, saw all those effects disappear—except for the ones I liked.

For instance, heightened libido and an improved figure stayed, while shortened lifespan and infertility vanished.

As for Seorin, she supposedly ate some miracle elixir in the Western Region that made her breasts grow.

Even then, she still didn't match Sowol or Lihyang.

Maybe my subconscious put limits on her, thinking "this isn't like Seorin."

It's ridiculous, but that's how this world works.

Jingle—

A dream endlessly gentle and kind to me.

No hardship, no lack. Just a life to be enjoyed.

Who knows how much time is passing in reality?

But here in this dream, no matter how many lifetimes I live and restart, I don't wake up.

Thus, this is an eternal dream.

Unless I wake up on my own.

Time flows even as I grow familiar with this world and investigate it.

And now, it's the first night of my wedding with the three of them, all dressed beautifully.

“Hmhm. Since I'm the official wife, shouldn't I take the lead here?”

“What are you talking about, Sister Tang? Since you two are inexperienced, I should demonstrate first.”

“Brat! Have you no respect for your elders? I should go first, by age!”

Tang Sowol shrugged, letting down the white hair pinned up with an elegant hairpin, as if reenacting the next part of an unfulfilled promise.

Seol Lihyang, face flushed, loosened her robe.

Though I've seen it many times, my heart still fluttered at the sight.

And Seorin, who had grown impressively compared to before, still couldn't match the other two. She puffed out her chest and spoke boldly.

The three teased and bickered, sending me subtle glances.

Perhaps this is the most ideal future I could wish for.

With no fear of the Heavenly Demon, ruling the Central Plains through the Tang Clan after the fall of the Imperial Family, and spending joyful days with women who only have eyes for me.

That alone would bring happiness, but if a child were to be born, a new kind of happiness would await.

A life where I stand alongside those I love, dreaming the same future—how beautiful would that be?

How precious would a family be to someone who never had one?

As the three women stared at me, as if waiting for my every move, I gave a faint smile.

“I have something to say.”

“What is it? If it’s you, Sword Demon, I’ll always listen.”

“You’re not about to ask something weird, are you? A little is okay, but...”

“You might not like hearing this, Blood Wolf, but I consider this moment a happiness too overwhelming to bear. Say anything you like. No matter how strange, it’s fine.”

Each of them spoke with a smile resembling moonlight that had soaked into my heart, with voices filled with pride, affection, and kindness.

I slowly looked at each of their faces, committing them to memory.

After much deliberation, I finally had an answer to the question Blood Demon posed to me.

A world where all desires are fulfilled is a world where only my desires exist.

In this world, I am the only one who exists.

Thanks to Seol Lihyang, I learned I could love someone.

Thanks to Seorin, I realized I could become a better person.

And when I came to hold Tang Sowol in my heart, I finally wished for happiness.

So how much value could a world hold if I were the only one in it?

“I do not like this empty dream.”

It is fleeting but beautiful.

And yet, it is a dream that must never come true.

A dream that is different from reality...

A dream that must be different.

Therefore, it is a Reverse Dream.

Waking from the dream is simple.

You must deny everything within the dream.

Jingle, jingle, jingle, jingle—

The bells of the Demon Bell rang loudly, echoing across the heavens and earth, as if trying to stop what I was about to do.

But I had already decided to open my eyes.

Srrng—

Amidst the countless bells, a discordant metallic sound rang out.

The sound of a sword being drawn from its scabbard.

“I’m sorry, but please die for my sake.”

My vision burst into flame. The familiar scent of smoke and blood stung my nose and cleared my mind.

Yes.

This is the kind of life I’ve always lived.

The Demon Bell’s paradise was overwritten by my hell.