

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

chapter 6-10

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“Ha.”

A group of martial artists approached from afar, surrounding us.

They weren't the Tang family's warriors I had been expecting. Their attire and weapons were all different, and not one among them was wearing the signature green martial robes of the Tang clan.

The only thing they had in common was the killing intent they couldn't fully suppress, seeping through the air around them. But even that was enough for me to deduce their identity.

“I thought they'd come, but I didn't expect it to be this soon.”

“Cheon Hwi-da? What are you talking about, all of a sudden?”

Tang Sowol, who had been eating, casually wiped the crumbs off her lips as she approached me. Then she saw them—those shadows advancing to kill her.

“...No way?”

“It’s exactly that. I don’t know where they caught our trail, but it looks like we’ve been found.”

“We need to leave immediately. It seems they haven’t spotted us yet, so if we move now...”

“No. We’re already surrounded. It’s true they haven’t pinpointed our exact location, but they’re closing in while maintaining their encirclement.”

“It’s too soon to assume we’re surrounded. Let’s check the rear first.”

“My martial arts are a bit... peculiar. I’m highly sensitive to killing intent, and right now, it’s emanating from all directions.”

Most likely, they were raising their momentum in preparation for a battle, unsure of where they’d spot Tang Sowol. What I sensed was the killing aura mingled with their leaking presence.

“Can you really sense that?”

“I can do much more than that.”

I shrugged, and Tang Sowol narrowed her eyes at me.

“If what you’re saying is true, then it’s too late to run. In that case, we need to come up with a plan quickly.”

“There are only two options. Either break through their encirclement and flee, or defeat them all here. For the record, I recommend the latter.”

“Why?”

“Because you haven’t fully absorbed the ‘Purple Flower Poison Enhancing Grass’ yet. Without being able to use your poison arts, even if we break through, we won’t be able to shake off the pursuers. Eventually, we’ll exhaust our stamina and internal energy and get caught.”

“That... makes sense.”

Poison is an extremely effective weapon. Even carelessly scattering it while running could slow down the pursuers to some extent.

However, using poison arts was currently impossible. Tang Sowol was a genius of poison arts, but not of hidden weapon techniques. Without her poison, she wouldn't be able to display even half her usual strength.

She knew this herself, so she nodded quietly in agreement.

Of course, I could escape on my own if necessary, but I didn't have the confidence to protect Tang Sowol while fleeing. My internal energy was barely above first-class rank. Against ordinary thugs, I might have stood a chance, but I was hopelessly lacking against opponents who had driven Tang Sowol to the brink of death.

Even though my Wave-Breaking Death Art was a martial art perfected from my own enlightenment and tailored to me, its foundation lay in unorthodox martial arts. While it excelled in accumulating energy quickly, it wasn't refined enough. After all, it had only been half a year since I returned to the past.

Given the current situation, if both Tang Sowol and I were to survive, there was no other choice.

As Tang Sowol changed into an outer robe resembling the Tang family's martial attire—perhaps to make it easier to throw hidden weapons—I asked her a question.

“How many hidden weapons do you have left?”

“Due to what I used up while fighting you earlier, I only have about thirty percent of what I usually carry. If it's just one or two enemies, that might suffice, but it's far from enough to deal with all of them.”

“Only throw your hidden weapons when absolutely necessary. If you run out, just pick up rocks from the ground and throw those.”

“What about you, Cheon Hwi-da?”

“I'll go out and cut them down.”

“Will you be okay?”

“Well, if someone watches my back, I should be fine.”

“Seriously, your way of talking... Don’t worry. The Tang family’s hidden weapon techniques can kill people even with stones.”

“People can die if they’re hit by a rock in the wrong place, you know.”

“Tsk! You could’ve just nodded quietly!”

Even though I was telling the truth, I didn’t understand why I was being scolded.

I felt a little wronged, but from experience before my regression, I knew that arguing would only make things more troublesome. So, I simply nodded.

“Fine. Trust me. ...By the way, I never thought someone would be foolish enough to target a bloodline of the Tang family.”

“People don’t always move with their heads. Sometimes they follow their hearts. So, does that mean you finally believe my story now?”

“I’m not foolish enough to deny something after seeing it with my own eyes. In that sense, do you have anything else to say? I’m willing to believe everything, for now.”

“...No, wait.”

Taking a deep breath, I stepped forward.

“Never stand in front of me.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s dangerous.”

I was still more accustomed to fighting alone than alongside others.

If we could see them with our eyes, then they could see us too.

Before long, the enemies spotted us and rushed toward the entrance of the cave. Most of them were second- or third-rate martial artists, but a few exuded a fierce presence.

A brutish giant with a menacing axe slung over his shoulder. A hunchback with abnormally long arms. A woman with heavy makeup and revealing clothes. And one assassin whose presence was poorly concealed.

Four first-class martial artists. Including the others, there were close to thirty enemies in total.

This was a force comparable to a mid-sized unorthodox sect. However, I doubted that Tang Sowol, before my regression, would have failed to escape in such a situation.

Back then, she would have been using her poison arts liberally, and she likely had plenty of hidden weapons. I distinctly remember there being one more factor...

While I was rummaging through my memories, a man in dark red martial robes stepped forward from among them. The others naturally made way for him.

“So, this will be difficult,” I muttered.

His body was withered like an old tree, but his aura was sharp, and his steps were steady without the slightest wavering.

A worn-out saber hung at his waist, and a long scar ran across one side of his face, crossing over an eye.

Judging by his aura, he was at the Peak Stage. However, it seemed incomplete and unstable, meaning he hadn't fully mastered it.

His internal energy was impure, and his understanding shallow—a common trait among unorthodox martial artists. I knew the state well because I had experienced it myself.

Still, he couldn't be underestimated. Despite his flaws, he was undoubtedly a master at the Peak Stage, worthy of the title.

It was clear now why these thugs, who would normally never dare to fight the Tang family's scion, had taken up arms.

He was their rallying point. They must have believed that even the most promising young prodigy couldn't defeat a master at the Peak Stage.

The man, who had been silently observing me with his one remaining eye, finally spoke.

“I’ll say this once. I have no intention of harming you. Our only target is the Tang family’s daughter.”

“Oh, how pitiful. So your life is one devoted to a futile goal. I almost feel sorry for you.”

Despite my sarcastic remark, the man remained composed as he scanned me from head to toe. Then, lowering his aura slightly, he continued.

“You don’t seem to be one of the Tang family’s guards. Have you ever heard of the title ‘Hundred-Kill Saber’?”

“Never heard of it.”

“That’s understandable. It was the title of my master, who passed away more than twenty years ago. I’m merely a self-proclaimed successor.”

Though he had been radiating hostility until now, his voice softened unexpectedly.

