

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

chapter 311-313

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311. Field of Vision (2)

After resting well for about three days and slowly using the new vision I had gained, I finally began to grow accustomed to it.

So I decided to put it to full use in my training.

“Hmm.”

As I focused my mind, I felt heat gather in my eyes, and more things began to appear within my sight.

A translucent halo overlapped atop the wide, open training ground.

Most of it was so faint I could only barely see it with concentration, but some things stood out vividly.

The qi rising from my sword was one, and another was Tang Sowol's arms, flushed because she had stormed out after getting stuck in her poison research.

She took her stance with a serious expression and spoke.

“For the last time, let me confirm. You told me to hit you once, by any means necessary, correct?”

“That's right. I'm immune to your poison anyway, so I won't be getting poisoned.”

“Yes, well, that's true... but getting hit by an Hidden Weapons still hurts, you know?”

“I doubt I'll get hit by either poison or Hidden Weapons.”

Tang Sowol pursed her lips, displeased with something.

I let out a short laugh at the sight and added,

“Besides, doing it like this wouldn’t even be fun. Our difference in realm is too big.”

“Hmph! It’s only a one-stage difference. I’m not talking about winning—just landing a hit. That can happen anytime!”

“That one stage is a steep one. Even one hit won’t be easy. So let’s make a bet.”

“A bet??”

“For one entire breath of incense, attack me with all your strength. If even my sleeve gets grazed, you win. If I endure without a scratch, I win.”

“If it’s a bet, there should be a prize. What will you stake?”

“You’ve been sitting constantly because of your research, haven’t you? It must be tiring. Before you sleep, I’ll carefully massage your acupoints.”

“Acupoint... massage...??”

Normally, Tang Sowol would have taken that without much reaction, but for some reason—whatever she imagined—her face reddened.

“E-even if I win, isn’t that still something *you* benefit from?”

“If you don’t like it, choose something even more intense. Since it’s something you’ll get if you win, deciding it yourself is best.”

“A free-use pass...!”

“I didn’t say that much.”

Her unexpected choice of words made me flinch, but her emerald-green eyes spun rapidly before blazing with fierce determination.

“Fine! I’ve decided! If I win—!”

“If you win??”

“You have to drink the liquor I prepared with me!”

“That’s nothing. If that’s all— ...Wait. What kind of liquor?”

“Oh my. Are you really going to make me say it with my own mouth?”

What the hell is it?

Seeing that I didn’t even have a guess, Sowol explained in more detail.

“It’s snake wine made using part of the Azure Cold Serpent we defeated last time. According to the people of the Medical Hall, it’s very good for men.”

“...Huh.”

“But as a daughter of the Tang Clan, ordinary liquor is a bit lacking. So I decided to add a little... excitement. Did you know that poisoned liquor tastes better than ordinary liquor?”

“Poisoned liquor causes poisoning. How would I know that?”

“Not anymore. At least for any poison I can make, you already have resistance.”

“That’s true, but... now I’m getting nervous. What poison are you planning to add?”

“Obviously an aphrodisiac.”

Her confidence was so absolute that I was left speechless.

I stared blankly at her for a long while before barely managing to open my mouth.

“My body may resist your poison, but—?”

“Of course. But do you know what’s left in an aphrodisiac once you remove the uncontrollable urges?”

“No idea. I don’t have much interest in that.”

“A powerful tonic effect.”

“...Ah.”

So she planned to feed me liquor that’s “good for men,” with a *tonic* mixed in on top of it.

I steadied my slightly reeling mind and spoke,

“So you want to go all the way before we even hold a formal wedding?”

“Well... if you really can’t hold back, that’s what will happen. Besides...”

Sowol trailed off, then looked straight at me.

“You have no intention of marrying me until you defeat the Heavenly Demon, do you?”

This time, I fell silent for another reason.

“...You knew?”

“Ever since I glimpsed your memory, vaguely.”

She shrugged lightly and smiled.

“I didn’t see everything, so I don’t know the details... but I *do* know something unimaginable happened. And that it still weighs on you.”

