

# I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

chapter 31-40

## I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

Heavenly Demon has not only reached the state of Extreme Demon Realm but has also become the leader of the Demonic Cult, preparing for an invasion.

I had guessed as much, but hearing it directly still delivered a greater shock.

To think that someone with such talent had been planning the downfall of the martial world for fifteen years... no, perhaps even longer.

Looking back now, before the Righteous Alliance was formed, when the Nine Great Clans and the Five Great Families were half-destroyed, Heavenly Demon never once faltered or hesitated. He trampled the Central Plains with an unstoppable force, as if cutting through bamboo.

No matter how overwhelming Heavenly Demon's power may be, surely the long-standing strength of those who had ruled over the Central Plains could not have been ignored.

Until now, I had thought that the results were simply due to Heavenly Demon's absurdly unmatched martial prowess and the complacency of the renowned righteous sects. But... perhaps there was a meticulous plan behind it all.

I let out a deep sigh, only to feel a large, yet strangely elegant, hand rest on my shoulder.

"Now then. The interrogation is over, so don't we have something to discuss?"

"Nothing happened last night, Father-in-law."

"That's important too, but that's not the topic I wanted to discuss."

Tang Jincheon applied subtle pressure to the hand resting on my shoulder as he spoke.

"How did you know about the mental restrictions of the Demonic Cult? No—while we're at it, why not spill everything else too? If it were just one or two things, I might have let them slide, but with so many, that's no longer an option."

“Can’t we resolve this in light of the bond between a future father-in-law and his son-in-law?”

“I’m willing to be reasonable. I’m not trying to force you into anything.”

“Then...”

“I just want to know. If I understand the situation, I might be able to help you. Just as you helped me and Sowol, I’d like to do the same.”

While I hesitated over how to respond—

*Wooong—*

Tang Jincheon deployed his qi, forming an energy barrier that surrounded the entire room.

“Now, no one can hear what we say here. I promise I won’t reveal your secrets to anyone, so long as they pose no harm to the Tang Clan or Sowol.”

“With such assurance... very well.”

I never truly believed I could keep it a secret forever. Nor did I have much reason to keep it hidden.

The only reason I'd concealed it was to avoid being dismissed as insane.

If they truly believed me, and I could receive their help, what reason was there to keep it from them?

Resolving myself, I opened my mouth to speak. But—

No words came out.

It wasn't hesitation. My mind was clear, and my thoughts were already organized.

But, against my will, my tongue froze. My lips stiffened unnaturally, and my throat only trembled, incapable of even producing a sound.

Perhaps noticing my strange state, Tang Jincheon asked in a concerned tone:

“Are you alright?”

“Yes, I’m fine.”

This time, my response flowed out smoothly. Once again, I steeled myself, preparing to reveal the truth about my regression.

But once more, my body froze.

Something incomprehensible was happening against my will.

The sensation was awkward, unnatural, and undeniable: as though someone, somewhere, was preventing me from speaking.

No matter how many times I tried, the outcome remained the same. Even when I attempted to write instead of speak, my body stiffened as though locked in place by some invisible restraint.

Realizing I was stuck in awkward silence, Tang Jincheon gently patted my shoulder with a warm gaze.

“As I said earlier, I’m not trying to force you. Don’t strain yourself.”

“I apologize. It seems my words won’t come easily. But I promise you this: I will never do anything to harm the Tang Clan or Tang Sowol.”

“Very well. If it’s difficult to talk, then it’s better left unsaid. Just remember this: the Tang Clan’s doors are always open to you. I’ll wait until you’re ready.”

Tang Jincheon withdrew the energy barrier with a nod. Though I was grateful for his consideration, I couldn’t fully appreciate it at the moment.

Someone had placed **mental restrictions** on me.

That realization struck me as I parted ways with Tang Jincheon and leaned against a tree in a secluded spot to gather my thoughts.

There was no visible trace of the restriction. Even as I scanned my inner self and searched every inch of my body with my internal energy, I could sense no abnormalities.

But the restriction was undeniably there—preventing me from revealing anything about my regression.

Who could have done this? And why?

“Ah.”

Thinking deeper, the answer became obvious.

How could something as absurd as bringing a dead person back to life and sending them to the past be possible?

Compared to such an unimaginable phenomenon, a mental restriction seemed almost trivial.

More importantly, anything that defies the natural order always comes with a price.

Just as a martial artist’s body and mind become corrupted by practicing *evil methods*, I, having experienced the *reversal of the heavenst*through regression, was bound to face consequences.

But why must I be unable to share my regression? How does that serve as a price?

Suddenly, I recalled Tang Sowol's words from the previous night—how she felt I was looking at someone else, not her.

Even though the current Tang Sowol resembles the one I remember, they are fundamentally different people.

Their pasts are distinct, and the current Sowol shares no memories with me. She cannot be exactly the same.

The Tang Sowol I loved is gone, forever out of reach. The person before me is merely someone who resembles her.

Is that it?

This small but insurmountable gap—a truth I cannot share with anyone, leaving my inner turmoil to fester.

A life of being misunderstood is undoubtedly a painful one, but it is no longer unbearable.

Last night, Tang Sowol had already declared that she knew I was seeing someone else in her place.

Yet, she boldly vowed to make me fall for her instead.

What more could I ask for?

For now, the mental restrictions were of greater concern.

Until now, I had dismissed my regression as an inexplicable phenomenon—an act of sheer luck.

But perhaps that wasn't the case.

What if there was intent behind it? What if whoever orchestrated this was a being beyond my comprehension?

The thought sent chills down my spine.

The idea of someone vast and incomprehensible watching me filled me with a momentary sense of helplessness.

But the feeling did not last long.

Regardless, I'd been granted a second chance at life—a chance to rectify my mistakes.

Rather than fear, I should feel gratitude.

As I gazed blankly at the sky, a familiar voice called out to me.

“Brother Cheon? Why are you out here instead of inside?”

“I was thinking about you, Tang Sowol.”

“W-What? That's... why would you say something so embarrassing out of nowhere?”

“You asked, so I answered honestly.”

“You said it knowing how I’d react, didn’t you?”

“Well, I won’t deny that.”

At my unabashed reply, Tang Sowol pouted briefly before letting out a chuckle and leaning against the tree beside me.

“I heard from my father. Thanks to you, the interrogation ended quickly when it was expected to drag on.”

“I only did what I could.”

“Most people would call that remarkable.”

Tang Sowol idly kicked a pebble at her feet, then reached out to tug on my sleeve, moving even closer.

Her delicate pinky finger intertwined with mine as she whispered:

“Next time, I’ll be the one to help you, Brother Cheon.”

“Hmm? What are you talking about?”

“Exactly what I said. You’ve always been the one helping me, haven’t you? I want to return the favor.”

“There’s no need. I did it because I wanted to.”

“Hmph. That was a roundabout way of saying you like me, wasn’t it? I won’t let you get the reaction you’re expecting!”

“All I meant was that I acted out of my own will.”

“Wha—?”

“They say people only see what they want to see. Were you hoping to hear those words from me?”

“I-I... No!”

Flustered, Tang Sowol stomped her feet. Watching her react so dramatically, I couldn't help but laugh, and the lingering unease I felt began to fade.

Yes, this is enough.

What does it matter, one way or another?

What's important is that Tang Sowol is by my side, and I've been given another chance.

I vowed not to let it slip away again.

As I tightened my grip on her hand, interlocking our fingers completely, Tang Sowol froze for a moment. Her fingers squirmed briefly before she quickly pulled her hand away, her face flushed.

She must have found it too embarrassing to be the one holding hands passively.

“I-I’ll be going now. It’s getting dark, so you should head inside too, Brother Cheon.”

“Will you sneak into my room again tonight? If so, I’ll leave the door unlocked.”

“W-What are you talking about?! Get some rest instead! We’re leaving as soon as you’re ready tomorrow!”

With that, Tang Sowol scurried off.

Watching her retreating figure, I let out a small laugh.

Now, my course of action was clear.

First, I would finish healing my internal injuries. Then—

“I must grow stronger.”

Stronger than I was in my previous life.

No—stronger even than the monstrous Heavenly Demon.

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A Few Days Later

With all my external injuries healed and most of the demonic qi lingering in my meridians burned away, the time to discuss returning home had arrived.

Even though I had come all the way to *Guangdong Province*, a place I used to frequent in my past life, it felt regretful to have stayed cooped up in the inn the entire time.

Since we'd be leaving tomorrow, I figured I might as well take a look around before we departed. Who knew when I'd step foot in *Safar (Unorthodox Factions)* territory again?

"I never thought I'd find myself missing this place," I muttered.

The darkening sky gradually brightened with street lanterns. Some people carried the exhaustion of the day as they returned home, while others embraced the drudgery of their nighttime work.

At first glance, it resembled the night markets often seen in *Sichuan Province*, but there was a peculiar atmosphere lingering in the scenery before me.

The unique night air of unorthodox territories.

Of course, even among such regions, there was a significant difference between *Zhejiang Province* and *Guangdong Province*.

Zhejiang, being the base of the *Black Lotus Sect*, carried an underlying sense of dread toward its swordsmen. The atmosphere was generally more ruthless, and violence, especially sword fights, occurred frequently.

Guangdong, however, was vastly different due to the dominant influence of the *Hao Gate*.

Here, it was flamboyant, decadent, and... squalid.

But strangely enough, it didn't feel entirely unpleasant.

No one here was truly alone. They were all scraping the bottom of the barrel of life together.

In the Hao Gate's territory, there was a peculiar comfort in their shared misery.

Lost in thought, I aimlessly wandered the bustling night streets, relishing the rare experience.

But that was as far as I would go.

As the Tang Clan's prospective son-in-law, I couldn't allow myself to get too caught up in such a place.

I was just about to head back to the inn when—

“You damned wench! I told you I'd break your legs if you tried running away again!”

“Kyahhh! Go ahead, you bastard! If you think you can, just try it!”

The scream, accompanied by familiar curses, grabbed my attention.

I turned my head toward the commotion and spotted a face I recognized all too well.

Why is *that person* here...?

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“You damned wench! I told you I’d break your legs if you tried running away again!”

“Kyahhh! Go ahead, you bastard! If you think you can, just try it!”

Familiar screams and insults rang out.

When I turned my head, I saw a face I knew well.

Her complexion was pale—almost ghostly—and her body so thin that her bones were visible. Yet, despite her frail appearance, she exuded a strangely alluring presence.

Though she seemed far weaker and more vulnerable than I remembered, how could I possibly forget this woman?

*Seol Lihyang.*

Before my regression, she was known as the *Demonic Sound Witch (Guieum Manyeo, 鬼音魔女)* and had been a member of the same **Ironblood Hall** as me.

While her martial abilities had reached an impressive level, her true strength lay in the martial arts she practiced.

Seol Lihyang was a rare expert in Sound Techniques (Eumgong, 音功).

Sound Techniques were not only difficult to master but also incredibly unique and hard to counter. Because of this, she was one of the most valuable assets in the Ironblood Hall.

That said, calling it a “Hall” was rather grandiose, considering it was little more than a group of a dozen or so troublemakers.

The Ironblood Hall was essentially a penal colony within the Black Lotus Sect, a place where problematic individuals were exiled.

If our hall leader hadn't reached the *Flowering Stage* like the Black Lotus Sect Master, the group would have had an even worse reputation.

I wasn't exactly an easygoing person myself, and Seol Lihyang was infamously difficult to deal with. While we didn't get along personally, we acknowledged each other's abilities.

So why was Seol Lihyang, someone I respected, being beaten so mercilessly here?

“Ah.”

Then it hit me—today was *that* day.

Just because someone belonged to the unorthodox factions didn't mean they were born that way. More often than not, people ended up in such circumstances due to extreme situations that forced them to make desperate choices.

Seol Lihyang wasn't inherently twisted in personality. Rather, she had been dealt a twisted hand in life.

The Ironblood Hall was full of people with similar stories, and Seol Lihyang was no exception.

I remembered a time when, after a brutal sparring session, we stole some liquor from the hall leader and shared a drink. She had opened up about her past—a story so tragic that even I, who thought I'd seen it all, found it hard to believe.

“Do you think you're special just because the branch leader pays attention to you? You're nothing but a courtesan! All you're good for is spreading your legs and flirting!”

“Oh, really? You're struggling to handle a single 'courtesan,' yet you talk so big! And why am I even a courtesan? Is kidnapping women and forcing them into prostitution the Hao Gate's way of doing things?”

“You insolent wench! Fine, I'll teach you what discipline means with that pathetic body of yours!”

The burly man, scowling deeply, stomped over to Seol Lihyang and slapped her across the face.

*Puhk!*

“Aaagh!”

The sound of the impact was so loud it echoed even from where I stood.

Her head snapped to the side from the force, and her frail body crumpled to the ground, unable to withstand the blow.

Unlike the earlier punches and kicks, this one had real intent behind it. The onlookers began murmuring in alarm.

But Seol Lihyang, as if to say this was nothing new, slowly lifted her head.

Her disheveled hair fell to the side, revealing her flushed, bloodied cheek.