“To be honest, my master wasn’t a good man. He tested his martial arts on innocent villagers to compensate for his lack of talent.”

“I see. So your title comes from killing a hundred people just to become a proper saber-wielder. Quite the slow learner with a bad personality.”

“I won’t deny it. My master was a bastard.”

The self-proclaimed ‘Hundred-Kill Saber’ chuckled bitterly, nodding in agreement. But soon, his eyes burned with fierce emotion.

“Even so, he was my master.”

“To an orphan like me, he gave food, shelter, and a family. He taught me every bit of martial arts he had, even staining his hands with blood to do so.”

His suppressed anger and the fire within him—those were the marks of a true avenger.

“The Tang family labeled my master as a villain and claimed they would punish him for his crimes in Sichuan.”

“All he did was kill those who tried to kill him. He followed that simple rule. But the martial world’s grudges weighed heavily on him.”

“Thus, he gagged me and cut out one of my eyes to make it seem like I was just a kidnapped villager rather than his disciple. That way, I could live. He wanted me to survive.”

There are no perfect villains in the world. Even the most heinous person is someone’s family, friend, or lover.

“I watched as my master was brutally slaughtered right in front of me. And yet, I had to bow my head and thank my enemies. I had to, to survive. Because that’s what my master wanted.”

This man was no different. His master had died, so he sought revenge. It was an understandable, even justifiable, motive.

“I know my master was in the wrong, and I know the Tang family did what was right. But that knowledge didn’t extinguish the burning rage in my heart.”

I wasn't so different. Even if she didn't remember me, I raised my sword to protect the woman I cherished. Who could criticize me for that?

“So please step aside, young man. I don't know who you are, but surely you have people you care about and those who care for you. I don't want to create more people like me.”

It was a sincere offer. Unlike the others, he was genuinely speaking from the heart. Perhaps he wasn't even a villain at all.

But that didn't matter. If two swordsmen had no intention of backing down, there was only one thing left to do.

I turned and glanced at Tang Sowol, who was staring anxiously in my direction. After giving her a brief look—

Srrrng.

—I drew my sword. Just the sound of it sharpened my mind, clarifying my purpose.

“I appreciate the offer, but I'll have to decline. I have my own reasons for doing this.”

“Is that so?”

The self-proclaimed Hundred-Kill Saber nodded heavily. I took a step forward, while Tang Sowol stepped back, hiding her hands in her wide sleeves. It was a signature Tang clan stance, making it difficult to predict when she might throw a hidden weapon.

The other enemies behind the man also drew their weapons in unison.

Tension filled the air, thick enough to cut with a blade. Feeling the oppressive atmosphere, I swung my sword.

Chwaaak!

A single line was drawn across the ground a short distance ahead of me.

“Cross this line, and you’ll die.”

No sooner had I finished speaking than a dagger shot through the branches, aiming for my forehead.

SswaEEK!

Its blade had been painted black to hide its reflection, but its wielder had failed to suppress his killing intent, making its trajectory obvious.

I swung my sword, intercepting the dagger mid-flight. Sparks flew as the blade and dagger clashed, but neither was deflected.

Instead, I adjusted my sword's angle slightly, disrupting the dagger's path. Following the subtle intricacies of swordsmanship, I guided the dagger along my blade. Then, spinning in place, I redirected it back toward its source.

“Kuheuk!”

With a short death cry, the man in black fell from a tree, a dagger embedded in his chest and his neck twisted at an unnatural angle.

Gasps of shock erupted from the enemies. Even Tang Sowol froze in place, her eyes wide. Seeing her expression, I couldn't help but smirk.

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Had they been shocked by the sight of me deflecting a dagger mid-flight and taking down a black-clad assassin in an instant?

The attackers, who had been focused solely on Tang Sowol while barely sparing me a glance, now turned all their attention toward me.

Their expressions were filled with undisguised astonishment. It was likely hard for them to believe that someone who barely looked old enough to reach the age of majority had handled a first-class assassin in one swift move.

“Why are *you* surprised, Tang Sowol?”

“I just realized once again that if you had really intended to kill me that day, I wouldn’t be standing here right now.”

“That’s an unnecessary worry.”

“Yes, because there’s no way Cheon Hwi-da would do that... right?”

Tang Sowol smiled slyly, and without warning, one of her hands, which had been hidden inside her wide sleeve, suddenly moved.

Paaang!

“Guaaagh!”

One of the attackers, who had been cautiously retreating as if sensing danger, suddenly clutched his eye and dropped his weapon.

It wasn't a hidden weapon from the Tang family. A small stone, no larger than a fingertip, had lodged in his eye—leaving him alive but incapacitated.

In a situation that wasn't overly dire and against an opponent who wasn't particularly dangerous, that was more than enough.

“Don't worry about the small fry. I'll handle them somehow.”

“Then I'll just take care of the big ones, right?”

As I grinned and fixed my gaze ahead, the remaining three first-class martial artists—excluding the assassin—flinched. They must have instinctively realized that they couldn't match me in a fight.

Watching the situation for a moment, the self-proclaimed **Hundred-Kill Saber** let out a low hum and waved his hand.

“I'll handle this young one myself. The rest of you, deal with the Tang family wench in the meantime.”

“Hehehe... Knowing your intentions, how could we dare take the lead in avenging you?”

The hunchback croaked obsequiously. In response, the Hundred-Kill Saber unsheathed his saber and spoke in a dry voice.

“I won't repeat myself. You don't need to defeat her, just keep her from interfering with me.”

“Y-Yes, understood!”

The hunchback nodded hastily and retreated. After whispering something to the others, they rushed at Tang Sowol simultaneously.

I tightened my grip on my sword, prepared to let none of them escape.

At that moment, the Hundred-Kill Saber had already closed the distance and was swinging his saber toward me.

Rather than dodging, I stepped forward. I aimed to block his saber before it could reach its full momentum.

Chang!

The root of his saber clashed with the tip of my sword, causing it to bounce back.

Though the difference in strength and internal energy was clear, if I struck with my full force at the exact moment when he was at his weakest, I could manage to hold my ground.

The problem was speed. While it wasn't overwhelmingly in his favor, I was undeniably at a disadvantage in that regard.

As I gauged the gap between us, the Hundred-Kill Saber smiled faintly and said,

“Young man, you’ll have to keep me entertained for a bit.”

“I’m not interested in men.”

“Come on, don’t be like that. Try this on for size.”

Without waiting for a reply, his saber swung toward me. It was a pure, straightforward exchange of techniques, devoid of any additional force, as if he wanted to test my level.

Chang! Cha-chang!

Sword and saber clashed several times, ringing out noisily with each impact. Occasionally, my clothes would get nicked, leaving small scratches on my body, but the rhythm of the exchanges remained the same.