“That’s...”

“Oh, don’t make that face. I’m not blaming you. Troubles are best handled quickly, aren’t they? Doing it together is easier than alone. And easier still if four people help, not two. However—”

Her smile subtly shifted—somehow more sinister.

“I am a daughter of the Tang Clan. I prefer throwing Hidden Weapons from afar and spreading poison—not fair sword fights. What matters is *why* you fight, not *how*, correct?”

“W-wait. Don’t tell me...!”

Sowol beamed widely at my horrified expression.

“Don’t you think an early child wouldn’t be so bad?”

“In the end, you’ll live happily with me anyway. Even if the order changes, nothing catastrophic will happen, right?”

Her bright, triumphant look almost convinced me, but I barely shook my head.

If things unfolded as she wanted, maybe it wouldn’t be bad.

But when the time came, instead of fighting the Heavenly Demon, I would choose to flee with someone precious.

And Sowol, unable to abandon the Tang Clan to the very end... she would sneak out alone if she had to.

I thought of the Poison Dance Empress before regression—more stubborn than anyone—and sighed deeply.

“Fine. I’ve decided what I’ll do if I win.”

“Oh? Already? Good. So what do you want from me? Go on, say it.”

“I’ll spank you until you beg me to stop.”

“M-my back? That’s your preference...?”

She covered her rear cautiously, but soon her expression loosened in a strange way.

“That might not be bad.”

“That’s enough. Start already. If you stall any longer, I’ll attack first.”

“Th-that wasn’t the rule! Ugh! Fine, I’m going all out!”

Her cheeks were still red as she glared shyly and moved her hand.

Her sleeve hid her movements, but green robes fluttered as thick green poison fog spread out.

The incoming speed was slow, but it covered such a wide area that it obscured my vision.

But it meant nothing to me now.

Because the poison created through her Poison Spirit Constitution held internal energy, I could see its faint shimmer.

Even the next move Sowol was preparing beyond it was visible.

Beyond the mist-like veil, other energies condensed—thin and dense—definitely feather needle-type Hidden Weapons.

Normally, I would never have been able to distinguish all this.

Her poison fog contained qi itself, so even with sharp senses, once blinded by the fog, seeing deeper was impossible.

But sensing qi and *seeing* its flow were entirely different.

I could now see exactly what was flying toward me behind the veil.

Ssshhh!

The slow poison fog enveloped the front, while the feather needle hid along the edges to attack from my blind spots.

Before the thin needles crossed the thick fog, my arm moved.

The important thing was the single line connecting everything.

Slash.

My strike split the fog and disrupted the needles' trajectory.

“How?!”

It was only her first attack, yet everything had been completely read and stopped before unfolding. Sowol grit her teeth.

Then the true barrage of poison and Hidden Weapons began.

Vibrant poison smoke hiding colorless, odorless toxins.

Hidden Weapons drawing acrobatics too complex to follow with the eye.

Hidden needles flying from blind spots.

Sometimes she flooded the area with so much poison that blocking it all was impossible; other times, she suppressed me with a relentless surface of Hidden Weapons like a storm.

If it were the old me, I would have blocked the weaker parts with protective qi, or charged through before I was hit.

But this time was different.

Now that I could see the flow of qi, everything she tried to hide or show was laid bare.

Within countless poisons and Hidden Weapons, I separated truth from feint.

I blocked what needed blocking.

Dodged what needed dodging.

Before I knew it, without moving a single step, I was suppressing her assault with only one sword.

“Ugh...! Fine! No choice then!”

Even though she should have been the sole aggressor, she found herself pushed back.

With clenched teeth, she attempted her final all-out move.

Qi surged from her dantian, spinning wildly, circulating through her body before gathering in her arms.

Fwoosh!

All the poison in the training ground was sucked into her sleeves at once. Then—

“Haaat!”

The poison mist condensed into poisonous beads, each moving separately as they flew toward me.