Though it was unlikely to swell immediately, her lips had split, and blood was dripping from her nose, staining one side of her face red.

Given her malnourished state and lack of any internal energy to protect herself, the blow must have been devastating.

Still, she managed to get up, even as her body swayed uncontrollably.

Her eyes, sharp and fierce, glared silently at the man, carrying a defiance that made him flinch and take a step back.

That was the Seol Lihyang I knew.

Her fiery spirit, her unyielding defiance—it was all still there, even if her body was battered.

Seeing that familiar side of her stirred an odd sense of nostalgia.

At the same time, I instinctively reached for the sword at my waist and quickened my steps.

If my memory served me right, today was the day that would add another tragic chapter to Seol Lihyang's life.

As I pushed through the crowd toward her, the burly man, seemingly embarrassed by his earlier hesitation, stomped the ground in fury.

*Thud!*

“What’s with that look? Do you think I haven’t beaten you enough yet?”

“If I were you,” Seol Lihyang retorted, her voice dripping with venom, “I’d stop flapping my gums like a pathetic idiot and throw another punch. It’s not like you’re good for anything else—just a spineless bastard who beat his own mother to death.”

“You filthy bitch!”

The man’s face twisted in rage as he raised his fist, channeling what little internal energy he had into it.

If that punch landed, Seol Lihyang wouldn’t just be injured—she’d be maimed.

Before my regression, this was the day she lost an eye, became lame, and was rendered infertile.

Though she claimed it didn't bother her, knowing her prickly demeanor, it was likely a lie.

We may not have been friends, but we were comrades who fought side by side. I knew more about her than I wanted to, and I couldn't stand by and watch.

“That’s far enough.”

“What—”

*Sreung!*

Before he could finish his sentence, my sword was drawn and pointed at his neck.

Perhaps because he was merely a second-rate martial artist, he froze, trembling, unable to respond properly.

I gestured with my chin.

“Leave her. If you do, I’ll let this slide.”

“What business does the Tang Clan’s son-in-law have with a woman like this?”

“Oh? So you know me?”

“Of course. While I may have shown you a disgraceful side, I’ve been with the Hao Gate for over twenty years. Naturally, I’m aware of who our esteemed guests are.”

The man, who had been acting like a thug moments earlier, quickly adopted a servile demeanor.

Well, anyone who survived this long in the Hao Gate wouldn’t be a simple brute.

I nodded and pressed my sword slightly against his neck, drawing a thin line of blood.

“If you understand, then leave quietly.”

“That’s... difficult. You see, this woman has caught the eye of the Hao Gate’s branch leader here in Guangzhou.”

“And why should that concern me?”

“Pardon?”

“I’m not obligated to care about some branch leader’s whims. I don’t answer to the entire Hao Gate, let alone him.”

“If you’re saying this with the Tang Clan’s backing in mind, I urge you to reconsider. Surely you haven’t forgotten the favor the Hao Gate extended to the Tang Clan.”

He emphasized the words *favor* and *Tang Clan*, clearly trying to remind me of the alliance between the two.

Indeed, the Tang Clan had received significant support from the Hao Gate during this mission, and the Tang Clan valued reciprocating favors.

For a moment, I hesitated.

Was it truly right for me to intervene in this matter?

From a purely pragmatic perspective, helping Seol Lihyang was a losing proposition.

Even if she became a peak-level martial artist someday, it wouldn't justify jeopardizing relations with the entire Hao Gate.

Moreover, her talent had always been fueled by her resilience in the face of suffering.

If I intervened now, would she ever reach the level I remembered?

But...

I recalled the drunken ramblings she shared during our time in the Ironblood Hall.

I remembered the Ironblood Hall leader's words: "*Don't just survive for survival's sake.*"

I thought of Tang Sowol, who once said she wanted to show me a different kind of world.

Those memories made my decision clear.

"I appreciate the Hao Gate's assistance to the Tang Clan," I said, sheathing my sword for a moment.

"But that's also the only reason you're still alive."

With a sudden burst of internal energy, I swung my sword upward.

*Puhk!*

The short distance limited the force, but the qi-infused blade dug into his chin, rattling his head.

His focus blurred, and he slumped to the ground unconscious.

*Thud.*

I glanced at his fallen body before turning my gaze to Seol Lihyang.

Though she looked much younger than the version I remembered, her overall features were the same.

Her hair was disheveled, and her clothes were torn, revealing bruises that had clearly been there for some time.

Her sharp, upturned eyes—usually fierce—were now clouded with confusion.

Despite her wariness, she scrutinized me carefully.

I let out a dry laugh.

“Seol Lihyang, right?”

“That’s... right. And you are?”

Her tone wavered as she hesitated between informal and formal speech.

It seemed I had no justification for intervening.

Or rather, any justification I had was buried with the passage of time.

But I needed a new reason—one that both she and the Hao Gate observers in the crowd could accept.

I paused, recalling bits of her tragic story she had once muttered drunkenly. Twisting it slightly, I spoke.

“When I was young, I received great help from your father, Seol Dae-in.”

“What?”

“I’m here to repay that debt.”

“...That man? That can’t be... No, that’s impossible.”

“Feel free to speak casually. I don’t expect formalities from the daughter of a benefactor.”

“Oh, uh... okay.”

Seol Lihyang nodded hesitantly, still confused.

It was no surprise. Her father had gambled away his fortune after her mother’s death, eventually selling her to a brothel.

Using the money for gambling, he disappeared, leaving no trace.

It was a convenient lie, but one she clearly found hard to believe.

Still, it served its purpose.

I raised my voice toward the crowd.

“I am *Cheon Hwi-da of the Sichuan Tang Clan!* If someone guides me to the Hao Gate’s Guangzhou Branch Leader, I will ensure they are well rewarded!”

A moment of silence followed, before several individuals—likely Hao Gate members—rushed forward to offer their assistance.

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The conversation with the branch leader didn’t go well.

So I kidnapped Seol Lihyang.

“...I’m screwed.”

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The street we arrived at, guided by a member of the Hao Sect, was the red-light district.

As I walked between the crimson lanterns glowing faintly in the night, I began to feel the weight of the stares around us. It was impossible not to attract attention—a young boy like me, still looking too young to be in this kind of place, walking alongside a heavily bruised courtesan and escorted by an adult man, all heading toward the center of the district: the *Honghwa Pavilion*.

Even amidst this peculiar atmosphere, Seol Lihyang held her chin high, her neck stiff with tension, her eyes slightly narrowed with defiance. But it wasn't long before the oppressive stares of the onlookers seemed to weigh on her, and she eventually turned her head slightly and jabbed me in the side with her finger.

*Poke. Poke.*

"Hey."

"What?"

"You do have a plan, right? You're not just walking into this without thinking?"

“Of course. You were sold to a brothel because of a debt, weren’t you? If I pay your price and clear your registration, it’ll all be over soon enough.”

“And where’s this money supposed to come from? Look, I hate to say this, but my ransom’s going to be expensive. Plus, do you even know how brothels trap their courtesans here?”

“What, by coming up with all kinds of excuses to increase the debt? I know. I’ve seen enough to understand how this works.”

During my younger days, when I wandered from place to place as a vagrant after leaving my hometown, I’d taken on some escort jobs for brothels, just like any other wayward martial artist.

According to what I’d learned back then, they inflate the debts by assigning costs to everything—the meals they provide, the clothes, the training to be a courtesan—and even go as far as to overcharge outrageously.

“They say it’s impossible to pay off the debt through ordinary work, but if you work as a courtesan, you might be able to scrape by and repay it around the time you’re too old to attract any more customers.”

“Wow, you know your stuff. But... are you sure this is okay?”

“That pouch I got from Tang Sowol was quite full.”

“Wait, you’re *Cheong*, not Tang, right?”

“I’m the *future* son-in-law, so it’s close enough.”

“Did you seriously just say you’re going to use your fiancée’s money to buy out a courtesan? Are you even in your right mind?!”

“Your phrasing’s off. I’m using my fiancée’s money to rescue my benefactor’s daughter.”

“My father was someone’s benefactor? That’s the part I just don’t get...”

Seol Lihyang sighed heavily. And understandably so—after all, it was a blatant lie.

But she couldn’t exactly prove my claim was false, so she had no choice but to go along with it.

As I silently nodded to myself and walked, I suddenly realized we’d reached our destination: the grand and imposing *Honghwa Pavilion*.

The Hao Sect guide who had led us here approached with a smirk, clearly expecting payment as he subtly extended his hand. I tossed him a silver ingot from the pouch I'd received from Tang Sowol, and after offering an overly dramatic bow, he quickly scampered off.

I tucked the pouch back into my robes when I noticed Seol Lihyang scowling up at the *Honghwa Pavilion*. She muttered under her breath.

“So it was here? I see... that makes sense...”

“Stop mumbling to yourself and speak clearly so I can hear.”

“This is where my father sold me. It figures... The branch manager must've taken an interest in me after seeing me here at his own establishment. Hah, he looks like he'd enjoy men, but apparently, he spends every night rolling around with his courtesans. Turns out it's true.”

“If he's that obsessed with women, it might not just be a simple case of lust. The Hao Sect's branch managers aren't exactly ordinary people, are they?”

“Is that so?”

Seol Lihyang tilted her head in confusion. It was only natural—she was still too inexperienced in martial arts to grasp the implications.

The branch manager's androgynous appearance and excessive lust were symptoms of *Absorptive Inner Energy Cultivation (Heopjeonggong)*.

More specifically, they were side effects of techniques like *Harvesting Yin to Replenish Yang* or *Harvesting Yang to Replenish Yin*, used to absorb inner energy beyond one's natural capacity.

I had already known about this before my regression, but the fact that a branch manager afflicted by the side effects of *Heopjeonggong* had set his sights on Seol Lihyang meant...

Suppressing the cold fury rising within me, I approached the main entrance.

One of the gatekeepers, who had been eyeing us with a curious expression, stepped forward to block our path. Perhaps the ease with which I had handed over silver earlier made him realize we weren't ordinary visitors, as his tone was surprisingly polite.

“Did you bring back a runaway courtesan? If you wait here, we'll prepare a reward for you.”

“No need. I’m here to meet the owner of this place.”

I adjusted the sleeves of my robe to make sure the green uniform I wore was visible and added, “Tell the master of the *Honghwa Pavilion* that I’m here to see them.”

“Understood.”

The gatekeeper nodded and disappeared inside. Before long, he returned with a young woman by his side.

Her beauty was such that nine out of ten people would turn to look at her. She wore a glamorous outfit with slight exposure, exuding an overtly seductive aura.

While her charm felt almost unnatural, the essence of her demeanor was something I was quite familiar with.

She must have been a courtesan who had mastered *Seduction Techniques* to an exceptional level. She was undoubtedly a notable figure even within the Hao Sect.

The woman, showing no intention of hiding her intentions, flashed me a sultry smile and said, “I’ll guide you to the master of the pavilion.”

“Lead the way.”

My calm response seemed to catch her off guard, as her eyebrows twitched slightly in surprise. Clearly, she hadn’t expected me to remain so unfazed.

Smirking faintly, she motioned for me to follow. As we began moving, Seol Lihyang whispered quietly enough for only me to hear.

“Be careful. She’s an elite courtesan of the *Honghwa Pavilion*. If you keep looking at her, you might get bewitched in an instant—just like everyone else.”

“Don’t worry. That won’t happen to me.”

And it was true. The nature of my *Raging Wave Death-Stealing Art* reduced the potency of techniques like seduction or mental manipulation.

Besides, my internal energy, flowing through my *Eight Extraordinary Meridians*, was steeped in a lethal aura, and my body—though not yet fully developed—was sustained by the ironclad will of someone who had once reached the peak.

Even if a master of *Seduction Techniques* at the *Flowering Stage* appeared, I wouldn't succumb.

Most importantly... her techniques felt all too familiar to me.

I glanced toward Seol Lihyang, who blinked in confusion.

“What is it? Why are you looking at me? No, actually, look at me instead—that's better!”

“That's not why I looked.”

Though *Seduction Techniques* worked more effectively on the opposite gender, it wasn't completely ineffective on the same gender. I had briefly worried that Seol Lihyang, with no training, might be affected—but it seemed my concern was unnecessary.

Well, that was only natural. After all, a technique of such an amateur level would never work on someone like Seol Lihyang.

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The interior of the *Honghwa Pavilion* was as extravagant as its exterior, and as we ascended higher, the loud and fervent sounds of men and women grew more intense. At last, we reached the highest floor of the pavilion.

“Master, the guest you mentioned has arrived,” the courtesan announced.

“Let them in,” came a delicate voice from within.

It was hard to tell whether it belonged to a man or a woman, but its youthful tone was unmistakable. The courtesan carefully opened the door.

*Creak.*

The door revealed a room so gaudy it almost hurt to look at. Everything was either red, gold, or glittering. Not a single detail deviated from that color palette.

Seol Lihyang froze in place, overwhelmed by the room’s splendor. Seeing her hesitate, I strode forward, blocking her view with my body.