Whenever the Hundred-Kill Saber launched an attack, I would sever his flow by exploiting his weaknesses. Conversely, whenever I attempted a counterattack by exploiting his openings, my sword would inevitably get deflected by his sheer strength.

Perhaps realizing that this stalemate wouldn't end anytime soon, the Hundred-Kill Saber pulled back to create some distance, adjusting his stance while narrowing his eyes.

“You still seem to be at the first-class level, yet your swordsmanship... it's quite remarkable. It's hard to believe someone your age has achieved this much.”

“A sword doesn't care about age. No matter how young or old, if it's a good hit, anyone can be sent to the afterlife.”

“That's true enough. Still, it's a pity. Since you're this skilled, I can't afford to hold back.”

Muttering as if lamenting something, the Hundred-Kill Saber's aura began to swell. Soon, a hazy red energy enveloped his well-maintained, albeit old, saber.

The reddish saber energy, a hallmark of a **Flowering Stage master**, radiated a chilling sharpness that sent shivers down my spine.

“Since this is your choice, please don't resent me for being ruthless.”

“What nonsense.”

He didn't want to be resented despite intending to kill me? How convenient.

A true martial artist facing life-and-death combat shouldn't hesitate. If you don't want to offer your neck willingly, then you must be prepared to kill, even if it means being resented.

I gathered my internal energy, intending to teach him that simple truth.

Woong—

The energy of the **Wave-Breaking Death Art** surged from my dantian, coursing through my entire body like an unbridled horse. Its violent force sent a chilling sensation down my spine, as if a blade had been pressed against the back of my neck.

But that was fine. Killing doesn't require much—just a piece of sharpened metal that can pierce a vital point. No matter how dangerous it feels, I wouldn't die from something like this.

If someone had to die, it wouldn't be me—it would be the enemy standing in my way.

“What the...??”

The Hundred-Kill Saber faltered, momentarily startled by the shift in my aura. It was a natural reaction.

I had survived countless brushes with death, where it was either kill or be killed. I had always emerged victorious, and at the end of that bloody path, I had reached the pinnacle of martial arts—the **Flowering Stage**.

The **Wave-Breaking Death Art** was the culmination of that brutal life, a technique I forged through my experiences.

Killing intent is simply the will to kill, imbued into one’s internal energy. The stronger the will, the more potent and domineering it becomes.

In terms of sheer destructive power, I could confidently say that this technique rivaled the **Ascending Heart Sutra**, a skill I had long coveted in the past.

Of course, there was one major drawback to the Wave-Breaking Death Art.

Just as those who train in Taoist or Buddhist martial arts develop serene temperaments, those who practice this art become so consumed by killing intent that they lose control.

However, for me, this wasn't a drawback. The killing intent imbued in the Wave-Breaking Death Art originated from within me. There was no way I couldn't control my own impulses.

“Pheh...”

I took a deep breath, condensing my killing intent into a single point.

The killing intent, once honed to perfection through my former experiences at the peak of the Flowering Stage, combined with the power of the Wave-Breaking Death Art, amplifying it further.

A cold bead of sweat trickled down the Hundred-Kill Saber's forehead as he faced my heightened aura head-on.

“Young man, you're more dangerous than I expected.”

“Well, coming from someone who drew his saber's full energy against a junior, I'd say that's a compliment.”

“That’s fair enough. Then, let’s see how dangerous people like us fare against each other.”

With a fierce grin, the Hundred-Kill Saber took a large step forward.

The Hundred-Kill Saber lunged at me with a diagonal slash aimed at my neck. The speed of his saber hadn’t changed much from earlier, but the concentrated saber energy surrounding it had undoubtedly multiplied its destructive force several times over.

Even though I had enhanced the durability of my sword using the **Eogi Defense Technique**, it wouldn’t hold up against that saber energy for long.

If I tried to block him head-on, my sword wouldn’t last more than a few exchanges before being cleaved in half.

In other words, I couldn’t afford to directly clash with him.

As the saber rapidly closed in on me, I took a half-step diagonally forward. This naturally shifted my body, allowing the blade to narrowly graze past my neck, drawing a faint, thin line in the air.

The blow was far more threatening thanks to the enhanced saber energy, but his body, weighed down by my oppressive killing intent, was noticeably stiffer and slower than before.

Meanwhile, I poured all my remaining internal energy into my body without holding back, letting it flow freely. This allowed me to keep up with his movements, despite my earlier exhaustion.

Ignoring the stinging sensation at my neck, I swung my sword upward from below, aiming for his arm.

At that moment, the Hundred-Kill Saber had fully extended his arm in a thrusting motion, making it impossible for him to block in time. My strike was perfectly timed to exploit his vulnerability.

To further pressure him, I sharpened my killing intent and directed it straight at his neck. From his perspective, it must have felt like my sword was simultaneously aiming for both his neck and arm.

A normal person would have instinctively prioritized defending their neck, but...

The Hundred-Kill Saber wasn't like most people.

Though his body flinched for a moment in response to my killing intent, he quickly realized it was a feint. Without hesitation, he forcibly altered the trajectory of his saber, bringing it down toward my waist in a wide arc.

Since he had changed the direction of his saber mid-swing, both his momentum and accuracy were greatly diminished, but the sheer destructive power of the blow remained more than enough to cleave me in half.

Crack.

I heard a sharp, bone-jarring noise from somewhere inside my body.

His saber didn't make contact—he had struck me with his arm instead. Despite the awkward angle and his weakened grip on the weapon, the impact was still enough to send a wave of pain through my torso.

If I had been trained in external martial arts, I might have been able to endure the blow better, but I wasn't, and my body paid the price.

Still, I hadn't taken the hit for nothing.

My rising slash had seamlessly transitioned into a thrust, and the tip of my broken sword pierced straight through his forearm.

“Kuheuk...! Get off me!”

A flame of fury erupted in the Hundred-Kill Saber’s eyes as he raised his knee to strike my stomach.

It was too close to dodge. I braced myself and, instead of resisting, allowed my body to follow the force of the blow by throwing myself backward.

Thud!

The sound was akin to someone hitting a leather drum. Even though I had done my best to minimize the impact, it felt as though my internal organs had been rattled.

But the Hundred-Kill Saber hadn’t emerged unscathed either. Blood poured freely from the wound on his forearm, and his arm hung limp by his side, unable to maintain a proper grip on his saber.

Under normal circumstances, he could have stopped the bleeding by applying pressure to his acupoints, but he knew the risks. With only one good arm

remaining, exposing himself in a defenseless position would be akin to offering his life on a silver platter.

In the end, he had no choice but to stand there, saber in one hand, watching me warily.