Alive-like, unpredictable trajectories—like replicating Soul-Chasing Flying Butterflies using poison and the Poison Spirit Constitution.

How nostalgic.

This was close to the technique Sowol used as her life-risking ultimate move before regression.

She still lacked finesse and didn't have enough poison to swamp the entire area, but—

She forced the opponent to choose:

Dodge every bead with life on the line, or confront a toxin that melted even internal energy.

Of course, in her current level, the technique wasn't that dangerous.

The poison beads covered only a narrow area, making escape easy.

And while they could melt sword qi, they couldn't melt protective qi, so blocking was also possible.

But I chose a different method.

Sharpening my focus, I saw her qi flow even more clearly.

And I realized:

Her technique connected each bead like pearls on a string, controlling them in sequence.

Since she hadn't yet awakened true willpower control, this was her limit.

If everything was connected by one thread, all I needed was one strike to sever it.

No need for White Sword or Formless Sword.

I didn't even have time to prepare those.

My old cutting technique from my early Flowering Stage days was more than enough.

“As long as I can cut it, it'll do.”

“Hup!”

I drew my sword along the thin thread in the air.

The slash tore through the space and cut the connection vertically.

To anyone else, I would look like I was swinging randomly at nothing.

But I could see it clearly—the poison beads losing their center and scattering.

“...Huh??”

With Sowol’s bewildered voice, the severed beads burst and scattered.

And that was it.

They didn’t splash onto the ground, didn’t leave lingering toxins, didn’t get recalled by her will.

They simply vanished into the air, the qi returning naturally to heaven and earth.

“Consumes a lot of focus... I need more practice.”

I sighed inwardly and sheathed my sword.

Sowol, who had just wasted all her internal energy into nothingness, gave a helpless laugh.

“What... what are you trying to become, exactly?”

“What else?”

After a moment of thought, I replied,

“Your Tang Clan’s son-in-law.”

“I don’t think my family is *that* extreme, you know?”

I chuckled and stepped closer.

I wrapped an arm around her waist, pressed my forehead to her temple, and whispered,

“What do you think about a son-in-law who spans the Tang Clan’s precious jewel until she begs him to stop?”

After a moment of thought, Sowol slowly pushed her hips back toward me.

A very proper attitude for someone who had lost the bet.

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“...Why are you staring at me like that? It’s unsettling.”

The Beast Palace Lord set down the chopsticks he had been raising to his mouth, wearing a displeased expression.

It happened during one of the meals we frequently shared ever since Tang Sowol began his full-fledged treatment.

“I just suddenly grew curious, that’s all.”

“Are you wondering how a half-dead old man can still eat meat so well? My teeth are sturdy, that’s all. Fortunately so.”

“You really do see the world in a twisted way. I was simply curious whether, if someone else learned the ‘beast’ portion of the Beast Palace’s martial arts, it would link person-to-beast or person-to-person.”

“So you want to handle a person like a trained beast? Hard to see that in a positive light, but to answer—no, that’s impossible. The martial arts of the Beast Palace only help communication flow better; they don’t cloud intelligence or force behavior.”

“That actually was the meaning behind my question. And I do wonder why the distinction between human and beast matters so much. In the end, humans are just intelligent beasts, aren’t we?”

“The twisted one is right here.”

The Beast Palace Lord shook his head and laughed.

It was an outrageous accusation, yet surprisingly, several people nodded as if agreeing.

Notably, my companions—and Meng Yubaek, who nodded reflexively before freezing in shock.

The only exception was the Beast Palace Lord’s eldest son, Meng Yugak, who watched his younger sister with a complicated expression.

For reference, Meng Gyeom had been making excuses and refusing to come out ever since the Demon Physician left.

He must have realized he no longer had a chance at becoming palace lord, and was preparing to gather what he could before leaving.

Of course, he might be preparing a decisive move to overturn the already-set board, but... honestly, that possibility was low.

Meng Gyeom might be reckless, but he wasn't stupid. In fact, he was rather sharp—just not sharp *enough*.