The excessive opulence showed just how much money had been poured into the place. However, compared to the extravagance of the *Black Lotus Sect* during my previous life, or the refined elegance of the Sichuan Tang Clan, this was nothing.

External appearances didn't matter. My focus was on the person sitting at the center of the room—the master of the *Honghwa Pavilion*.

“Welcome, honored guest from distant Sichuan, and my runaway little one...”

The man slowly stood, his gaze meeting mine as he spoke.

His clothing hung loosely, leaving much of his upper body exposed. Despite his apparent age, his face was unnervingly smooth, devoid of any facial hair.

He had tried to add some masculinity to his appearance, but his slender frame made the attempt ineffective. Without his open shirt, it would've been almost impossible to tell whether he was male or female.

The master of the *Honghwa Pavilion*—the Hao Sect's branch manager—spoke in a soft yet unnaturally high-pitched voice, his tone intentionally masculine.

“As you may already know, I am the branch manager of the Hao Sect here in Yanzhou and the master of the *Honghwa Pavilion*.”

“I appreciate the warm welcome. I assume you know who I am as well, but for formality’s sake: I am Cheon Hwi-da of the Sichuan Tang Clan. And this—”

I turned to Seol Lihyang, intending to introduce her, but she cut me off with a sharp glare directed at the pavilion master.

She didn’t say a word but made her hostility unmistakable. The pavilion master merely shrugged and chuckled lightly.

“I see there’s no need for introductions. I know her well—after all, she’s someone I’ve been keeping an eye on.”

“You bastard!” Seol Lihyang hissed, her voice low and venomous.

Despite her outburst, I didn’t see any reason to escalate things yet. For now, I calmly sat down on the floor and patted the spot beside me.

“Sit down.”

“...Fine.”

Reluctantly, Seol Lihyang sat beside me, though her sharp gaze never left the pavilion master.

Her compliance drew a glimmer of interest from the man, who looked at her with an almost predatory curiosity.

“Oh, how surprising. I haven’t heard your reason for visiting yet, but it’s rare to see this unruly girl obeying anyone. Would you care to share your secret, young hero?”

“I simply promised her freedom.”

“Freedom, you say? Many have been lured by that word, only to have their lives ruined in this very district. Perhaps she’ll meet the same fate.”

His lips curled into a mocking smile, as if he were scolding me for my naivety.

But I wasn’t here out of some fleeting impulse. I had long passed the age for such childish whims.

“Enough of this. Let’s get straight to the point. I’m here to clear Seol Lihyang’s debt and remove her from this establishment. How much does she owe? If possible, I’ll pay it now. If not, I’ll have someone from the Tang Clan bring the rest.”

“Hmmm... Before that, may I ask why the future son-in-law of the Tang Clan is so invested in a mere courtesan?”

His soft voice had a snake-like quality, and his narrowed eyes gleamed with malice, as if he were probing for weaknesses. It was clear he had no intention of letting her go without resistance.

Suppressing a sigh, I nodded.

“There’s no harm in explaining. Her father, Master Seol, once did me a great service. I intend to repay that debt by helping his daughter.”

“A debt, you say. In the Sichuan Tang Clan, such things are of great importance, aren’t they? After all, you’re about to become part of their family, so you must want to settle any lingering obligations from your past.”

“That’s about right.”

Hearing my answer, the pavilion master's lips twisted into a sly grin.

“But there's a problem. As much as I'd love to oblige, Seol Lihyang isn't someone I can simply sell for money.”

“What the hell?!” Seol Lihyang growled, recoiling at the way he casually referred to her by a pet name, as if she were his property.

The pavilion master paid her no mind, his gaze fixed solely on me.

“It sounds like you're suggesting there's something else you want. Be specific.”

“Of course. You see, Seol Lihyang is my chosen successor. Young hero, have you ever heard of the *Pure Yin Physique*? It's a rare natural gift, a constitution perfectly suited for mastering techniques like *Seduction Techniques*.”

Of course, I knew what the *Pure Yin Physique* was—probably better than the pavilion master himself.

To put it simply, it's a body with an unusually high concentration of yin energy, far purer than that of an average woman. While it's not overwhelmingly potent like the *Extreme Yin Pulse*, which leads to an early death, it's still a rare constitution prized for its unique properties.

The pavilion master's gaze, laden with thinly veiled greed, swept over Seol Lihyang as he spoke.

“Who in their right mind would sell someone destined to become their successor for mere silver?”

“And yet, didn't you buy her for silver in the first place?”

“That's no different from how the orthodox sects sometimes take in children from impoverished families. They provide money in exchange for raising and training them, don't they?”

He wasn't entirely wrong.

Taoist and Buddhist sects often took in orphans, offering payment to their families in return. It was a form of mutual benefit: the sects gained loyal disciples raised from a young age, while the families received financial support, and the children were spared from starvation.

But Seol Lihyang's case was entirely different.

She had been forcibly sold by her father, stripped of her freedom, and turned into a courtesan. Even if the pavilion master claimed to be training her as a disciple, it was obvious he intended to exploit her *Pure Yin Physique* as a mere resource.

Fiddling with the hilt of my sword, I spoke.

“So, no matter how much money I offer, you won’t let her go. Is that what you’re saying?”

“Haha, not quite. If it’s something money can’t buy, that’s another story. For instance, if you could offer me something like the *Hundred Poisons Pure Blood Pill* from the Tang Clan...”

The *Hundred Poisons Pure Blood Pill* was an elixir on par with the *Great Rejuvenation Pill* of the Shaolin Temple or the *Grand Purity Pill* of Wudang. It was a treasure that represented the pinnacle of the Tang Clan’s expertise.

It wasn’t something I could casually promise, and even if I could, it would be absurd to trade such a treasure for a single courtesan.

His suggestion made it clear he had no intention of negotiating in good faith.

I glanced at Seol Lihyang.

She seemed to sense the tension, her expression growing increasingly anxious. Her unease reminded me of the last time I had seen her in my previous life. Her final words echoed in my mind.

And with that, my decision was made.

“I’m sorry, but I’ll just take her by force.”

In an instant, I drew my sword and unleashed the full force of my *Raging Wave Death-Stealing Art*.

The pavilion master’s expression twisted in shock as a lethal aura surged toward him.

“What the—?!”

His reflexes were quick, as expected of a master, but my blade wasn’t aimed directly at him—it struck the floor.

*Slash!*

“Kyaaah!”

“Hold on tight. We’re getting out of here.”

Grabbing Seol Lihyang by the waist, I leaped down to the lower levels.

And just like that, I abducted Seol Lihyang.

## **I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan**

“This pear is called ‘Seolli’ because its flesh is as white as snow.”

“You idiot. All pears are white. It’s called *Seolli* not because of the color but because its flesh is as soft as snow.”

“...”

Seol Lihyang swung her fist at me in silence. Naturally, I dodged it with ease.

“Hmph.”

“Hey! Are you coming over here or not?!”

“No. Why would I walk over just to get hit by someone weaker than me?”

“I won’t hit you hard! Just let me hit you once!”

“I don’t listen to those weaker than me.”

I spun around the Ironblood Hall’s training grounds, easily evading Seol Lihyang, who limped after me in frustration. After about two laps, she finally gave up, her teeth clenched in irritation as she let out a long sigh.

“Fine, I won’t hit you. Come here, Blood Wolf. I have a favor to ask.”

“Hmph. Why should I listen to you, Demoness of Pure Yin? Like I said, I don’t take orders from those weaker than me.”

“Forget that and just get over here, you bastard! Are you seriously going to make me hobble after you with this leg?!”

“I was already on my way.”

She tapped at her injured leg in annoyance as I approached. Once I was close enough, she held out a pear.

“Cut this for me.”

“Do it yourself.”

“You’re better with a sword than I am.”

“Hmph. Fair point.”

“Wait, was that a smile? Did that really make you happy?”

Ignoring her indignant expression, I took the pear from her hand. It didn't take long to peel it and slice it into bite-sized pieces. After all, I *am* good with a sword.

“Here.”

“Th-thanks.”

Seol Lihyang accepted the pear slices with a strange expression. She popped one into her mouth, chewed, and then her eyes widened in surprise. Even her usually dull, clouded eye seemed to sparkle momentarily.

“This is really good. You want to try one?”

“You weren't planning to share any after I cut it for you?”

“Don't you know how to say things nicely?”

“Being eloquent won't make my sword any sharper. It's better to spend that time training.”

“Ugh, you’re so insufferable.”

Despite her grumbling, she held a slice up to my lips. I took it and found that it was indeed delicious.

“It’s quite soft.”

“Wh-what?!”

Seol Lihyang hastily hid the fingers that had just touched my mouth, her face turning red. I let out a dry chuckle and shook my head.

“Filthy-minded. What exactly were you thinking?”

“That’s too much! Can’t you say it more delicately?!”

“Stop rambling and give me another slice. The taste and aroma are quite pleasant.”

“You’re doing this on purpose, aren’t you?”

“Ah, you caught me.”

“See? You’re the dirtiest-minded of all, Blood Wolf!”

Despite her indignant shout, she placed another slice in my mouth. We continued to share the pear, taking turns feeding each other until it was gone.

Now empty-handed, Seol Lihyang wiped her sticky hands on my clothes without a hint of hesitation. She then spoke in a low voice.

“Oh, right. I have a favor to ask.”

“A favor? Is there another pear?”

“Not that. It’s a serious favor this time.”

“I’m not lending you money. I heard the Yu Family Manor is auctioning off some of their internal techniques due to financial troubles. Even with what I have now, I’m cutting it close.”

“Not everyone is a martial arts addict like you! That’s not the kind of favor I was going to ask. It’s about my martial arts. You know, the ones tied to my cultivation technique? There’s... a problem with it.”

“Ah, you mean your *Seduction Techniques*.”

“Don’t call it that!”

“But that’s what it is.”

“Technically, yes, but still! Calling it that makes me sound like some kind of... seductress.”

“Fine, fine. No need to get worked up. What’s the favor? I owed you one from that last mission anyway. As long as it’s not unreasonable, I’ll help.”

Most missions assigned to the Ironblood Hall are either extremely difficult or annoyingly complex. Considering the Ironblood Hall’s role within the Black Lotus Sect, it’s only natural.

The last mission I took on was of the former variety—too much for me to handle alone, so I'd enlisted Seol Lihyang's help. Now it was my turn to repay the favor.

While I waited, Seol Lihyang averted her gaze and began tracing circles on the ground with her foot.

“So, about that favor...”

“Mm?”

“Tonight... would you share a room with me?”

“...What?”

I instinctively adjusted my collar and took two steps back.

“So, you are a seductress.”

“I am *not*!”

“How can you deny it when you just asked me to share a room out of nowhere? For the record, I may have just wiped out a bandit group under the Black Lotus Sect’s jurisdiction yesterday, but I’m not exactly a wandering martial artist.”

“Will you listen to me first?! Stop jumping to conclusions! And you better not pretend you didn’t eat that pear I gave you!”

“Fine. Since I owe you, I’ll hear you out.”

“Gee, thanks. I’m so grateful you’re giving me a chance to explain.”

She let out a long sigh, clearly not feeling grateful at all. In a quieter tone, she continued.

“Like I said, there’s an issue with my martial arts. I’ve tried everything I can think of, but I can’t fix it on my own. I need your help.”

“That’s... serious.”

I wasn't a master of proper martial arts myself. Most of what I practiced were third- or second-rate techniques I'd modified to suit my needs. While the results weren't ideal, at least my efforts were born from a genuine desire to grow stronger.

But Seol Lihyang's situation was different.

She had originally been sold to a brothel, not as a courtesan to entertain customers but as living medicine for the pavilion master who suffered from the side effects of *Absorptive Inner Energy Cultivation*.

Her *Pure Yin Physique*, while not as extreme as the *Extreme Yin Pulse*, was a rare constitution overflowing with pure yin energy. Though it came with minor drawbacks—such as cold extremities, pale skin, and a strong but hard-to-satisfy libido—it wasn't life-threatening.

However, to the pavilion master, whose imbalance of yin and yang had left him a shadow of his former self, her physique was the perfect resource.

Thus, she had been forcibly taught *Yin Soul Pleasure Art*, a technique designed to refine and amplify her innate yin energy. It was like fattening livestock for slaughter, a cruel and calculated exploitation.

But Seol Lihyang had exceeded the pavilion master's expectations.

She had reworked the martial art into a usable cultivation method, even grasping the basics of *Sound Arts* by humming along to the faint melodies she heard from her isolated chamber. Using her voice imbued with yin energy, she developed the *Wailing Ghost Sound* and escaped.

Since then, she had wandered the martial world, earning the nickname *Demoness of Pure Yin* and eventually joining the Black Lotus Sect.

Due to her past experiences, she was rough around the edges, often clashing with others, especially male martial artists. It was no surprise she'd been reassigned to the Ironblood Hall.

Given the circumstances, it was no wonder her martial arts were inherently unbalanced.

Even if she wanted to switch to a safer cultivation method now, the deep connection between her yin energy and her current technique made it nearly impossible.