We exchanged glances in silence, no words necessary. We both understood what came next.

As if by mutual agreement, we moved at the exact same time.

Our blades swung through the air in unison, neither making contact as they sliced through empty space.

This time, both of us had abandoned defense altogether, focusing solely on evasion and counterattack. Each exchange left new slashes on our clothes, and thin lines of blood traced across our bodies.

Though there was no sound of metal clashing, the tension in the air was palpable, unchanged from when we first crossed swords.

Perhaps having learned from his previous experience, the Hundred-Kill Saber refrained from using brute force and adopted a calmer, more calculated approach.

He aimed for my vital points—my throat, my wrists, and even my heart. On one occasion, he pretended to go for my chest, only to suddenly target my groin.

It was a ruthless and insidious style of combat, fully dedicated to exploiting vulnerabilities, the hallmark of unorthodox martial arts.

I found it... familiar.

A style designed solely to kill, without any regard for honor or beauty, wasn't that different from my own approach.

However, his saber lacked depth.

The previous Hundred-Kill Saber had been a talentless brute, and the current one, despite his skills, lacked the necessary killing intent and ingenuity.

It didn't take long for me to fully analyze his technique.

“Alright, I've seen enough.”

“What...?”

Lowering my sword slightly, I took a bold step forward.

Caught off guard, the Hundred-Kill Saber instinctively swung his saber toward what appeared to be an opening.

But before his blade could fully descend, I had already read its trajectory—both from his killing intent and from the patterns he had displayed so far.

I moved a split second earlier, my sword cutting through the air.

This time, it wasn't my clothes that were torn—it was his.

“Urgh!”

Sensing something was wrong, the Hundred-Kill Saber tried to retreat, but I didn't give him the chance.

I pressed forward relentlessly, chasing after him without pause. His tattered clothes flapped in the wind, and blood sprayed with every cut I inflicted.

Though he clenched his teeth and retaliated with wild bursts of saber energy, it made no difference.

Each exchange left him with fresh wounds, forcing him further back, until his posture finally began to crumble.

“This... This is impossible!”

Desperate and cornered, he unleashed his remaining internal energy in one final, all-out attack. The saber energy surrounding his weapon flared brightly, enveloping the entire blade in a crimson glow.

It was clear what he intended—he no longer cared if he got wounded. He was going to ensure that I died, even if it meant being cut down in the process.

Without hesitation, he charged at me.

Seeing this, I couldn't help but chuckle.

"I've been waiting for this moment."

"What...?"

The Hundred-Kill Saber's eyes widened in confusion. Even as he bore down on me with his full strength, he didn't falter, determined to cut me down.

He was betting everything on this final strike. No hesitation, no holding back.

But that was exactly what I had been counting on.

Thwack!

Slaaash!

The sharp wind from his saber tore through my upper garment, while the edge of his weapon grazed my torso.

However, it failed to reach deep enough to cause fatal damage.

Because just before his saber could fully descend, I had struck the side of his blade with my broken sword, deflecting it slightly.

Though the recoil snapped my sword in half, it was enough to divert his attack and create an opening.

And that was all I needed.

Puk.

The shattered tip of my sword drove deep into his chest, piercing his heart.

“Guh... I... I...”

Ignoring the blood seeping from his own hands, the Hundred-Kill Saber clutched at the broken blade embedded in his chest.

He alternated his gaze between me and Tang Sowol, his lips moving wordlessly, before finally collapsing to the ground.

For a moment, I stood there, staring down at his lifeless body, blood dripping steadily from the long gash on my chest.

My entire body was soaked in crimson, and though the wound was shallow, it was large enough to result in significant blood loss.

I discarded any unnecessary sentiment as I pressed down on my acupoints to stop the bleeding.

After steadying my breath, I turned to look at Tang Sowol.

Her situation wasn't good.

Though she was still throwing things nonstop, they were nothing more than stones—she must have long since run out of proper hidden weapons.

Even the stones seemed to be running low, as anxiety was written all over her face and in her movements.

Her loose Tang clan robes clung to her sweat-drenched body, and her labored breathing suggested she was nearing her limit, both in stamina and internal energy.

Under normal circumstances, she would have easily dealt with such enemies. It seemed that the lack of her poison arts had affected her more than I expected.

Meanwhile, the attackers surrounding her looked relatively unharmed.

Though half a dozen lay dead on the ground, the remaining ones had only sustained minor injuries.

But that didn't matter anymore.

Standing before the line I had drawn at the start, I gripped my broken sword tightly.

The attackers, realizing I had defeated the Hundred-Kill Saber, flinched. But upon noticing my tattered state, their confidence seemed to return.

The brutish ax-wielder, who had been leading the charge, shouted in a booming voice.

“Don’t be afraid! Look at his sorry state! Sure, he got lucky and defeated the old man, but that brat’s half-dead already! Fight! Let’s wash away our grudge and the elder’s death with blood!”

“Waaaahhh!”

The attackers roared in unison, tightening their grips on their weapons as a renewed sense of determination filled the air.

“Hah...”

Admittedly, out of everyone here, I was in the worst condition.

My clothes were in tatters, my body drenched in blood, and my exhausted body trembled involuntarily, no matter how much I willed it to stop.

On top of that, my internal energy was nearly depleted, and my sword was broken in half. The term “half-dead” wasn’t entirely inaccurate.

And yet, despite everything, I didn’t feel like I was going to lose.

I tapped the ground lightly with my toes where I had drawn the line, then raised my head to face the oncoming attackers.

As they charged at me, I spread my sharpened killing intent wide, blanketing the area around me.

“Come.”

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“Please, don’t be too late...”

The Patriarch of the **Sichuan Tang Clan, Tang Jincheon**, muttered anxiously as he sped forward, his Lightness Art pushed to its utmost limit.

With each step he took, the scenery blurred past him. As one would expect from the Tang Clan, known for their mastery of precision and control, Tang Jincheon's movement skill had reached a state of near-perfection. And yet, even that felt inadequate at this moment.

His youngest daughter, born late in his life, had always been cherished beyond measure, a treasure not only to Tang Jincheon but to the entire Tang Clan.

It had been over a month since all contact with Tang Sowol was abruptly cut off. What parent could possibly remain calm in such a situation?

Of course, Tang Jincheon hadn't simply sat around in despair. He had mobilized all the resources of the Tang Clan and humbled himself before the **Beggar's Sect**, seeking their help in locating her.

Despite all efforts, it had seemed as though she had vanished into thin air, with not a single clue to her whereabouts—until now. Those agonizing days of helplessness had finally come to an end.

At long last, the Beggar's Sect had delivered news that they might have found her.