Meng Yugak, who was practically confirmed as the next Beast Palace Lord, had a sturdy, honest-looking demeanor. As I imagined what the future Beast Palace might look like under him... I couldn't picture it easily.

Naturally so—before my regression, even up to my death, Meng Yugak never inherited the Beast Palace Lord's seat.

Perhaps because Meng Gyeom was still a competitor back then, but more likely because the current Beast Palace Lord, Meng Oh, remained so absurdly vigorous it seemed he might outlive his prime.

While I quietly nodded to myself, the Beast Palace Lord grinned and spoke.

“Why did you suddenly fall silent? If it struck a nerve, don’t worry. High-realm martial artists always have a few screws loose somewhere.”

“I don’t know where you’ll find someone as properly upright as I am. I just asked because I recently gained some insight.”

“Insight, eh? Now that you mention it, your atmosphere is slightly different from before. Seems the Beast Palace’s secret arts helped you. If so, I’d appreciate you sharing that insight with me as well.”

Perhaps because he knew his treatment was progressing smoothly, he acted far brighter and more playful than when we first met.

Since what he said wasn’t unreasonable, I smirked.

“Not a bad idea. I’m not sure whether this is what the Beast Palace Lord had in mind, but I did gain plenty, so giving some back should be fine.”

“Oh? I appreciate it, but... that was a joke, you know. Don’t misunderstand it as a demand.”

“Don’t worry. Nothing like that. Have you met anyone from the Namgung Clan before?”

“I know they’re a famed sword clan of the Central Plains, but I’ve never seen them personally.”

“They’ve helped me greatly in multiple ways. They aren’t closed-minded about martial arts—quite open, in fact. In exchange for learning my swordsmanship, they taught me the Namgung sword.”

“Ohh... from what I know, martial artists of the Central Plains value their martial arts more than their lives. Surprising.”

“That much is true of the Namgung Clan as well. But *because* they value it, they do so.”

Swordsmanship is a technique; it grows faster through exchange than through hoarding.

What they must protect isn’t a set of movements, but the Namgung sky.

Under that philosophy, they held an open attitude toward martial arts and maintained their title as the strongest clan for generations.

Their sword embraced all swords—the sky above all blades, and the king ruling over them.

For someone like me, endlessly thirsty for advancing martial arts, it was an unforgettable philosophy. I agreed with much of it.

“So, I don’t want to be stingy with martial arts either. Though unlike the Namgung Clan, I can’t go as far as ‘steal it if you can.’”

“I see. If that’s how you think, then I’m grateful to hear it.”

Since we were on the same boat now, maintaining strong ties was beneficial—and it was more effective than I expected.

The Beast Palace Lord, Meng Yugak, and Meng Yubaek all looked at me with impressed expressions, and I felt my face warm.

I cleared my throat lightly to chase away the embarrassment and continued.

“Ehem. You told me before—spiritual beasts of divine rank leave something behind even at death.”

“I did.”

“So I observed what it left behind, and thanks to the Beast Palace’s teachings, I was able to accept it.”

“I doubt what it left for its killer was anything pleasant.”

“My killing intent was far more vicious, so it was fine.”

The Beast Palace Lord stared at me, stunned, so I gave him a gentle smile and continued.

“I added the Azure Cold Serpent’s lingering will to my own willpower. And now, if I choose, I can see the world through the sight she had in life.”

“She?”

“She was female. I remember clearly—I killed her offspring too.”

His expression shifted to that of someone looking at a deranged killer, so I quickly added,

“It was an all-out battle where we used every method to kill each other. She simply died in the order of the weaker.”

“...We’ll go with that.”

The atmosphere grew slightly awkward—not my intention—so I quickly moved on.

“Anyway, the point is this: I gained the sight of a divine beast, one that views the world differently from humans.”

“And what’s different specifically?”

“I can see the flow of energy.”

“Hmm???”

“I’m saying I literally see it with my eyes, not just sense it.”

Naturally, no matter how sharp one’s senses, sensing could never surpass actual sight.