I sighed. "How serious is it?"

"If this continues, my meridians will freeze over, and I'll die within three months."

“Did you consult the Hall Master?”

“Of course. He’s the one who told me I had three months. He even apologized for not having a solution, which was unnecessary.”

Her shoulders slumped, and she exhaled heavily.

So that’s why she wanted to “share a room.” It wasn’t hard to guess her intention—to balance her excessive yin energy with my yang energy.

But...

“I’ve never done this before.”

“Neither have I.”

“Does it *have* to be me?”

“The other guys are all incompetent idiots.”

“But still...”

“Ugh! Didn’t you say you’re short on funds for that Yu Family martial art you wanted? I’ll chip in!”

“...Your place tonight, then?”

“It’s not about the money!”

“Sure, it isn’t.”

And so, that night, snow fell silently outside.

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After that, our relationship changed ever so slightly.

“Blood Wolf, why do you always dress like that? The Black Lotus Sect isn’t like the Murim Alliance; there’s no dress code to follow.”

“A martial artist’s uniform is enough, isn’t it?”

“Enough of that. Come with me. I need to mend my sleeves anyway, so I might as well get you some decent clothes while I’m at it.”

We still bickered as usual, but we started going out together more often for personal reasons.

“Blood Wolf, how did you even end up here? With your good looks, were you a male escort or something?”

“What nonsense are you spouting now? I just ended up here while living my life.”

“Hmph. Now that I think about it, I’ve shared my story, but I’ve never heard yours. Don’t you think that’s unfair?”

“You’re interrupting my training. Leave.”

“Die!”

“A sparring session? Sounds good.”

Occasionally, we’d share deeper conversations—ones I wouldn’t have with anyone else.

“Hey.”

“What now?”

“Do you... want this?”

“*Seolli*? I like it, sure, but... Ah, I see what you mean.”

“Mm-hmm.”

The pears Seol Lihyang brought became a sort of signal between us, an unspoken understanding.

“Eat it.”

“Tonight, too?”

“Any complaints?”

“Not really...”

Sometimes, she'd bring pears back-to-back, but overall, those days weren't bad.

I had been pushed, shoved, and exiled to this place because of my tendency to resolve everything with a sword. Ironically, this “exile” became the most comfortable place I'd ever known.

The Ironblood Hall Master had a sharp tongue but was generous with his teachings.

Seol Lihyang constantly picked fights and snapped at me, but she wasn't malicious. She was like a thorn-covered rose, sharp but not cruel.

The balance was just right—a perfect distance to maintain. With time to focus on my swordsmanship and easy access to martial arts resources, I wouldn't deny it.

I had grown quite fond of life in the Black Lotus Sect's Ironblood Hall.

At least, until that day.

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It was a typical day. I had just returned from completing one of two mission types: either incredibly difficult or annoyingly complicated. This one was the latter.

The mission had required me to travel far, so it had been fifteen days since I last returned.

While passing through the market on my way back, I spotted a particularly expensive pear—far pricier than the others.

*Seolli.*

The fruit had become a signal between Seol Lihyang and me. Thinking back, I realized I had only ever received pears from her but had never given one to her first.

I figured it wouldn't hurt to change that. Soon, I'd receive the reward for my mission success, so this small purchase wouldn't be an issue.

I selected the largest, most pristine pear from the vendor's stand, tucked it into my robes, and hurried back.

The Ironblood Hall was treated like a place of exile, far removed from other Black Lotus Sect buildings. Its structure, covered in snow from recent days, came into view.

And yet...

The hall, blanketed in white just the day before, was now engulfed in roaring flames.

“What...”

An incredulous whisper escaped my lips. Drawing on my internal energy, I sprinted toward the burning hall.

The closer I got, the more bodies I saw—familiar faces among the corpses.

Members of the Ironblood Hall. The servants who managed the hall.

And then...

“Seol Lihyang.”

She was slumped against the outer wall, just a short distance from the main gate.

Grinding my teeth, I rushed toward her.

The smell of blood grew stronger with every step. She lay in a pool of crimson, barely lifting her head as I approached.

Her already pale skin had turned corpse-like, devoid of any color. Her uninjured eye was marred by a long slash, and her chest bore a wound so deep that her bones were visible.

It was a miracle she was still alive. Her trembling lips curved into a faint smile.

“Blood Wolf... I almost died waiting for you.”

“Who? Who did this...?”

“The Black Heaven Sword Emperor. Survivors from the Black Heaven Sword Sect, the one destroyed by the Hall Master years ago. They came for revenge.”

“Revenge?”

“Yeah. The kind of revenge all martial artists obsess over... I knew this day would come eventually, just not so soon.”

She coughed, spitting out a mouthful of blood as her body trembled.

“Hah... This really is it for me.”

“You’ll be fine.”

“Don’t lie. Look at me... I just wanted to see your face one more time, so I waited at the gate. And this is what I get.”

“You were waiting for me?”

“Of course, you idiot. Blood Wolf, you don’t even know why I was waiting, do you? How did it come to this...”

Her words trailed off, not because she didn’t want to speak, but because she lacked the strength.

Her weak voice mumbled as she lay dying.

“I just wanted to see your face... It’s annoyingly handsome—my type.”

“I’m sorry.”

“That’s not what I want to hear. I’m about to die. Don’t you have anything better to say?”

“I’ll avenge you.”

“You bastard.”

Her breathing grew slower and slower.

After a moment’s hesitation, I pulled the pear from my robe and held it before her face.

“This...?”

“I thought the scent was nice, so I bought it.”

A faint chuckle escaped her lips as she struggled to move. I placed the pear in her hand and guided it to her chest.

Her smile softened, as though she was finally content.

“Blood Wolf, you really are a bastard.”

“Am I?”

“You’re good with a sword... but there’s nothing else good about you.”

“That might be true.”

“And yet... I still...”

Her lips moved faintly, but her words stopped.

I waited, but her voice never returned.

Rising slowly, I looked up at the burning hall.

Then...

*Shing.*

I drew my sword.

Just as Seol Lihyang had said, I was someone who only knew how to wield a blade.

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Somehow, I managed to escape *Honghwa Pavilion* with Seol Lihyang in tow.

But outside, we were immediately surrounded by martial artists, likely from the Hao Sect.

*Shing.*

I drew my sword again.

“Hey! Are you insane?! What are you trying to do?!”

“What I do best...”

And what I failed to do in my previous life.

## **I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan**

“Damn persistent bastards.”

Muttering under my breath, I swung my sword. The Hao Sect martial artist charging at me didn't even have time to properly react before I sliced off one of his arms.

“Ahhhh!”

He screamed, clutching at the severed stump as he writhed on the ground. But I didn't have the luxury to confirm his state. From behind me, a spear was hurled straight toward my shoulder.

It wasn't aimed at my throat or heart but rather a non-lethal spot. If I tried to counter with a spin, Seol Lihyang, cradled against my side, would get in the way.

But I didn't need to move.

“Back off.”

“Guhh!”

I snapped my head toward the attacker and unleashed a sharp wave of murderous intent.

*Clatter.*

The spear fell from his hands as if my blade had struck him. Gasping for breath, he clutched his throat as if it had been pierced.

I didn't hesitate. My sword sliced through his arm as he stood frozen in fear.

Sssk.

With that, the immediate pursuers were dealt with.

Slashing my way through the Hao Sect members surrounding *Honghwa Pavilion*, I managed to break their encirclement. But the pursuit hadn't ended. If anything, it was growing more intense.

The only saving grace was that the master of *Honghwa Pavilion* hadn't joined the chase personally. Likely, the side effects of *Absorptive Inner Energy Cultivation (Heopjeonggong)* were preventing him from properly utilizing martial arts.

Someone of his status, as a Hao Sect branch manager, would have known that I could take on a peak master alone.

Just as I sheathed my sword with a sigh, Seol Lihyang, who had been watching the carnage, let out a breath of her own.

“Why aren't you killing them? If it's because you're uneasy about taking lives, I can—”

“Idiot. Killing them would force a fight to the death.”

“Aren’t you already doing that?!”

“Not quite. Just as I’m stopping at severing their arms, they’re also deliberately avoiding my vital points. They’re aiming for my shoulder or thigh instead. They’ve probably been ordered not to kill me.”

The reason was simple: they feared the Sichuan Tang Clan backing me.

The master of *Honghwa Pavilion* and the Hao Sect members knew full well that if they acted recklessly and killed me, their own heads could end up rolling.

I wasn’t that different. While I wasn’t just a wanderer anymore, I was now affiliated with the Sichuan Tang Clan. At *Honghwa Pavilion*, I even introduced myself as *Cheon Hwi-da* of the clan.

Regardless of my personal situation, the Tang Clan owed the Hao Sect for past support. Killing one of their men without cause would only undermine the Tang Clan’s strong emphasis on honor and reciprocation.

“Now, hand me that spear.”

“You’re saying even noble families can’t act as they please?”

Wearing a complicated expression, Seol Lihyang handed me the spear. I took it and hurled it at a nearby wall with all my strength.

*Swish—Crash!*

The spear embedded itself deeply into the wall, startling Seol Lihyang, who stared at it, speechless. I turned my back to her and crouched down.

“Get on.”

“Wha—what?!”

“The pursuers are getting closer. And they’re not just chasing us from behind—they’re cutting us off ahead of where we’re going.”

Just because the master of *Honghwa Pavilion* wasn’t pursuing us personally didn’t mean he was sitting idle.

As a branch manager of the Hao Sect, in a region entirely under their control, he had likely already spread word of our movements.

“So we’re being herded into a trap?”

“Probably.”

“And here I thought I picked the quietest route to avoid being seen...”

“I’m not blaming you. I expected as much.”

While heading toward the inn, Seol Lihyang had pointed out shortcuts and quieter paths.

But expecting that to be enough to evade the master of *Honghwa Pavilion*, a recognized figure even within the Hao Sect, was naïve. Seol Lihyang, who had merely lived in this city for a while, couldn’t compare to someone with the resources and influence of a branch manager.

“Just get on already. If we know they’re herding us, we just need to go somewhere unexpected.”

“Ugh! Fine, I’m getting on!”

Seol Lihyang reluctantly climbed onto my back. She was lighter than expected, her body more bony than soft.

*How little has she been eating to be this thin?*

Clicking my tongue inwardly, I sprinted toward the wall where I’d embedded the spear.

“Wait, don’t tell me...!”

“Don’t open your mouth unless you want to bite your tongue.”

I felt her arms tighten instinctively around my neck as I leaped.

*Thud!*

“Kyaaaaa!”

Using the spear as a foothold, I vaulted onto the top of the wall, then onto the roof of a nearby building.

Seol Lihyang buried her face in my neck, trembling. I patted her hand lightly.

“Relax. You won’t fall. Open your eyes.”

“Ugh...”

Still teary-eyed, she slowly opened her eyes. Her expression shifted from fear to awe.

“Wow...”

The countless lights illuminating the night of Yanzhou spread out before us, a breathtaking sight.

Smiling faintly at her reaction, I gestured toward the lights.

“Most of those lights belong to the Hao Sect members chasing us.”

“Tell me the safest way to avoid them.”

Her face fell, turning pale, and she shakily pointed in one direction.

“Over there. That’s the fastest route.”

“Got it. Hold on tight.”

“Wh—what?!”

“You might fall.”

“You said I wouldn’t, you bastard!”

Grinning at her indignant protest, I activated my lightness technique and darted off.

“Catch them! They went into the alley!”

“The branch manager said he’d split the rewards with anyone who helps capture them!”

“Don’t hog it all—form groups to take them down!”

Pretending to head into an alley, I pressed myself flat against the back of a building, waiting for the Hao Sect members’ voices to fade.

When I felt it was safe, I let out the breath I’d been holding.

“Phew.”

The plan had worked.

By sticking to rooftops and moving between buildings, we'd escaped the sensation of being herded.

But a new problem had arisen.

The chaos of running along the rooftops had drawn an overwhelming number of Hao Sect members.

I had been cutting off their arms one by one, yet instead of reducing their numbers, they only seemed to multiply.

They weren't particularly strong—most were third- or second-rate fighters, with a few first-rate martial artists.

The issue was sheer numbers.

Everywhere I went, more Hao Sect members appeared. Even a coachman I'd assumed was a bystander lashed out with a whip.

The only explanation was that the master of *Honghwa Pavilion* had offered them a massive reward—whether it was martial arts, gold, or something else.

Having lived most of my life as an unorthodox martial artist, I knew all too well how greed drove people. Once the fire of desire was lit, they wouldn't stop until they had their prize or lost their heads.

“Damn unorthodox scum.”

Though I'd improved my stamina and internal energy over time, I was starting to reach my limits. I descended from the rooftops because using my lightness technique continually consumed too much energy.

If I could reach the inn, I might still make it. If not, I'd have to recover my strength bit by bit while hiding.

“This is bad.”

Leaning against the wall, I sighed deeply. Seol Lihyang, standing beside me, spoke in a subdued voice.

“Is the situation really that dangerous?”

“Not yet. But it could be soon.”

“Then...”