A remote roadside village in **Hubei Province**. There, traces of a battle involving poison and hidden weapons had been discovered. Though the assailants had

attempted to erase the evidence, the unique nature of the techniques made it impossible to completely conceal them.

Moreover, there were signs that pointed to the use of martial arts specific to the Tang Clan, leaving no room for hesitation.

Without wasting a moment, Tang Jincheon had set out alone. None of his subordinates could match the speed of someone who had reached the **Flowering Stage**, so he didn't bring them along.

Ordinarily, the head of one of the **Five Great Clans** wouldn't move so recklessly. But there was no one bold enough to stand in the way of a father searching for his missing child.

Even without his position as patriarch, Tang Sowol was a beloved figure in the clan—kind-hearted, graceful, and beautiful. From a young age, she had been the jewel of the Tang Clan, adored by all.

Thus, the clan members could do nothing but bow silently as they watched their patriarch's back disappear into the distance.

After three days of relentless travel, Tang Jincheon finally arrived at his destination.

“Yugyeong Village, was it...”

He recalled the information provided by the Beggar's Sect as he gazed at the entrance to the small village at the end of the road.

Yugyeong Village, the closest settlement to the site where traces of the battle had been found. Since the day after Tang Sowol's presumed disappearance, a stranger carrying a sword had been seen periodically purchasing supplies for two people.

Whoever this stranger was, it was clear that Tang Sowol had been kidnapped by the bastard.

Just imagining what hardships his only daughter—his precious, delicate flower—might have endured made Tang Jincheon's blood boil.

Though the kidnapper hadn't made any demands or contacted the Tang Clan, Tang Jincheon didn't care about the kidnapper's identity or motives.

A favor repaid twice over, a grudge repaid tenfold.

It had always been the Tang Clan's creed, and Tang Jincheon fully intended to uphold it.

With an explosive burst of speed, he reached the entrance of the village in just a few breaths. There, a scruffy beggar stood nervously, pacing back and forth.

The beggar's eyes widened in shock as the distant speck on the horizon transformed into a man standing right before him. Quickly, he bowed his head.

“Y-You've arrived, Poison King. I'm the branch leader assigned to this part of Hubei Province...”

“That's enough. Since you already know who I am, let's skip the pleasantries and get straight to the point. Where is my daughter?”

Despite his best efforts to remain composed, Tang Jincheon's aura leaked out, sharp and oppressive. The beggar, flustered, immediately pointed toward the mountain behind the village.

“She's... up there somewhere! But earlier this morning, about thirty unorthodox martial artists went up that way. It seems like something's gone wrong...”

Tap.

Before the beggar could finish his sentence, Tang Jincheon had already dashed off toward the mountain. A strong gust of wind followed in his wake, ruffling the beggar's hair as he scratched his head awkwardly.

“Well... I guess there’s nothing to worry about after all.”

After all, Tang Jincheon wasn’t just the head of the Sichuan Tang Clan—one of the **Five Great Clans**—but also a rare master who had reached the **Flowering Stage**. Ordinary trouble wouldn’t even qualify as a problem for someone like him.

Tang Jincheon ascended the mountain without pause.

The unorthodox martial artists who had gone ahead didn’t even bother hiding their tracks, making it easy to follow them.

The pursuit proceeded smoothly, yet one question lingered in Tang Jincheon’s mind.

“Why are those unorthodox bastards after Sowol?”

Whatever their reason, it was unlikely to be anything good.

Still, the fact that they were searching for her meant that she was likely still alive.

But if anything had happened to her...

“Any bastard involved, no matter how minor their role, will pay the price.”

It was a conclusion befitting the Tang Clan’s ruthless reputation. Suppressing his boiling rage, Tang Jincheon spread his senses wide, carefully scanning the surroundings.

Then, he suddenly froze.

“Killing intent...!”

And not just any ordinary killing intent. This was the kind of bone-chilling malice one could only sense from a seasoned unorthodox master who had committed countless murders over a lifetime.

Tang Jincheon’s senses sharpened as he bit his lip and accelerated. Before long, he arrived at the source of the killing intent.

“Ugh, aaaargh!”

Sssk.

A scream, followed by the sickening sound of flesh being sliced. Moments later, a severed head rolled across the ground, stopping at Tang Jincheon’s feet.

Tang Jincheon narrowed his eyes as he looked up.

What greeted him was a small mountain of corpses.

Bodies dressed in mismatched attire lay scattered across the blood-soaked ground. Pools of crimson had formed beneath them, seeping into the earth.

Some of the corpses bore marks from hidden weapons, but most had fatal wounds inflicted by a blade.

These were likely the unorthodox martial artists mentioned by the Beggar’s Sect branch leader.

And the one who had slain them all... was probably the young boy standing in front of the narrow cave entrance.

“Hm...?”

Tang Jincheon unconsciously swallowed as he took in the boy's condition.

His clothes were in tatters, his entire body drenched in blood. He stood at an angle, unable to straighten himself—perhaps due to broken ribs. Even the sword in his hand was only half its original length.

Yet, despite his grievous injuries, the boy exuded an overwhelming killing intent that even Tang Jincheon couldn't ignore.

At a glance, the boy seemed to be around Tang Sowol's age, if not younger. But could someone so young truly emit such monstrous killing intent?

Tang Jincheon decided to put the question aside for now. His priority was finding his daughter.

Just as he took a step forward...

Hwaaak—

The boy's killing intent, which had been scattered across the area, abruptly focused on a single point—Tang Jincheon's throat.

It was as if the boy was warning him: *Come any closer, and I'll cut you down.*

“How insolent.”

Of course, Tang Jincheon simply snorted in response. While the killing intent was impressive, it wasn't enough to stop someone who had reached the Flowering Stage.

Without even bothering to raise his own aura, he calmly continued walking forward, brushing off the pressure with ease.

The closer he got, the more intense the killing intent became. But soon, the boy seemed to realize that it wouldn't be enough to deter Tang Jincheon.

In desperation, he raised his broken sword, aiming it at Tang Jincheon.

Yet, something was off.

Though the sword pointed directly at Tang Jincheon, the boy's eyes were unfocused, staring blankly into space.

Sensing something strange, Tang Jincheon took a closer look. When he noticed the boy's half-lidded, vacant eyes, he finally understood.

The boy was barely conscious. Perhaps it could be called a state of **selfless concentration**, but to be more accurate, it was closer to a **Qi deviation**.

Though Tang Jincheon didn't know what had driven the boy to this state, it wasn't hard to guess his purpose.

The line drawn at the boy's feet... he had clearly stood guard there to ensure that no one crossed it.

If Tang Sowol was here, she would likely be inside that cave.

Which meant that this boy had fought to the brink of death to protect her.