And I hadn’t lost my energy sense—this was an addition—allowing me to observe the flow with far greater detail.

“For example, you and the Black Claw... that’s the panther’s name, yes?”

“Correct.”

“I can see how your internal energies operate.”

“...What?”

The Beast Palace Lord widened his eyes, unable to brush that aside.

Understandable. It sounded dangerously close to perceiving one's cultivation method.

I shook my head with a wry smile.

“Not that far. If I could read a cultivation method just from the outside, I would've sensed something ages ago.”

“Ah, so you're seeing what you normally sense, but visually.”

“Exactly. All I sense through energy sense is that you and Black Claw are linked through a shared cultivation method. So that's all I can see as well.”

With that, I looked quietly at Black Claw.

Would a divine beast-level creature understand human speech?

As if reacting to my gaze, the beast stopped lounging lazily and grew alert.

I sensed its swirling energy through both perception and sight, then spoke.

“Beast Palace Lord, have you ever considered this? Other Beast Palace warriors have martial ability similar to their partner spiritual beasts. Since their qi is shared, it’s natural. But you and Black Claw do not match in the slightest.”

“Well, that’s because the realm of divine beasts isn’t something easily reached.”

“The Flowering Stage isn’t easy either.”

“True, but still...”

“Tell me—how many previous Beast Palace Lords raised their partners to the level of divine beasts?”

“Other than our founder, who became close friends with the Heavenly Winged White Tiger—none.”

Heavenly Winged White Tiger?

A tiger... with wings?

Spiritual beasts could evolve unpredictably, but that stretched imagination to its limit.

The absurd image of a flying white tiger roaring in the sky flashed into my mind. I shook my head to clear it and continued.

“After the Flowering Stage, humans and beasts simply cannot share the same path. Humans have a human path; beasts have a beast path.”

“Didn’t you just say humans are intelligent beasts?”

“Yes—different beasts require different paths.”

As I rephrased, the Beast Palace Lord sank into thought.

I spoke as carefully as possible; phrased poorly, it might sound like an insult.

“I’m not saying the Beast Palace’s martial arts are flawed. But consider this: if two martial artists reach the Flowering Stage with the same techniques, are they truly the same martial artist?”

“Oh...”

His eyes widened as understanding dawned.

The Flowering Stage was where mind, qi, and body unified—upper, middle, and lower dantian harmonized—revealing one’s purest self.

Naturally, everyone would differ, even if raised identically from birth.

Then how much more so between a human and a beast?

The Beast Palace’s martial arts were exceptional—they could elevate beasts to spiritual beasts and even push them to Sub-Perfection. But...

By sharing each other’s qi and will, they limited the growth of something unique within themselves.

“So you’re saying the Beast Palace’s martial arts become a shackle?”

“Rather than shackle, I’d say it becomes a wall to break.”

Until you reach it, it guides.

Once reached, it becomes a limit.

“The flow I saw told me this: the Beast Palace’s martial arts lean too much toward the human side of the bond. And that becomes a thick shell that prevents the spiritual beast from rebirthing into a divine beast.”

“I see... true. Humans have two arms and two legs and stand upright—but beasts vary infinitely.”

Frogs, dogs, cats, monkeys, tigers, birds, fish—everything was lumped under “beast.”

There naturally had to be trade-offs.

“Finding martial arts that suit Black Claw—that must be the first step.”

“Exactly.”

“Thank you. I’ll look into the specifics later, but the fact remains that you’ve given me tremendous help. I will repay it someday.”

“Then perhaps you could sell goods cheaper when trading with the Tang Clan—”

“Others need to make a living too, do they not?”

“If you can’t make them cheaper, perhaps you could at least serve as a guide?”

“I can promise that no matter how dense the jungles of Yunnan, you won’t lose your way while there.”

Considering Yunnan Province was so harsh even the imperial court avoided interfering, that was quite a good offer.

I nodded in satisfaction, then suddenly remembered something.

“Ah, there’s one more thing I should tell you.”

“What is it?”