She hesitated, as if trying to decide what to say.

“There! They’re hiding here!”

“Even if you fail, it’s just an arm. But if you succeed, you might finally escape this wretched life! What are you hesitating for?!”

“Charge him all at once! He’s only one man—there’s no way he can block ten attacks with just two hands!”

“These bastards just won’t give me a break.”

The Hao Sect members surged from every direction, leaving me no time to catch my breath. Weapons came flying from three sides—swords, sabers, and spears aimed not at my vital points but at my limbs, places easy to subdue.

It was clear they didn't intend to kill me, and for that same reason, I couldn't unleash fatal strikes against them.

“Click.”

Clicking my tongue, I swung my sword at the first spear. At the same time, I split my concealed aura into three precise bursts.

The killing intent, minimal yet focused, rippled through the air, making the attackers flinch.

*Clang!*

My sword deflected the spear, which tangled with the other weapons, throwing the attackers off balance.

Seizing the moment, I slashed through three elbows in one fluid motion.

“Ggaaah!”

“My arm!”

“Monster...”

Their screams echoed as the Hao Sect members fell one by one. I frowned, my grip tightening on the hilt of my sword.

Cutting through human limbs required more strength than most people imagined. Internal energy made it easier, but even so, it wasn't limitless.

One skirmish had left my breathing labored. My shoulders ached to the point of numbness, and my dantian felt hollow.

Yet I kept my voice steady as I spoke.

“Which way now? We've twisted through so many alleys I've lost track.”

“If we get through that alley, it'll lead to a main road. From there, turn right and keep going. We're almost there.”

Seol Lihyang's voice carried a note of worry. Smiling faintly, I shook my head.

"I feel like I've heard 'almost there' three or four times already."

"This time it's true."

"Then let's hope you're right."

Forcing my weary body to move, I left before the commotion could draw more Hao Sect members. I silenced my footsteps as I led us through a narrow alley.

Midway through, Seol Lihyang spoke softly.

"Hey... your name is Cheon Hwi-da, right?"

"That's right."

"Why are you doing so much for me?"

“As I said, it’s because—”

“I don’t care about my father. I don’t even know if what you said is true. Even if it is, it’s not enough to justify all this trouble.”

“Hm?”

“Look. You seem to know a lot about me, but I can’t even remember your name properly.”

“We only met today. That’s natural.”

“Exactly. We just met today... so it’s fine now.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve done enough. Whatever debt you owed my father, you’ve paid it back. I’ll vouch for you.”

“So let’s end this here. Up until now, things have been fine, but you said it yourself—it’s going to get dangerous. You won’t die, but you could get seriously hurt. Just like all the arms you’ve been cutting off.”

“Maybe so.”

The master of *Honghwa Pavilion* had likely instructed his men to capture me alive, fearing conflict with the Sichuan Tang Clan.

But the grunts following those orders were a different story. They were on the brink of losing their limbs and lives. Expecting them to stick to orders under such conditions was naive.

I couldn’t let my guard down completely.

“Even so, I have no intention of stopping.”

“You... you idiot!”

Seol Lihyang clicked her tongue and abruptly turned, running back the way we had come.

But she wasn't trained in martial arts. No matter how tired I was, it didn't take much to catch up to her.

*Snap!*

I grabbed her wrist, halting her escape.

“Let go! You're going to get hurt because of me!”

She slapped and pushed at my arm, but I didn't loosen my grip. Her frustration boiled over, her face twisting with anger.

“Why... why are you doing this?! Is it my body you're after? If that's the case, fine! Just take what you want! I'm going to end up a courtesan anyway, so—”

Her voice cracked as her words turned to incoherent rambling.

I listened silently, holding her wrist firmly as I began walking forward.

Her protests grew quieter until she finally fell silent. Head bowed, she trailed after me without resistance.

In a calm tone, I began to speak.

“I used to be an arrogant man. I thought I could do anything as long as I had my sword.”

“At the same time, I understood that someone like me, who only had his sword, couldn’t keep anyone by his side.”

“But I was wrong. Even someone like me could form bonds. And there were those who wanted to stay by my side.”

“By the time I realized that, it was already too late... but it taught me to be honest with my emotions.”

It was true. The reason I could accept Tang Sowol’s feelings, the reason I came to love her, was all thanks to Seol Lihyang.

“I’ve gained far more from you than you think. So, Seol Lihyang, all you need to do is follow me quietly. I’ll take care of the rest. Got it?”

“...Okay.”

Her reply was soft, her head still hanging low.

I pulled her along as we exited the alley.

And then—

“I knew you’d come this way.”

The master of *Honghwa Pavilion* stood before us, flanked by enough Hao Sect members to fill the entire street.

## **I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan**

“Of course, you ended up here.”

Behind the speaker, the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion, stood a dense crowd that filled the main street.

Among them were people of all sorts: thugs who looked like troublemakers, young errand boys, a weary middle-aged coachman, and even courtesans dressed lavishly in stark contrast to the grim scene.

They were, quite literally, a ragtag group. But such people were what comprised the Hao Clan.

“So, you’ve gathered all the Hao Clan members in the prefecture just to capture me?”

“There seems to be a misunderstanding. What I’m after is not you, young hero, but the courtesan who fled. I’ll let this matter slide if you hand her over now.”

“You’re really taking the long way around just to say, ‘Hand her over.’”

“That wasn’t my intention, but if it came across that way, I can’t help it.”

The Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion maintained a smile laced with false courtesy. At that, I scoffed at his androgynous face.

“Stop spouting nonsense. Do you think I’ll just hand over Seol Lihyang now?”

“That’s the part I don’t understand. I didn’t have time to look into it deeply, but I know you’re a son-in-law of the Tang Clan. Then why are you so fixated on a mere courtesan?”

“I could ask you the same. Why is someone as high-ranking as the Lord of the Hao Clan’s branch so fixated on a mere courtesan?”

“I already told you. I’m only after my disciple.”

“Disciple, my ass. Isn’t it because you’re trying to treat the side effects of the *Absorption Art*?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“The defining characteristic of *Pure Yin Bodies* isn’t their Yin Qi quantity but its purity. And the side effects of the *Absorption Art* are mostly caused by impurities mixed into Yin or Yang Qi.”

By absorbing the pure Yin Qi from Seol Lihyang, the impurities in your body's Yin Qi would be partially neutralized.

It's a matter of concentration and balance. It's like pouring clean water into muddy water to dilute it to a usable level.

At that moment, Seol Lihyang picked up a random rock from the ground, wrinkling her forehead as she listened to our conversation.

"I have no idea what you're talking about, but... What are you planning to do with me?"

"You'd be taught an internal energy technique that causes all kinds of side effects but speeds up cultivation... then—"

"Get to the point!"

"The plan is to defile you and then kill you."

"That's messed up!"

Finally realizing the predicament she was in, Seol Lihyang threw the rock in her hand, visibly flustered.

Of course, it never hit the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion.

Even with restrictions on his internal energy, he was still a peak martial artist. Catching the rock effortlessly, he caused Seol Lihyang to explode in anger.

“The Hao Clan is supposed to be a sect where the weak help each other, right? How can this be allowed?”

“If that were the case, the Hao Clan wouldn’t be classified as a dark faction but as a righteous sect. And more importantly, Seol Lihyang, you’re not even a member of the Hao Clan; you’re an outsider.”

“What...?”

Perhaps this was her first time seeing the bare face of martial society. Seol Lihyang was at a loss for words, her lips trembling silently.

The most important thing to the Hao Clan was oneself. Helping each other was merely a means to ensure help when needed in the future.

In other words, if it was in one's self-interest, there was no hesitation to be cruel to outsiders.

The Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion, who had been listening to our conversation, still wore his insincere smile as he spoke again.

“I'll ask one last time. If you return my disciple now, I'll hold you accountable for nothing.”

“I refuse. I haven't yet repaid the favor I owe her, so I won't send her into a situation that's clearly a death sentence. And besides...”

I paused for a moment, then smirked as I raised the corners of my mouth.

“I don't listen to those weaker than me.”

The expression of the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion hardened. With a slight flick of his fingers, he gestured to the subordinates behind him.

“Attack. Just don’t kill him.”

Watching the Hao Clan members charge all at once, I spoke without taking my eyes off them.

“Seol Lihyang, stay behind me.”

“What should I do? I still have more rocks!”

“Just don’t leave my side. Honestly, you’re in the way.”

“Ugh. Fine.”

Only after confirming that Seol Lihyang had ducked behind me did I lift my sword.

Even though I had somewhat recovered while talking to the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion, my body was still tired.

And protecting someone while fighting meant I couldn't use my usual reckless, all-or-nothing tactics.

But it didn't matter.

No matter how many there were, the Hao Clan was still a gathering of riffraff.

If I were to fall, it would only be because I was exhausted, not because anyone managed to bring me down.

Two men charged at me first.

Perhaps unwilling to step into the range of my sword, they thrust their long spears from a distance.

But one of them seemed unfamiliar with his weapon, his movements clumsy and his thrusts sluggish.

Aiming for my shoulder and thigh, the spear tips flew toward me.

I swung my sword at the spear that arrived first, focusing my internal energy and pushing with force.

*Kkaang!*

Sparks flew as the metal clashed, and the spear's trajectory was deflected.

“Whoa??”

The deflected spear tangled with the other man's, causing both of their stances to falter. I stomped on the spear shaft with force.

*Kwajjik!*

The clumsy one lost his grip on his spear, and the more adept one held on but had his shaft snapped in two.

Both were now incapacitated.

I lunged forward, spinning low to the ground in a wide arc.

“Argh!”

“My leg...!”

The two fell to the ground, their thighs deeply slashed, as if kneeling before me.

I glanced around, emanating murderous intent in all directions.

The Hao Clan members hesitated, their movements faltering.

I swung my sword wide, scattering the blood clinging to the blade.

“Who’s next?”

The Hao Clan members exchanged glances, none daring to step forward.

Frustrated, the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion yelled at them.

“You idiots! Look at his arm! It’s trembling from exhaustion! If you can’t take him down, at least hold him off! He’ll collapse on his own if you wait long enough!”

Though I had tried to hide my state by acting forcefully, I couldn’t deceive the eyes of a peak martial artist.

With their spirits reinvigorated, the Hao Clan members began charging in groups, coordinating their attacks.

The ensuing fight was utter chaos.

I parried swords without pause, dodged falling axes, severed entangling whips, and intercepted those trying to bypass me to target Seol Lihyang.

Despite my fatigue, I maintained focus sharp enough to resist the seduction techniques of the courtesans aiding the Hao Clan.

I swung my sword, disarming and incapacitating one enemy after another.

But exhaustion was inevitable.

My breathing grew ragged, my body felt like lead, and my muscles twitched uncontrollably. Even my sword, which never wavered, began to shake.

Eventually, I started to falter in clashes of strength.

*Puhk!*

“Ugh!”

A staff struck my shoulder. It was something I should have avoided, but my legs failed to respond in time.

I retaliated by slashing at the man’s elbow.

*Sssk.*

“Ggahhh!”

Though my sword struck true, it no longer had the strength to sever limbs completely.

Despite taking down numerous foes, just as many Hao Clan members remained, their eyes gleaming with intent.

Gripping my sword with one hand, I struggled to steady my trembling arm.

As I worked to correct my faltering stance, the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion stepped forward, brushing past his subordinates.

“Well? Have you changed your mind now?”

“Hardly. Even in this state, I don’t think I’m weaker than you.”

“Fine. You claimed not to listen to those weaker than you, so let me personally show you the gap between us.”

Despite having stayed back until I was thoroughly worn out, the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion finally decided it was his turn.

Unlike the others, he was truly dangerous. A high-level martial artist, even if he wasn't at his peak.

But I had already made my choice and resolved to face the risks.

Breathing deeply, I lowered my sword into a relaxed stance.

It was more a limp posture than a proper stance, given my near exhaustion.

But this wasn't my first time fighting at my limit, and it wouldn't be the last.

I emptied my mind, casting aside the gratitude the Tang Clan owed to the Hao Clan and even my identity as a Tang Clan member.

I let go of my earlier hesitation to avoid killing.

In life-and-death battles, it isn't brute strength, deep internal energy, or intricate techniques that prevail.

It's the will to end a life, a blade aimed directly at the enemy's vital points.

My killing intent flowed freely, sharp and honed like a tempered blade.

Cold sweat trickled down the face of the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion, who stood in the full brunt of my murderous aura.

“You’re insane. Just who are you?”

“Cheon Hwi-da.”

Stepping forward with my left foot, I tilted my body slightly, ready to lunge at any moment.

“A swordsman.”

No fancy titles mattered. What mattered was that I still held a sword in my hand.

The message must have gotten through. Silently, the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion drew his flexible sword from his waist.

The thin blade bent and curved with every small movement.

Placing all my focus on the blade's tip, I prepared myself to intercept any change it made, driving strength into my toes.

*Tapt.*

With a short push from my ankle, I slid forward, closing the distance in an instant.

Though my speed was slower than usual due to my lack of internal energy, it was enough to surprise him.