Softening his tone slightly, Tang Jincheon spoke.

“Step aside. ...Though it seems you can’t hear me.”

In that case, he would have to subdue the boy quickly and carefully. Given his injuries, it would be better for him to rest anyway.

Just as Tang Jincheon gathered his internal energy, intending to incapacitate the boy in one swift strike, a familiar voice called out from behind the boy.

“Father?”

“...Sowol, is that you? Are you unharmed?”

“Yes! Aside from fainting from exhaustion earlier, I’m perfectly fine! Ugh, ah...”

Tang Sowol let out a small groan as she tried to stand, only to lose her balance and stumble. It seemed she wasn’t lying about being utterly exhausted.

“Ah, oops...”

Looking at her trembling limbs, Tang Sowol sighed deeply before grabbing onto the boy to steady herself.

“Cheon Hwi-da, just stay still for a moment, please.”

She even went so far as to rest her hand on his thigh and lean against his shoulder, as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

Tang Jincheon, witnessing the scene, found his mouth hanging open in disbelief.

“Regardless of the situation, isn’t she being a bit too... familiar with him...?”

While Tang Jincheon was still reeling from shock, Tang Sowol finally noticed the boy’s strange condition and let out a startled cry.

“Kyaaah! Cheon Hwi-da?! Are you okay? Wait, why is there so much blood?!”

Despite her own exhaustion, she frantically began patting his body, wiping the blood off his face with her sleeve without a second thought.

“Stop! Sowol, get away from him! He’s not in his right mind right now! If you get too close—”

“...Ah. It’s over.”

“What?!”

The boy, who had seemed ready to cut down anything that approached, suddenly regained his senses at the sound of Tang Sowol’s voice.

In an instant, the sharp killing intent vanished without a trace.

It wasn’t something that should have been so easily broken—whether it was a state of selflessness or Qi deviation. And yet, it had happened right before Tang Jincheon’s eyes.

While Tang Jincheon stood in stunned disbelief, Tang Sowol remained close to the boy, giving him a mix of scolding and concern.

“What on earth happened for you to end up in such a state? I told you to let those who ran away go!”

“And if they came back seeking revenge like today, what then? It’s better to finish things properly, even if it’s a bit risky.”

“But getting hurt like this serves no purpose!”

“A favor repaid twice over, a grudge repaid tenfold. Isn’t that your Tang Clan’s creed, not mine?”

“Yes, yes. And it’s because of that creed that I’m worrying about you right now, so please listen.”

“Don’t worry. It’s just surface wounds—nothing life-threatening.”

“I’m sorry. I was so confident about holding them off earlier...”

“No need to apologize. You held out until I dealt with the Hundred-Kill Saber, and that was more than enough. Besides, I was the one who fed you the Purple Flower Poison Enhancing Grass, preventing you from using your poison arts, so you have nothing to feel guilty about.”

“...Thank you for saying that.”

Tang Sowol smiled faintly as she inspected his wounds. After confirming that none of them were too serious, she let out a relieved sigh.

“Phew... Oh, right! Father, could you share some of that ointment you always carry? Cheon Hwi-da’s injuries are pretty bad.”

“Ah, of course. Wait a moment.”

Finally snapping out of his daze, Tang Jincheon pulled out a small wooden container from his robe.

It was a rare medicinal ointment, specially crafted by the Tang Clan using secret techniques known only to the patriarch. Its value was immeasurable—if sold on the market, it could easily be exchanged for its weight in gold.

Yet, Tang Sowol took a generous amount with her fingers and applied it to the boy's wounds as if it were some cheap salve.

Cheon Hwi, watching her hands carefully tend to every part of his upper body, spoke in a low voice.

"There's a problem."

"What is it? I'm being extra thorough with the wound on your chest since it might leave a scar."

"Thanks for that. But... I think I'm about to faint."

"...Right now?"

"Right now."

With those final words, Cheon Hwi's eyes rolled back, and he collapsed without warning.

“Cheon Hwi-da? Hey, Cheon Hwi-da, wake up!”

Since she had been leaning against him, Tang Sowol ended up falling with him, landing sprawled across his body.

Tang Jincheon, watching his daughter fuss over the unconscious boy, turned his gaze toward the now-exposed interior of the cave.

Inside, there were various items neatly arranged—things that unmistakably resembled household necessities.

After carefully moving Tang Sowol off Cheon Hwi’s body, Tang Jincheon finally spoke.

“When we get home... we’re going to have a long talk.”

“Huh?”

Tang Sowol tilted her head in confusion, clearly not understanding what her father meant.

Tang Jincheon closed his eyes tightly, suppressing the headache brewing within him.

No matter the confusion or questions swirling in his mind, there was one undeniable fact—his daughter was safe.

And for that, he was grateful.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

When I opened my eyes, I was greeted not by the all-too-familiar sight of the cave ceiling I had been staring at for over a month, but by a simple, ordinary ceiling.

“Ugh...”

As I tried to sit up, pain flared across my entire body—not from open wounds, but from sore muscles. Muscle pain. This was the inevitable result of neglecting external training.

Thanks to the Wave-Breaking Death Art, my internal energy had been developing quickly, but there were no shortcuts when it came to external training. It couldn't be helped.

Letting out a long sigh, I glanced around the room.

The room was spacious and luxurious, but rather than flashy, it exuded a calm, refined atmosphere.

I vaguely remembered seeing Tang Sowol and a middle-aged man who resembled her before passing out. That would mean...

“This must be the Tang Clan.”

Looking down at myself, I noticed my bare upper body was tightly wrapped in bandages.

Though my wounds appeared to have been treated, judging by the lingering muscle pain, not much time had passed since I was brought here.

I figured I should try to get up and move around despite the discomfort. Just as I was bracing myself to endure the pain and fully rise—

Creak—

The door suddenly opened, and I locked eyes with Tang Sowol, who was carrying an armful of supplies.

“Cheon Hwi-da! You’re finally awake!”

“I just woke up. Ah, would you mind lending me a hand? My frail body seems to be struggling just to get up.”

“What are you trying to get up for in that state?”

Shaking her head in exasperation, Tang Sowol lightly pressed her hand against my forehead. Lacking the strength to resist, my body obediently collapsed back onto the bed.

Even though I had only managed to sit up halfway, it had been quite painful, making her casual dismissal of my effort feel rather futile.

Feeling a mix of mild annoyance and disbelief, I stared at her, only to see her shrug as if she were completely oblivious, before sitting down beside me.

“Just rest for now. I’ll assign a servant to you, so if you need anything, just tell them.”

“I’m not fond of lying around idly.”

“And I’m not fond of injured people wandering around aimlessly. Why don’t you stay put until you’ve fully recovered?”

“Your stubbornness has grown while I was asleep.”