“Since I can see the flow of energy now, I think I can control some of the risks accompanying your detoxification.”

We hadn’t been able to directly cure the Beast Palace Lord’s poison because three different poisons were tangled together in a delicate equilibrium.

Heal one, and the remaining two rampaged through his body—something his weakened state couldn’t withstand.

So the plan had been to split the burden between him and Black Claw, his partner, and research a method accordingly—which took time.

But poison qi was still qi.

And now, I could influence it.

I could delay the rampage, prevent clashes between poisons, or even absorb part of the poison qi with my Poison Immune Body.

Meaning, even if Tang Sowol's research wasn't fully complete, I could still treat him.

After listening to my explanation, Tang Sowol shouted in an aggrieved voice:

“Th-this... this isn't poison arts at all...!”

A hollow cry.

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313. Guest (1)

“This actually works.”

“I told you it would.”

The Beast Palace Lord, whose lips still bore traces of the blood he had coughed up—yet whose sickly complexion had vanished, replaced by vitality—turned his head.

There, Black Claw was also hacking and coughing up clotted blood, but his life didn’t seem to be in danger.

Tang Sowol’s antidote, the incomplete yet effective results of his research, and my assistance together had fully eradicated the poison that had been devouring the Beast Palace Lord’s body.

Of course, the one who was essentially the heart of this treatment—Tang Sowol—was still pouting.

“This kind of thing isn’t poison arts at all...! But the detoxification is perfect, so whatever.”

“Hehehe. Lady Poison Phoenix is still displeased, I see. I, who survived thanks to her, am grateful nonetheless.”

“Oh. How could I, as a member of the Orthodox Sect, refuse to heal someone? I’m just relieved you recovered.”

Only then did Tang Sowol realize she’d been making a sour face in front of someone freed from decades of poisoning. She forced a soft smile.

A noble daughter’s grace, the warmth of someone who had just saved a life... yet compared to moments ago, it was so blatantly fake that—

I couldn’t help blurting something out.

“It doesn’t suit—”

“What was that, hmm?”

“I said it’s a relief you’re my fiancée. Otherwise I might have thought you don’t suit me at all.”

“Fufu. Don’t worry. That could never happen.”

...Yes, I swallowed the words quickly.

See? People say I'm sometimes oblivious and reckless like a demonic prodigy, but I am in fact very considerate.

While I shrugged inwardly, the Beast Palace Lord rolled his shoulders and neck before speaking.

“So what do you plan to do now? Naturally, just because the treatment is done doesn't mean you must leave immediately. Stay as long as you wish.”

“Hmm. About that... actually, what was supposed to be a short outing somehow became far too long...”

“What was that?”

“My original plan was about a month, but it's already been three months. I probably need to return right away.”

Tang Sowol laughed awkwardly as she said it.

And as she pointed out, we really had set out for a brief trip... and somehow ended up here.

We *did* send letters midway when it seemed we'd be late, but—Honestly, that barely counted as notice.

Once our business was done, we should've returned instead of lingering.

It really felt like nothing had changed from when I first entered the Tang Clan.

Then again... merely sitting around training would never have brought me to my current level.

This trip had allowed me to gather every fortuitous opportunity available; it was time to focus on digesting them.

Medicinal pills, martial manuals thought long lost, various treasures...

We brought back enough to supplement whoever needed them.

As originally planned:

- *The Everfrost Iron Gauntlets for Seorin,*
- *The aggressive sound-art Heaven-Piercing Collapse Tone for Seol Lihyang,*
- *And for Tang Sowol, the poison of the Seven-Flame Five Poisons.*

And the leftover medicines and techniques that didn't quite fit us could simply be entrusted to the Tang Clan.

The Tang Clan was known for hidden weapons and poison arts, not *limited* to them.

Giving some medicines to Meng Yubaek wouldn't be a bad idea either.

A closer relationship with the Beast Palace, Meng Yubaek growing stronger alongside the Seven-Flame Five Poisons...

All of that meant Tang Sowol could one day create even more potent poisons.