“!”

The Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion panicked as my sword aimed directly at his throat.

He twisted his wrist, causing his flexible sword to deflect my blade midair.

*Teong!*

Though it diverted my attack, the flexible sword wasn't suited for direct clashes.

The blade rebounded, failing to guide my movements or set up a follow-up attack. It was merely a desperate attempt to neutralize immediate danger.

Blood vessels in his eyes burst, and blood leaked from the corner of his mouth as he strained to rally his internal energy.

I had expected this. In times of desperation, those with hidden tricks reveal them without hesitation.

The Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion unleashed a vicious barrage with his sword, undulating like a snake.

But I thrust myself forward, bringing my neck dangerously close to his attack.

“.....!”

The Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion was as constrained as I was. A lethal blow would backfire on him too.

Forced to redirect his blade, he left his side wide open.

Taking advantage of the gap, I drove my sword into his ribs.

*Puhk.*

The blade slipped between his ribs, piercing his heart.

His body stiffened for a moment before collapsing with a massive spurt of blood.

“Khugh! You little bastard... Do you think you’ll survive after killing me? How will you deal with the aftermath—”

“You think too much.”

Interrupting his words, I twisted the blade, crushing his heart completely.

The Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion collapsed with his eyes wide open.

I murmured to his lifeless body, “For someone in a dark faction, you talk too much.”

Not that I was much different.

## **I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan**

The Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion was dead.

Perhaps it was because no one had died until now, even if many were seriously injured. The Hao Clan members were in an uproar.

From their perspective, not only had I abducted the Lord’s courtesan, but I had also taken his life. It was a situation that warranted cries for revenge.

Just as I had once cried for vengeance before the burning Ironblood Hall.

Raising my sword again, I sharpened my senses. Now, this wouldn't end until one side—either me or them—was dead.

“Sh-shouldn't we leave it at this?”

A weasel-faced man at the forefront, with a sly expression, spoke up.

Thinking it might be a trick, I stared at him in silence. He even went so far as to cautiously put away his chain hammer.

“I only came because the branch leader promised a chest full of gold if we brought someone back alive. I figured at worst, I might lose an arm or two, but I wouldn't lose my head... But judging by what just happened, it seems you've decided to shed blood, haven't you?”

“That's correct.”

I hadn't planned to before, but now, I wasn't going to hesitate.

The weasel-faced man took a step back and continued.

“Well, the branch leader who was supposed to pay me is dead, and the promise of safety is broken. What’s the point of fighting any longer?”

“Aren’t you going to take revenge or something?”

“We weren’t close enough to stake our lives on it.”

The man shook his head firmly.

Watching him with a curious expression, I saw others lowering their weapons in agreement.

“Uh, well... can we leave now?”

“Do as you wish.”

As soon as I gave the word, he turned around and fled, relief clear on his face.

I squinted as I watched him run away, wondering if it was really necessary for him to sprint like that. But before I could dwell on it, Seol Lihyang, who had been nervously fidgeting behind me, pointed in his direction and shouted.

“Hey! He’s heading to the Bright Moon Pavilion to hoard all the rewards stored there since the Lord is dead, isn’t he?”

The Hao Clan members froze for a moment but soon lit up with fiery determination and began to run.

“Catch that bastard!”

“Don’t let him hog it all!”

“What about the ones with severed arms?!”

Of course, not everyone headed for the Bright Moon Pavilion.

Some left in different directions as if they had no interest, while others remained to tend to the injured.

Finally, the courtesans, trained in seductive arts, bowed their heads toward me.

“Thank you, young hero.”

“Are you seriously thanking the one who killed the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion?”

“Most of us courtesans didn’t come to the pavilion of our own will.”

“Hah.”

So, there were more like Seol Lihyang, sold into their roles as courtesans.

One of the courtesans who had bowed to me gave a bitter smile and explained further.

“No matter how addictive gambling may be, it’s not easy for someone to go mad enough to sell their daughter in an instant. Unless someone nearby whispers poisonous words into their ear, that is.”

“That’s...”

This was something I hadn’t known even in my previous life.

Seol Lihyang hadn’t been sold as a courtesan and then used as an elixir because of her unique constitution.

They had discovered her constitution first, and then they deliberately ruined her family to turn her into a courtesan.

Even knowing the Hao Clan’s nature, I hadn’t expected them to go this far.

While both Seol Lihyang and I stood frozen in disbelief, the courtesan turned to look at the towering Bright Moon Pavilion.

“Today, the Bright Moon Pavilion will accidentally catch fire, thanks to some reckless hooligans taking advantage of the owner’s absence. And the registry might just get burned along with it.”

“I see.”

If that were to happen, there would be no need to record Seol Lihyang as a runaway courtesan.

She wouldn't be considered a courtesan at all anymore.

And the same would go for them.

With one last bow toward Seol Lihyang, the courtesans walked off toward their soon-to-be-destroyed workplace.

In mere moments, the once-crowded street was deserted.

Seeing this, Seol Lihyang, who had been clutching a rock she picked up at some point, slowly lowered it to the ground.

When had she picked that up again?

“Is... is it over?”

“It seems so. Honestly, I thought I'd have to cut down a few more people.”

“Is this kind of thing common for martial artists? Like... scattering as soon as their leader dies?”

“No, not usually. It doesn’t resolve itself this easily. There are surprisingly few people in the world who are truly wicked.”

Family, friends, lovers, subordinates... Every person has someone they cherish and who cherishes them in return.

And it’s those people who vow revenge, keeping the martial world in a state of constant turmoil.

The Hundred Kill Swordsman and the warriors who followed him to attack Tang Sowol before were such a case.

Even villains killed by the Tang Clan were not seen as deserving of death in their eyes.

“It seems the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion wasn’t like that, though. He likely controlled people solely through money and fear.”

“We weren’t close enough to stake our lives on it,’ was it? And none of the courtesans joined of their own will, either.”

Seol Lihyang muttered as if mulling over what she had heard earlier. After a moment of thought, she looked down at the corpse of the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion and prodded it with her foot, as if checking to see if he was really dead.

“Well, I don’t care about a dead man’s story. What matters is that this bastard is dead, and we’re alive.”

“Alive, sure. But I wouldn’t call us unscathed.”

Confirming that the Hao Clan members had fully disappeared, I sheathed my sword.

As I did, a wave of exhaustion washed over me. My body swayed, feeling as though I’d collapse if I relaxed even slightly.

“Whoa?!”

Seol Lihyang instinctively caught me as I stumbled. Awkwardly positioning herself to support my arm over her shoulder, she frantically asked,

“Hey! Stay with me! Are you okay? If you’re hurt, say so now!”

“Don’t yell. You’re hurting my ears. Other than the shoulder you’re holding, I’m fine.”

She quickly shifted to the opposite side to better support me, her concern easing the pain somewhat.

Reassured by her effort, I tried to put her at ease.

“I’m just tired, that’s all. Don’t worry.”

“Well, that’s a relief... So, what now? Should we just head back to the inn where you’re staying?”

“That’s right. But...”

“It’s fine. I’ll take you there.”

“Do you think you can manage? You must be exhausted too.”

She hadn't fought or used martial techniques, but she had been running nonstop since descending from the roof.

Given her malnourished and frail state, it must have been an extreme ordeal.

Even so, she adjusted her stance and supported me without complaint.

“Not as much as you. Besides, you've been carrying me on your back while running around until now, haven't you? It's my turn this time. We're almost there, anyway.”

With a shrug that seemed almost playful, she started walking, carrying me along.

The tight-packed streets, the pervasive stench of sweat, and the faintly familiar scent of her body surrounded me.

Looking at her now, her pale skin was flushed red from exertion, as though blood was finally circulating again.

Watching her like this, I felt an odd sense of nostalgia, as if I'd been transported back in time.

But I knew better. I'd already learned this through Tang Sowol.

No matter how much I longed for the past or felt a sense of déjà vu, the present and the people of my previous life could never truly be the same.

The Seol Lihyang I had known was gone. She had died smiling, clutching the first gift I had ever given her.

This moment now? It was nothing more than a lingering regret granted to a dead man like me.

It wasn't for some grand cause—it was purely for my own satisfaction.

But I had no regrets.

Even if I were to return to that moment again, I would undoubtedly make the same choice.

We walked in silence for who knows how long, through a quiet night street with barely a soul in sight. Amid the whispers of those still awake, Seol Lihyang's voice broke through.

"Thank you."

Still holding me up with one arm, she took another step forward, her voice resolute.

"I thought I'd never escape this street for the rest of my life."

"You would've escaped eventually, on your own."

"Maybe my body would've left, but my heart would've stayed trapped in the red-light district of Yeonju, quietly closing its eyes with a sigh at the end. That's what my entire life would've been."

Her voice faltered, then grew firm again.

"But not anymore, Cheon Hwi-da. You've painted over my memories."

She kept walking, staring straight ahead.

“I saw the towering walls of the Bright Moon Pavilion shatter. I saw the terrifying Hao Clan warriors crawl in the dirt. I remember the night view of Yeonju from high above and the feel of the wind brushing against my cheeks.”

After taking a deep breath, she spoke with even more resolve.

“And for whatever reason, I saw someone throw themselves into danger for my sake.”

Her lips softened into a serene smile, one so similar to the Seol Lihyang of my previous life that it left me speechless.

As if to fill the silence, she continued in a gentle tone.

“So, thank you. Thanks to you, Cheon Hwi-da, I was able to escape this wretched pit.”

“I see.”

After much thought, that was all I could say.

Even so, Seol Lihyang simply smiled warmly, as though my response was enough.

“Cheon Hwi-da. You said you helped me because you owed my father a favor... but I think you’ve more than repaid that debt, with plenty of change left over.”

“Don’t tell me you’re planning to return the favor that much.”

“I am. Just like you helped me, I’ll repay my debt to you, no matter what.”

Turning to look directly at me, she stared into my eyes and emphasized her words.

“No matter what.”

Her tone was almost suggestive, stirring improper thoughts.

I had assumed the allure in her voice was a side effect of the seductive arts she had been forced to learn.

But perhaps I was wrong.

Even without mastering those arts, she didn't seem all that different. Maybe it was simply innate.

*Gulp.*

Before I realized it, I swallowed hard.

Distracted, I failed to notice a protruding stone in my path and tripped.

In my weakened state, I couldn't resist the momentum and began to fall.

“W-wait, hold on!”

Seol Lihyang tried to steady me, but she was exhausted herself. Unable to keep her balance, she fell as well.

*Thud!*

“Ugh... ow...”

“Mn...”

She landed on her back, and I ended up sprawled on top of her, my face buried in her chest.

Though smaller than in my previous life, the soft sensation enveloped my face entirely.

Realizing this, Seol Lihyang froze, stiff as a board, while I struggled futilely to lift myself from her arms.

And just then, the voice I least wanted to hear sounded from behind me.

“My betrothed was out so late that I grew worried. I traced you using the Poison of the Twin-Headed Viper and finally found you...”

Tang Sowol's calm, icy tone continued.

“Brother Cheon. What exactly is this situation? And who is that woman?”

Indeed...

How was I supposed to explain this?

## **I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan**

“Brother Cheon, what exactly is going on here, and who is that woman?”

Her voice was calm yet icy, reminiscent of the tone Tang Sowol had used when I first abducted her.

I understood why. After all, she had tracked me down late at night, only to find me tangled up on the ground with a strange woman.

It was the perfect setup for a misunderstanding. But in moments like this, panic would only make things worse.

The first step was to put some distance between Seol Lihyang and myself and explain the situation.

Though I felt like I'd faint the moment I closed my eyes, I mustered my remaining strength to rise.

*Thud.*

But my body gave out, and I fell back onto Seol Lihyang's chest, burying my face in it again.

To make matters worse, Seol Lihyang instinctively held my head in place to keep it from moving, her arms wrapping around me as if she were hugging me tighter.

I couldn't see Tang Sowol's face behind me, but the chill running down my spine told me her usual serene demeanor had long since vanished.

Sensing danger, I yelled in desperation.

“Mffmmph!”

“Hiik!”

My attempt to speak was muffled by something soft pressing against my mouth, making my words incomprehensible. Startled, Seol Lihyang flinched like a cat whose tail had been stepped on.

“Brother Cheon...”

Tang Sowol’s voice now carried a faint trace of sorrow.

“I don’t want to believe it, and I hope I’m wrong... but if you were to betray me, I would have no choice but to kill both of you and erase everything.”

Seol Lihyang, clearly terrified for her life, quickly lifted my head. My neck felt a little stiff, but at least I could speak again.

“This is a misunderstanding!”

“...Excuse me?”

“I can explain everything! But first, could you help me up?”

“Are you serious?”

Her tone was uncertain, but she grabbed my shoulder and helped me up.

My limbs were weak and practically useless, so she half-supported me as I leaned against her.

*Fwoomp.*

My head came to rest against something soft and supportive—her shoulder, I guessed—and I exhaled a sigh of relief.

“Whew... just listen to me for a moment.”

There was a lot to explain after all that had happened today.