“Well, that’s to be expected. This is the Sichuan Tang Clan, after all. Even a dog raised in its own house learns to assert itself a little, don’t you think?”

“You’re hardly a dog, Tang Sowol.”

“Woof.”

Tang Sowol barked like a puppy, then gazed down at me with a mischievous smile.

“Cheon Hwi-da, it seems you still don’t quite grasp the situation.”

“It’s hard to come to terms with the idea of the Tang Clan’s youngest daughter barking like a dog.”

“No, not that.”

Snickering, she poked my cheek a few times.

“You’ve been kidnapped, Cheon Hwi-da. This time, the situation is the complete opposite of before.”

“Hah.”

Was she really bringing that up now, as payback? Dumbfounded, I stared at her face for a moment.

Apparently satisfied that she had teased me enough, she gave a contented nod before pulling out fresh bandages and medicine from the bundle she had brought.

“It’s time to change your dressings. I’ll help you sit up.”

“You’re the one who pushed me back down in the first place.”

“Which means it’s my job to help you sit up again, doesn’t it? Just relax, and I’ll take care of everything.”

With that, she slid her arm under my shoulder and carefully lifted my upper body.

She unwrapped the old bandages and began cleaning the wounds with a damp cloth, her movements surprisingly skillful.

“Don’t tell me you’ve been doing this the whole time I was unconscious?”

“What do you think?”

“I’d prefer it that way. I don’t like strangers touching my body.”

“Congratulations, then. Just as you hoped, I’ve been the one taking care of your injuries all this time. You can rest easy.”

“Thanks, but isn’t this the kind of task you’d normally leave to a servant? The Tang Clan even has its own medical department, doesn’t it?”

“There are servants and doctors, of course, but you woke up before I could call them.”

“Hm?”

“It took us five days to bring you here from the cave. You were unconscious for about that long. When I came to check on you one last time, you were trying to get up on your own.”

So I regained consciousness not long after arriving at the Tang Clan.

“Wait... are you saying you personally looked after me for five whole days?”

“There’s no need to thank me. After all, I owe you my life—it’s only right that I do this much.”

“No, I mean... did you also handle things like... uh, helping me relieve myself?”

“...What?”

“If you did, you’ll have to take responsibility. You didn’t think you could just examine my body thoroughly and get away with it, did you? I’ve heard rich kids tend to be more... liberal.”

“Th-That’s...!”

Tang Sowol’s face turned bright red, her lips moving soundlessly as she struggled to find a retort. Despite her embarrassment, her hands didn’t stop as she continued changing the bandages and applying fresh ointment.

Amused by her reaction, I couldn’t help but watch her. Unfortunately, she seemed to calm down after a short while.

“...There was nothing inappropriate, so please don’t worry. For more delicate matters, my father handled it.”

“...Your father? You mean... the Poison King?”

“Yes! He used Sammae Purification, so no physical contact was necessary! So please, let’s end this conversation here!”

“Well... if that’s the case.”

Seeing that she might genuinely get angry if I teased her any further, I decided to stop.

Despite her flustered state, Tang Sowol didn’t pause her work, and before long, she had treated all the minor wounds, leaving only the large gash across my chest.

When she unwound the bandages covering my chest, a faint scar from a clean slash was revealed. Tang Sowol, who had been grumbling under her breath, suddenly froze.

“...This was really dangerous. If the cut had been any deeper, your internal organs would have spilled out.”

“It wasn’t dangerous. I knew it would only graze my skin, so I deliberately allowed it.”

“It looks like it’ll leave a scar, though.”

“Scars on a warrior’s body are proof of survival. It’s something to take pride in.”

“Of course. You’re the benefactor of the great Sichuan Tang Clan, after all. Feel free to be as proud as you want.”

Tang Sowol’s fingers traced the scar gently, her touch slow and careful. Her dark eyes flickered with a mixture of regret and gratitude.

“Just so you know, my father and I agreed to present a slightly different version of events to others. Don’t be surprised if the story sounds... altered.”

“Altered? How so?”

“We’ll say that the fight was an official duel, and that you voluntarily accompanied me afterward. That way, it won’t cause any unnecessary complications.”

“I doubt people will be that gullible.”

“That’s the beauty of it. My father is the Poison King and the head of the Tang Clan. Anyone with half a brain will have no choice but to believe it—or at least pretend to.”

“Ah...”

True enough. With Tang Jincheon being one of the few masters at the *Flowering Stage* and the patriarch of a powerful clan, no one would openly question his words.

And even if there were whispers behind the scenes, his influence would be more than enough to suppress them.

Still, the real issue was the fact that unorthodox martial artists had attacked Tang Sowol in the first place.

While grudges and debts were taken seriously in the martial world, the *Sichuan Tang Clan* took it to another level, having enshrined such principles in their family code.

Someone had dared to harbor a grudge against the Tang Clan and attempted to harm their beloved daughter.

Although I had killed the ringleader, the *Hundred-Kill Saber*, that alone wouldn't be enough to quell the Tang Clan's fury.

The Tang Clan would undoubtedly lodge a formal complaint with the *Black Lotus Sect*, and they wouldn't hesitate to pursue any group even remotely connected to the incident.

With that, my involvement in the matter would gradually be pushed to the background and eventually forgotten.

As I nodded to myself in thought, Tang Sowol finished applying the ointment and began wrapping the final bandage around my chest.

"Regardless of how things turn out, you're still my savior. Neither my father nor I intend to let this matter go lightly."

"Good. I wasn't planning to let it go either. I'll accept whatever reward I can get."

"I like your honesty. But for now, focus on recovering. I'll assign a servant and a physician to take care of you, so don't worry about anything else."

"Got it."

Gathering up the used bandages and dirty cloths, Tang Sowol stood up. I closed my eyes, intending to focus on circulating my internal energy for faster recovery.

Just as I began to center my mind, Tang Sowol's voice reached me from the doorway.

“Cheon Hwi-da.”

“Do you have something else to say?”

“Once you've fully recovered, my father will call for you to discuss your reward over a meal.”

“Good. It's not every day you get a chance to make a direct request to the head of the Tang Clan.”

“What you ask for is up to you, but... um...”

“Go ahead. Just say it.”

“If my father says anything strange, please don’t be too surprised. As you might have guessed, he’s a bit... overprotective, since I’m the youngest.”

“That’s understandable. Any father would be concerned after their daughter went through something so dangerous.”

“...It’s not quite like that...”

After hesitating for a moment, Tang Sowol sighed, seemingly unable to find the right words.

“Never mind. It’s pointless to explain now. Just... keep it in mind, okay?”

“...?”

Muttering to herself, she waved her hand dismissively.