Besides, most of my companions were already at a level where elixirs barely made a noticeable difference.

Tang Sowol, who had eaten rare medicines since childhood until they no longer increased her internal energy, and now benefited more from rare poisons.

Seol Lihyang, who had devoured half the North Sea Ice Palace's medicine stores alone and even absorbed the Ice Essence, making her internal energy one of the highest among Sub-Perfection masters.

And myself and Seorin, already in the Flowering Stage, who could simply draw in natural energy directly if needed.

The era of gaining strength through little tricks was over.

...Somewhat unfair, really.

Why did I only become this strong *after* gaining access to all my past-life knowledge?

“Hoo.”

“White Moon Sword Lord? Why the sudden sigh?”

Meng Yubaek, who had accompanied us out of concern for her father, tilted her head.

Pure joy that her family member was healed, sorrow that we would soon part, and anticipation for beginning anew outside Yunnan...

She had several emotions layered together, trying hard to hide them, exactly fitting for someone her age.

I let out a small laugh.

“It’s nothing. I just suddenly wondered why I became so strong.”

“Wow, you’re seriously the worst—”

“What was that?”

“N-nothing! I meant it’s a very master-like concern! You really are just like Lady Poison Phoenix!”

Meng Yubaek shook her head quickly, then nodded as if convinced of something.

Surprisingly, others also nodded with identical expressions.

Only Tang Sowol and I blinked at each other.

Watching all this, the Beast Palace Lord burst into laughter.

“Hahaha! I worried Yubaek would struggle in the Tang Clan... but it seems I worried for nothing.”

“Fufu, with the Tang Clan and Beast Palace joining forces, why would anyone shun her?”

“That may be, but hearts don’t move as the heart wishes.”

“???”

The Beast Palace Lord smiled meaningfully, while Tang Sowol tilted her head in confusion.

For some reason, the Beast Palace Lord’s mood improved even further, and he rose to his feet.

“You’re leaving soon—we cannot let you go without a proper send-off. Tonight, I’ll host a grand banquet. Will you attend?”

“If you’re inviting me, of course.”

I shrugged as I answered.

It was the day before we left the Beast Palace.

“We... we’re finally here??”

“Yes. That’s the Tang Clan.”

“Wow...”

The moment we crossed out of Yunnan, the atmosphere changed dramatically.

Even though we traveled on the back of O-Gong (the great centipede), the long journey had worn Meng Yubaek out.

But now her eyes sparkled brightly.

“It’s huge! Are the Centipede Sect people inside too?”

“They’ll be here, yes—but not for long.”

“Are we... are we getting kicked out...?”

“That makes it sound harsh. Not at all. If a separate sect stays inside the Tang Clan estate, it’ll look like a subordinate branch. So they’ll prepare a separate manor for you. Fortunately, the Centipede Sect is small, so it won’t take long.”

“But we don’t have money...”

“No need to worry. The Beast Palace paid in advance.”

“Father...!”

Eyes shining with emotion, Meng Yubaek looked up at the sky.

The Beast Palace Lord may have sent her away, but not because he disliked her—he even gave considerable funds as support for the Centipede Sect.

And he said nothing directly to Meng Yubaek—so very characteristic of a father.

Anyway, they would be able to live comfortably for a while. What came after depended on Meng Yubaek herself.

We finally arrived at the Tang Clan.

After announcing our return at the front gate, we headed to Tang Jincheon's office.

I expected Jincheon to be sitting with a terrifying expression and arms crossed—
But what I found was something I never imagined.

“Sword King? Brother Namgung? What are you both doing here??”

“Mm.”

Namgung Dowi, upon seeing my face, nodded and spoke to the very exhausted Tang Jincheon.

“Since the White Moon Sword Lord has arrived, we'll follow the Poison King's suggestion for the negotiations.”

“Thank you.”

Namgung Dowi stamped a stack of documents Tang Jincheon had pushed toward him with a sigh.

Then he and his son, Namgung Jong, stood before me.

“Long time no see, White Moon Sword Lord.”