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After I finished explaining, Tang Sowol glanced around, her face flushed with embarrassment from the misunderstanding.

Though it was late at night and the streets were mostly empty, there were still a few people around.

This was Yeonju, after all—a city that seemed more alive at night than during the day.

After confirming there weren't too many onlookers, Tang Sowol suddenly crouched down on the ground.

“For now... please allow me to carry you. We can talk as we go.”

“Wait, you're offering to carry me?”

“Who else? You're the only one here who's struggling just to stand.”

“But... being carried is a bit...”

“It’ll be faster than supporting you on foot. And for your information, the Dark Soul Unit is combing all of Yeonju right now. They’re searching for you.”

“...Tch.”

I couldn’t argue with that.

Resigning myself to the situation, I closed my eyes tightly and leaned onto Tang Sowol’s back. She adjusted me and effortlessly carried me piggyback.

There was a faint fragrance about her—clean and calming.

With a gentler tone now, she remarked, “You made the right choice. Still, I didn’t expect so much to happen in just a few hours.”

“Wasn’t it noisy enough for you to notice?”

“The inn we were staying at was very quiet. That’s why I only started searching for you now.”

“Lucky me, then.”

I tightened my grip around her neck slightly, letting out a sigh.

The breath must have tickled her skin because she shivered slightly before quickly changing the subject.

“You said the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion avoided implicating the Tang Clan until the very end, didn’t you? Perhaps he took precautions around the inn to avoid drawing attention.”

“Probably. This is his domain, after all. Hiding our presence for a while wouldn’t have been difficult for him.”

While Seol Lihyang and I were making our escape, he must have been setting up smokescreens around the inn and orchestrating a hunt to corner us.

Impressive tactics, though ultimately pointless now.

As I nodded to myself, Tang Sowol spoke in a cautious tone.

“I understand the situation now. I apologize for misunderstanding you earlier. I acted rashly because I was so concerned. Can you forgive me?”

“It’s fine. Given the circumstances, it’s understandable.”

“M-me too! I think anyone would’ve misunderstood if they saw their fiancé rolling around with another woman!”

Seol Lihyang’s words came out in a flustered rush.

I chuckled at her awkward attempt to smooth things over.

“What’s with that strange tone? You spoke casually to me, cursed like a sailor at the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion, and now you’re trying to act all proper with Tang Sowol?”

“Well, I *did* talk to you like this at first! But you told me to drop the formalities! And why should I be polite to someone trying to kill me? But she’s different!”

“Different how?”

“She’s from a noble family, she’s beautiful, and she’s an adult! How could I treat her like someone my age?”

Seol Lihyang glanced at Tang Sowol, her expression a mix of admiration and self-deprecation.

That sort of emotion was common among those who had lived harsh lives. I’d felt the same way in my younger days, before I brought down the Red Sand Gang with my own hands.

While time could heal such feelings, it also meant she needed time to move past them.

Tang Sowol, perceptive as ever, seemed to recognize this as well.

Her voice softened as she spoke.

“Allow me to introduce myself again. I am Tang Sowol of the Sichuan Tang Clan.”

“Y-yes! I’m Seol Lihyang!”

“Since you’re a benefactor to Brother Cheon, you’re also a benefactor to me. Please don’t feel burdened.”

“Still...”

“Hmm. How about starting with something simpler? You could call me ‘Sister,’ for instance.”

“S-Sister?!”

Seol Lihyang flinched like a startled cat, her wide eyes betraying her shock.

Tang Sowol chuckled, nodding gently. “Yes. I am older than you, after all.”

“Well... that’s true...”

Seol Lihyang was the same age as me, so naturally, Tang Sowol was several years older.

After hesitating for a long while, Seol Lihyang finally murmured, “Tang... Sister?”

With a satisfied smile, Tang Sowol patted Seol Lihyang on the head.

Her flustered reaction only prompted Tang Sowol to smile playfully and tease, “Brother Cheon has such an old-man-like personality that he’s not cute at all.”

“Oh, I know what you mean. It’s his stiff expressions and that formal way of speaking, right?”

“Ah, so it wasn’t just me who thought so. You know, at first, I thought Brother Cheon was an old martial artist pretending to be young.”

“Wait, really?”

Seol Lihyang's eyes widened in surprise, her reaction so obvious that Tang Sowol became even more animated, eagerly recounting stories.

After talking for a while and easing Seol Lihyang's tension, Tang Sowol suddenly sighed.

She lightly tapped the back of my hand, which was resting around her neck, and said, "Sigh. Despite how mature you act, Brother Cheon, I sometimes forget you're only fifteen."

That left me with mixed feelings. I knew she didn't mean it that way, but as someone who had lived a previous life, it felt like she was calling me immature.

When I remained silent, Tang Sowol gently clasped my hand.

"Don't be too hard on yourself. We were lucky to settle this by cutting down the Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion, but do you know how worried I was about what could have happened?"

"Sorry. I thought I could handle it alone. I didn't expect things to escalate this much."

“I’m not asking for an apology. I just want you to tell me next time. Your problems are my problems, just as mine are yours.”

“I promise. Next time, I’ll consult you first.”

“Only words?”

Tang Sowol pouted and held up her pinky finger.

“Brother Cheon, didn’t I say I’d be your strength when you need it? Or do you not trust me?”

Recalling the time she’d made me promise by linking pinkies, I hesitated before intertwining my finger with hers.

“Is this good enough?”

“Perfect.” She nodded, her tone bright and cheerful. “I’ll explain everything to Father. Don’t worry.”

Perhaps it was because I was on her back, but her swaying hair brushed against my cheek, tickling me.

I couldn't help but chuckle softly at the absurdity of it all.

While we were laughing, I caught sight of Seol Lihyang's face.

She looked distant, as if waking from a long dream, her expression tinged with sorrow.

But when our eyes met, she immediately returned to her usual demeanor, her voice light and playful.

“So, you're really the Tang Clan's son-in-law, huh?”

“You didn't believe me?”

“I believed you. It just didn't feel real.”

She shrugged nonchalantly, and the three of us continued toward the inn, chatting lightly and checking for any remaining injuries.

Though being carried on Tang Sowol's back was a bit embarrassing, it was surprisingly comfortable.

It wasn't long before fatigue overcame me, and I began to doze off.

Half-asleep, I vaguely registered Tang Sowol speaking hesitantly.

“By the way, Brother Cheon...”

“Mm? What is it?”

“You originally planned to buy Miss Seol with money and add her to the Tang Clan's registry, didn't you?”

“Yes. But that was just to resolve things smoothly...”

“I’m not criticizing you for using the money Father gave you to buy her freedom. After all, you were trying to save your benefactor’s daughter.”

“...That’s right.”

As I nodded awkwardly, Tang Sowol’s voice grew more serious.

“Still... you abducted me when we first met. And now Miss Seol. Do you... enjoy abducting women?”

An awkward silence fell.

I glanced at Seol Lihyang, who covered her mouth, clearly stifling laughter. Whatever thoughts she was having, they were surely inappropriate.

As I glared at her, Tang Sowol, as if making a resolute decision, spoke again.

“If you like it that much, I wouldn’t mind letting you abduct me a couple more times.”

“That’s not it!”

This was all just a misunderstanding—or so I hoped.

## **I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan**

As expected, the Tang Clan erupted into chaos when I arrived back at the inn.

I’d shown up unable to walk on my own, carried on Tang Sowol’s back, and accompanied by an unfamiliar face.

After mustering the last bits of my strength to give a brief explanation, I left the rest to Tang Sowol and Seol Lihyang and promptly collapsed into sleep.

The next morning...

“Tch. Still sleeping, huh? How is someone so frail supposed to become the Tang Clan’s son-in-law?”

“Brother, no one would call someone frail after they fought off the entire Hao Clan in Yeonju and even defeated the branch leader.”

Even in my half-asleep state, the gruff voice reached my ears clearly, waking me.

A soft bed, warm sunlight streaming through the window, the distant chirping of birds...

And the unpleasant sight of burly men glaring down at me from my bedside. What a refreshing way to start the day.

I circulated my internal energy to shake off the remnants of sleep before speaking.

“What brings you all here so early in the morning?”

“We have things to discuss and some things to give you,” Tang Jincheon said.

“I’m sorry to disturb you when you need more rest,” Tang Yujin added, giving me a friendly wave. “But it’s something that will help you, so please don’t find us too troublesome.”

Despite their appearances, they were genuinely good people. But seeing them first thing in the morning was a bit overwhelming.

“How could I think that? I’m just surprised. What’s so urgent that you’ve come to see me?”

“We’ve arranged a carriage,” Tang Jincheon explained. “We’re planning to return to Chengdu in about an hour, so we came to let you know to prepare.”

“Wait, right now?”

“We can’t risk staying here longer. Who knows what might happen next? It’s best to prioritize returning to Chengdu. I know you’re not fully recovered yet, but we’d like you to rest in the carriage instead of on a bed.”

“I have no objections, but isn’t this a bit rushed?”

“It needs to be rushed. We have a lot to deal with—explaining the situation to the Hao Clan, addressing any protests, and potentially applying some pressure if necessary.”

Tang Jincheon’s expression hardened as he spoke, his tone barely suppressing his anger.

I glanced at Tang Yujin for clarification. Catching my look, he offered a sheepish explanation.

“Even though you haven’t officially married Sowol yet, we’ve made it clear that you’re part of the Tang Clan. The Hao Clan knows this, but the branch leader here treated you like prey and hunted you down.”

“Well, it’s probably because I ‘kidnapped’ Seol Lihyang,” I said.

“You mean the girl you brought with you? She’s the daughter of your benefactor, so I understand your actions, but they were still extreme. However, there’s an order to things and a proper way to handle them.”

Tang Yujin’s smile turned sharp as he continued.

“The Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion should have first visited us to explain the situation and seek a resolution.”

But the Lord didn’t do that.

Instead, he controlled the area around the inn where the Tang Clan members were staying to keep the commotion out of earshot while he mobilized the Hao Clan to capture me.

He must have planned to secure Seol Lihyang first and then negotiate with the Tang Clan from a position of strength.

He had been desperate and likely assumed we wouldn't hand Seol Lihyang over once we learned the details.

But still...

“That doesn't change the fact that he disregarded the Tang Clan. And you could have been seriously injured.”

“That's true...”

If the Hao Clan members had continued fighting after I defeated their leader, I might not have made it out unscathed.

“Of course, I'm not saying you did the right thing. You should have consulted the elders about this beforehand.”

“I apologize. Tang Sowol already scolded me about it.”

Perhaps because her name was mentioned, Tang Jincheon's tone softened as he spoke again.

"Let me say this once more. We all know you're skilled, but not every problem needs to be solved with a sword. If you face difficulties, bring them to us. That's what the elders are here for."

Though I acknowledged that I was still young from an outsider's perspective, as someone with memories of a past life, I wasn't fond of being treated like a child.

Still, just like when Tang Sowol said something similar, the sentiment didn't feel bad.

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Good. Now, let's move on to the next matter."

"Next matter?"

"As I said, we have things to give you."

Tang Jincheon began pulling out various items and handing them to me.

“This is *Supreme Vitality Pill*, this is a tonic called *Hundred Herb Decoction*, and here are a few *Reinforced Essence Pill* pills. If we were in the Tang Clan’s main estate, we’d have better medicines, but unfortunately, this is the best we could get here.”

I looked at the armful of medicines with a puzzled expression.

“What are these for?”

“They’re for you, of course. We bought these from a nearby pharmacy in a hurry. None of them are miracle elixirs, but they’re all good for restoring energy. We made sure they don’t conflict with each other, so eat them all.”

Tang Jincheon grumbled about how I was too frail for someone about to marry into the Tang Clan, yet he’d gone out and bought this much medicine in a single night.

Feeling a bit overwhelmed, I accepted the medicines and said, “Thank you?”

“Don’t thank me. Just eat them.”

After swallowing the pills and drinking the tonic, a bitter medicinal taste lingered in my mouth, making me grimace despite my efforts to hide it.

Satisfied, Tang Jincheon stood up.

“Now then, we’ll leave. Someone will come to get you soon, so be ready by then.”

“I understand.”

With those parting words, Tang Jincheon and Tang Yujin left the room.

In truth, I had little to prepare. All I owned was my body and a sword.

They likely knew this and were simply giving me time to recover using the medicines they’d brought.

“Whew.”

Ignoring the soreness in my body, I forced myself into a meditative position and took deep breaths.

Soon, my consciousness sank deep into my inner world.

Though my body still ached here and there, I managed to recover enough to move properly.

When one of the Dark Soul Unit members arrived to escort me outside, I was greeted by a grand and luxurious carriage, far more impressive than I had expected.

Near the carriage, Tang Sowol and Seol Lihyang were chatting.

Judging by the scene, it seemed Tang Sowol was making an effort to ease Seol Lihyang's nervousness around the Tang Clan warriors.

When I approached, Tang Sowol immediately noticed me and hurried over, with Seol Lihyang following hesitantly.

“Brother Cheon, are you feeling better now?”

“The patriarch brought me medicine this morning. Thanks to him, I’m well enough to move.”

“My father? Heh, as much as he complains, it seems he really does like you!”

Tang Sowol giggled behind her hand, while Seol Lihyang inspected me curiously.

“You were so exhausted you collapsed, and now you’re fine after a single night? Are all martial artists like this?”

“I was only fatigued, that’s all.”

“Isn’t that still a problem...?”

“I wasn’t seriously injured, either externally or internally. And while the medicines weren’t miracle elixirs, they helped replenish my energy. A bit of meditation did the rest.”

“Can you explain that in a way someone who doesn’t know martial arts can understand?”

“For someone like me, good medicine and rest are enough to recover quickly.”

“Wow, martial artists are amazing!”

Seol Lihyang’s awe was so pure that it made me chuckle.

As I laughed, Tang Sowol gently tugged my arm and guided me toward the carriage.

“Brother Cheon may say that, but he’s far from fully recovered. You’ll need to rest in the carriage for the time being.”

“R-really? Is that true, Sister Tang?”

“Yes. According to my uncle, young men like him often overestimate themselves. They feel embarrassed to admit when they’re not fine, so they insist they are.”

“That’s not true,” I retorted.

“Oh, it isn’t? Then why is it that every time you claim you’re fine, you end up collapsing or seriously injured?”

“When have I ever—”

“When you fought the Hundred Kill Swordsman, you passed out covered in blood. When you faced the Ogre Chief and Ghostwood Witch, you suffered severe internal injuries from the demonic energy. And this time, too. If you’d pushed yourself a little further, you’d have damaged your energy flow and needed a long recovery.”

“...I said I was fine because I was fine. I wasn’t dying, was I?”

“‘Not dying’ doesn’t mean ‘safe.’”

I had no response to that.

She was right, of course. Many young martial artists in my position often met tragic ends because of their recklessness.

Tang Sowol continued leading me toward the carriage, where Seol Lihyang opened the door.

With seamless coordination, the two of them had me seated in no time.

Tang Sowol sat beside me, while Seol Lihyang took the seat across from us. The seats were already padded with soft leather for comfort.

With her usual graceful yet firm smile, Tang Sowol spoke.

“Lie down here, young hero.”

Before I could respond, she gently pulled my head toward her lap.

Resting my head on her thigh, she nodded in satisfaction.

“You were disappointed when you had to ride with my father on the way here, weren’t you? Now you can return with me instead. Isn’t that wonderful?”

Her words carried the confidence of someone who believed her actions could only make me happy.

Normally, I might have played along and enjoyed her assertive attitude, but...

For some reason, the conflicted expression on Seol Lihyang's face, her wide eyes staring at me, made me feel awkward.

Without thinking, I changed the subject entirely.

"Speaking of which, about Seol Lihyang's situation..."

"M-me? The patriarch said he'd help me settle in Chengdu," Seol Lihyang replied.

"That would be good. Living under the Tang Clan's protection would be safe and comfortable. But for me, it would feel like a waste."

"A waste? Why?"

Her voice carried a hint of curiosity, as though she was expecting something.

“You have a talent for martial arts. It would be a shame to let it go to waste.”

“Martial arts?!”

Her initial disappointment turned to excitement as her eyes sparkled.

“What kind of martial arts talent? Swordsmanship like yours? Throwing weapons like Sister Tang’s? I guess I *am* pretty good at throwing stones.”

As she grinned and nodded to herself, I replied in a calm voice.

“You have a natural talent for seductive arts.”

A cold silence filled the carriage.

## **I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan**

“A talent for seductive arts.”

A cold silence fell within the carriage.

Perhaps it was because of my current position—resting my head on Tang Sowol’s lap as though using her thighs as a pillow—but I could feel her hand on my head subtly tense.

It was only then that I realized how my words might have sounded.

I had essentially told someone who nearly became a tool for training in seductive arts that it was a shame she hadn’t learned them. And I’d said it while lying on my fiancée’s lap, no less.

I quickly shook my head in denial.

“It’s a misunderstanding.”

“A misunderstanding... is that so?”

“I... I think I’ll pass on martial arts altogether...”

Tang Sowol’s voice was calm and steady, while Seol Lihyang, taking note of her tone, quietly inched away from her.

I attempted to sit up and clarify, but...

*Gently.*

Tang Sowol placed her hand on my forehead and lightly pushed me back down, leaving me no choice but to continue speaking from my reclined position.

“I’m not saying she should train in seductive arts. I’m just pointing out that she has a talent for that kind of thing.”

“So, what you’re saying, Brother, is that Miss Seol has an innate talent in that... area?”

“You... you’ve been looking at her like that all along?”

Tang Sowol began poking my cheek repeatedly with her finger. It didn’t hurt, but there was an odd pressure to her gesture.

Meanwhile, Seol Lihyang frowned but didn't seem entirely opposed to the conversation.

Eventually, she sighed and grabbed Tang Sowol's hand to stop her from continuously poking me.

“He's talking about the *Pure Yin Constitution*.”

“Oh!”

“That's right... I almost forgot about that.”

Tang Sowol's face reddened, embarrassed at her earlier misunderstanding. Seol Lihyang, on the other hand, simply nodded as if this were someone else's issue entirely.

Of course, that made sense. She likely knew nothing about martial arts or her unique constitution.

“How much do you know about the Pure Yin Constitution?” I asked.

“Honestly, not much. Other than my *Poison Spirit Constitution*, I’m not familiar with these things. I assume it’s related to yin energy, like the *Nine Yin Severed Veins*?”

“I just found out I have this constitution. Is it... a good thing?” Seol Lihyang asked, looking uncertain.

Both of them seemed clueless. That was understandable. If not for what I’d learned from Seol Lihyang in my previous life, I wouldn’t have known about it either.

The *Nine Yin Severed Veins* was so infamous that other yin-based constitutions often went overlooked.

Perhaps embarrassed by her earlier reaction, Tang Sowol tried to pull her hand away. This time, I firmly grasped her hand and began to slowly trace my fingers along hers, one by one.

Every time I slid my fingers between hers, she flinched slightly but didn’t pull away, likely because she’d just been poking my cheek moments ago.

“The Pure Yin Constitution is completely different from the *Nine Yin Severed Veins*,” I began to explain. “The *Nine Yin Severed Veins* is a condition where key

meridians are blocked, causing an abnormal buildup of yin energy. The sheer volume and intensity of that energy mean those with the condition rarely live beyond their twenties without intervention.”

“W-wait, am I going to die?! I’m fifteen now, so... does that mean I only have five years left?!”

Seol Lihyang panicked and started counting the years she had left on her fingers.

Seeing this, Tang Sowol chuckled behind her hand.

“Don’t worry. The name *Severed Veins* is given to conditions that result in death due to blocked meridians. Since your condition is called the *Pure Yin Constitution* and not the *Pure Yin Severed Veins*, it shouldn’t be that severe.”

“Tang Sowol is right,” I added. “The Pure Yin Constitution does involve a high amount of yin energy, but it’s not life-threatening. Its key trait is the purity of that yin energy.”

“Purity?”

“Yes. Naturally, people accumulate *impurities* over their lives. It’s not a bad thing—it’s a natural byproduct of living and interacting with others. However, these impurities can hinder martial arts training.”

That’s why many clans and sects start training their disciples in martial arts at a young age, before too many impurities have accumulated.

As people age, their meridians narrow, and their ability to circulate internal energy becomes less efficient.

Even I started training in martial arts relatively late at fifteen. It wasn’t too late, but compared to those raised in prestigious families, nourished with rare elixirs and techniques from childhood, I had a lot of catching up to do.

The *Hundred Poisons Pure Blood Pill* I’d recently taken had helped to some extent, though.

“The Pure Yin Constitution, however, naturally resists the buildup of impurities. The purity of the yin energy naturally washes away most impurities.”

The Lord of the Bright Moon Pavilion had likely intended to absorb Seol Lihyang’s pure yin energy to cleanse his own internal energy of impurities.

After hearing my explanation, Seol Lihyang scratched the back of her neck awkwardly and asked, “Um... so what’s the point of not having impurities? You said it’s natural to have them.”

“It may be natural, but being free of impurities is special. It allows for faster cultivation and greater efficiency. Even if you start learning martial arts late, you can still achieve greatness.”

“So... I have a talent for martial arts?”

“Isn’t that what I’ve been saying this whole time?”

“Hehe. I just wanted to hear it again. No one’s ever told me I’m good at anything before.”

Seol Lihyang chuckled sheepishly.

In my previous life, she had reached the pinnacle of martial arts despite training in a flawed technique.

Though she lacked the eerie presence she had back then, if she learned proper martial arts now, she could aim even higher.

While I was nodding to myself, Tang Sowol, who had been listening intently, asked cautiously, “Brother, I think the most important thing about a constitution like this is not just the talent it provides but the drawbacks that come with it. Do you know if there are any issues with the Pure Yin Constitution?”

“Of course. While it doesn’t lead to an early death, it does come with its own problems. The high amount of yin energy and its purity can cause minor issues if left unchecked.”

“W-what kind of issues?” Seol Lihyang asked nervously, swallowing hard.

Recalling what I’d learned in my past life, I answered, “For starters, you’ll be extremely sensitive to the cold. Your complexion may be pale, your limbs weak, and you might experience hallucinations or hear things that aren’t there.”

“That sounds serious!”

“It is. While it won’t kill you, it’s enough to drive someone mad. Fortunately, there’s a clear solution.”

“Phew. So there’s a way to deal with it, huh?”

“If there wasn’t, I wouldn’t have brought it up in the first place.”

“Stop dragging it out and tell me already! I’m desperate here!”

Amused by her urgency, I smiled and said, “The solution is simple: train in a martial art that manipulates yin energy.”

“There’s a martial art for that?”

“Of course. The most common would be techniques related to the seductive arts, but—”

“Stop right there! I knew it!” Seol Lihyang pouted, her face suspicious. “You’re just trying to make me learn something weird!”

Her sudden pause and nervous glance at Tang Sowol suggested she’d realized this wasn’t the kind of conversation to have in front of one’s fiancée.

Thankfully, Tang Sowol either didn’t notice or chose to ignore the implication, laughing playfully.

“There are other options too, aren’t there, Brother?”

“Yes, there are. Martial arts involving cold yin techniques or those that manipulate ghostly energies are also deeply connected to yin energy.”

In her past life, Seol Lihyang had learned *Ghostly Wail of Yin Spirits*, a technique she’d received as a reward from the Black Lotus Sect and improved upon with help from the Ironblood Hall’s leader.

While I knew the basics of the technique, I had no intention of teaching it to her now.

That technique had been fueled by her bitterness and pain, which no longer existed in her current life. Without that foundation, it would lose much of its power.

Besides, she no longer needed to rely on such techniques now that her leg was healed.

“Among the available options, cold yin techniques are the easiest to find,” I added. “What do you think, Tang Sowol?”

“The Tang Clan’s secret vault contains a few basic cold yin techniques. If we search carefully, we might even find something better.”

“That’s reassuring. But are you really willing to go that far for her?”

“Of course, it’s not my decision to make,” Tang Sowol said with a grin. “It will ultimately depend on what my father decides.”

“True enough. There’s no point in us making a fuss over it now. The patriarch has the final say.”

When the conversation turned to Tang Jincheon, Seol Lihyang’s expression grew uneasy.

“Do you think he’ll allow it...?”

“If you want to train as a martial artist and pledge yourself to the Tang Clan, he’ll probably help you to some extent.”

“Exactly,” Tang Sowol added. “Brother Cheon is already part of the clan, and you’re the daughter of his benefactor. It would be a shame to let someone with such potential slip through our fingers.”

“Potential... me?”

Seol Lihyang pondered for a moment before nodding with a determined expression.

“Alright. I’ll give it a shot. You said you were just repaying a favor, but it felt like you solved all my problems out of nowhere. So now it’s my turn.”

“Your turn?”

“Yes. Just as you helped me, I want to help someone else next. In the martial world’s terms, I want to repay my debt.”

I never expected to hear such words from Seol Lihyang—or anyone, for that matter.

After all, while I’d repaid favors in the past, I’d never been the one to extend a hand first.

As I stared blankly at her, Tang Sowol gently ran her fingers through my hair and said softly, “Brother Cheon, did you know? The Tang Clan repays favors above and beyond because of moments like this.”

“I see.”

“Yes. Just as it’s important to decisively eliminate enemies, it’s equally vital to cultivate friends.”

I’d always focused on grievances and revenge—on taking or being taken from.

But now, things were starting to change.

With a small smile, I murmured, “It looks like I’ll be busy when we return.”

This recent battle had taught me something. My body was still too weak to fully utilize the insights I’d gained.

I’d been planning to take my time building my strength and cultivating my energy, but now I realized I needed to accelerate the process.

I briefly mapped out my plans in my mind, only to be interrupted by Tang Sowol's cheerful voice.

“Brother Cheon, I suppose you are excited for our engagement ceremony?”

Ah... I had completely forgotten about that.

It seemed my plans would have to wait a little longer.