“Yes, it has been. Was the last time at Shaolin?”

“Correct. Already half a year ago... and you’ve grown stronger again. Truly remarkable.”

“Yes, Father. At this point, I should probably call him Brother instead.”

Feeling danger from how well the father and son were getting along, I instinctively stepped back half a step.

“You’re praising me too much. What brings you both here?”

“Of course, we came to see you. We heard rumors you cut down the man called Bloodflame Fist Demon, whose body was like Diamond Vajra, and wondered if it was true.”

“Oh...”

“And also, the Chief tossed a pile of documents at me saying if I didn’t get them stamped we’d starve together—so we handled that as well.”

“That sounds like the main issue here.”

I looked frantically at Tang Jincheon, but he only wore an expression of relief—no, satisfaction—no, worse, a *smug* look as he stared at me.

“Sorry to trouble you the moment you return home, but I’ll count on you, son-in-law. Think of it as clearing the backlog.”

“...Yes.”

“Then we’ll go have a meal and talk more. Ah, and you—you’re the daughter of the Beast Palace... no, now the Centipede Sect Leader. Your sect members are diligent. Even when told they could rest, they insisted on helping since they’re guests.”

“Did they?”

“They did. A superior’s virtue is shown through his subordinates. Be proud. By the way, I’ve heard the Seven-Flame Five Poisons is here too...”

“Oh, O-Gong is outside. Too big to fit in here.”

“Oh! It’s been a long time since I’ve seen a living spiritual creature. I’m looking forward to it. Sowol, how was the Seven-Flame Five Poisons’ venom?”

“Fufu. Very fun. I’ll show you during dinner.”

A warm atmosphere... with me excluded.

It seemed no one would be helping me.

Fine. I'm the one who returned late anyway.

If it's come to this, I'll face it head-on.

I inhaled deeply and turned to the two Namgung swordsmen, who were staring at me with aggressively shining eyes.

“Hoo. It's been a while—talking alone won't do. How about a spar?”

“As expected of you! You always speak my language!”

“I look forward to it, brother Cheon!”

Their bright, almost glowing eyes...At this point, it bordered on madness.

“But what's that talk about the Namgung Clan starving? Even if things are worse now, you're still the Namgung Clan.”

“Hmm? Ah, that. It’s nothing major. Lately there have been rumors that the Tang Clan will use you to completely crush the Namgung Clan and even steal the Sword King’s title. So our work has been decreasing.”

“That’s complete nonsense.”

“Of course. I know you, and I know the Poison King—why would I doubt?”

“I’m relieved there’s no misunderstanding.”

“Mhm. Besides that, we’ve had merchants attacked even though the Green Forest bandits stopped moving, some traitors were caught selling internal intel to the Hao Clan, some branch families were being agitated into rebellion... A few problems here and there. I brought the young master here to keep him safe. But it’s fine.”

“That’s *not* fine at all!”

This was *not* the time for a spar.

Clearly, something was happening inside the Namgung Clan.

But Namgung Dowi spoke in a steady voice.

“I know. Something is interfering with the Namgung Clan.”

“Then—?”

“But what can I do?”

“...What?”

“My sword can cut more than it cannot...But right now, I don’t even know *what* I should cut.”

“It simply isn’t time to draw my sword. Not yet.”

“Ah.”

Then it became clear why Namgung Dowi left the clan during such a time.

Yes, he trusted his capable retainers...

But more importantly—leaving was part of a trap.

A display of confidence bordering on arrogance.

But after seeing the Sword King's blade many times, I knew—

It was justified arrogance.

The moment the rats mistook this for opportunity and stuck their heads out—The king's sword would sever their miserable necks.

“By the way, was that Bloodflame bastard's Diamond Vajra Body truly that tough? I heard even the Alliance Leader's strikes couldn't break it.”

As Namgung Dowi revealed curiosity and competitive spirit, I couldn't help but wonder—

Was sparring with me actually his *main* reason for coming,

and the Namgung Clan's trouble only the side matter?