“Anyway, I’ll be going now. Make sure you get plenty of rest.”

Creak—

Leaving behind only those brief words, Tang Sowol closed the door and disappeared.

After staring at the firmly shut door for a moment, I refocused on my breathing and resumed circulating my energy.

As Tang Sowol said, recovery was my top priority right now.

Ten days passed.

Not only had my body fully healed, but I felt stronger than before I collapsed.

Of course, given the amount of mid-grade medicinal herbs I had consumed at every meal to aid my recovery, it was only natural.

Once I regained enough mobility, I began practicing with my sword in one of the Tang Clan's training grounds.

Since I didn't have any particularly secretive techniques to hide, I figured there was no need for privacy. Nonetheless, they insisted on providing me with a private training hall.

It was a clear indication of how highly the Tang Clan regarded me. Every servant and guard I encountered bowed respectfully, which felt somewhat awkward at first.

I had grown accustomed to people bowing to me during my time in the Black Lotus Sect, where I had even served as a branch leader.

But receiving bows filled with respect and gratitude rather than fear or contempt was something entirely new to me, and I wasn't sure how to feel about it.

Perhaps that was why I began avoiding crowded areas and focusing solely on my training.

The Sichuan Tang Clan wasn't considered one of the Five Great Clans without reason. When I truly dedicated myself to training, there was no more comfortable place than this.

The Black Lotus Sect's facilities had been decent, but they couldn't compare to the treatment I was receiving here.

Thus, early in the morning, I was in the private training hall, swinging my sword, when I noticed Tang Sowol quietly squatting in a corner, watching me.

"If you've come, you should've said something. Why are you lurking like that?"

"Lurking? I'd prefer you call it a considerate gesture to avoid interrupting your training."

"Fine, let's call it consideration. But you usually come around evening. It's not even lunchtime yet—what's the matter?"

After the previous ambush, it seemed Tang Sowol had grown more aware of her own limits. I had heard she had been diligently training every day, focusing on hidden weapons since she couldn't yet use her poison arts.

Despite frequently complaining about how difficult it was, she hadn't skipped a single day.

For her to skip training and come this early meant it was something important.

I sheathed my practice sword and turned toward her. She stood up in sync with me, dusting off her clothes with a smile.

“My father has summoned you. He wants to have lunch with you and discuss a few things.”

“Ah...”

Finally, the time had come.

I Kidnapped the Youngest Daughter of the Sichuan Tang Clan

Before me was a table so heavily laden with dishes that its legs seemed ready to buckle under the weight. Seated at the head of the table, Tang Jincheon, the Poison King, spoke in a calm tone.

“Have a seat.”

“Yes.”

I responded briefly and took a seat in an appropriate spot. Following my lead, Tang Sowol sat beside me and began poking my thigh with her finger.

“Wow. So you *do* know how to speak politely. Who would’ve thought?”

“I don’t know what you take me for, but I do understand basic etiquette when addressing my elders.”

“Then why don’t you ever speak to me that way? I’m five years older than you. Just thinking about how much I’ve been fooled by your casual speech still makes me speechless...”

“Five years isn’t that much. It’s enough to be considered peers, not ‘elders.’”

“Peers? That’s pushing it. There’s a world of difference between someone in their mid-teens and someone in their early twenties.” She raised her chin proudly. “From now on, you should address me with respect.”

I chuckled lightly and shook my head at her smug expression.

“How about you just speak casually to me too? Then it won’t be a problem.”

“Ehh. I don’t want to speak informally. I want you to respect me, not the other way around.”

“Well, I feel the same way. I don’t mind being polite to others, but somehow I just can’t bring myself to do that with you.”

“Why only me? What’s that supposed to mean?”

Tang Sowol pursed her lips and gave me a sharp look. It was clear that being home made her feel much more at ease—her expressions had become noticeably livelier.

Under the table, she tried to lightly step on my foot, but I quickly avoided it and gently pinned her foot in return. She let out a small huff, but before our playful exchange could escalate further, Tang Jincheon’s calm voice cut through the air.

“Master Jin, our head chef put great effort into today’s meal. If you find the food lacking, more will be brought out, so enjoy to your heart’s content.”

“Wow! Now that you mention it, Father, it really does look delicious.”

“Thank you,” I replied.

At a glance, it seemed like a friendly offer, and indeed, Tang Sowol cheerfully picked up her chopsticks without a second thought.

But I had noticed something. There was a brief moment when Tang Jincheon’s brow had furrowed slightly, and his aura, which had been calmly restrained, wavered ever so slightly, ready to surge forward at any moment.

Ah, so this is what she meant by overprotective.

I already knew that the Tang Clan cherished Sowol deeply, just as she held her clan dear. And it seemed that no one was more overprotective of her than her father, Tang Jincheon.

Understanding this, I gave a slight nod to myself and began eating as well. Though the food I’d been given during my stay at the Tang Clan wasn’t lacking, I quickly realized that my younger body had a much stronger appetite than I was used to.

Back in my previous life, it was rare to have enough to eat. I had only recently come to understand what it was like to eat properly.

Opportunities like this didn't come often, so I decided to eat heartily. I continuously stuffed my mouth with whatever was within reach, barely pausing to breathe.

Not long after, Tang Jincheon let out a quiet laugh.

“Cheon Hwi, was it? You seem to be enjoying the food. I'm glad. Though at this rate, we may run out of food before you're full.”

“I'm at a growing age, so I tend to eat a lot.”

“Indeed. You must eat well to grow strong. But judging by your demeanor, it seems you've spent more time wielding a sword than eating meals.”

“Well, the reason we fight is to live, right? The harder you train, the better food tastes, and the more of it you can eat.”

“That's an interesting way to put it.” Tang Jincheon nodded approvingly before continuing. “So, tell me—what would it take to truly satisfy you? The Tang Clan owes you a great debt for your assistance in this matter. Within reason, you may ask for anything, and we will do our best to grant it.”

“Well... While it’s true that I first picked up a sword because I was hungry, I doubt that increasing the quantity and quality of my meals alone would fill my hunger.”

“Are you saying you intend to live the rest of your life in perpetual hunger?”

“No, that’s not it. What I mean is...”

I set down my chopsticks for a moment and glanced at Tang Sowol, then met Tang Jincheon’s gaze head-on.

“...as long as I have people to share meals with, that’s enough for me.”

“I see.”

Tang Jincheon’s tone softened as he nodded thoughtfully. He then turned to look at Tang Sowol.

“Sowol.”

“Huh? What is it, Father?”

Still trying to process the sudden turn of the conversation, Tang Sowol blinked in confusion. Then, like a bolt from the blue, her father delivered an unexpected declaration.

“Become engaged to Master Cheon.”

“W-What?! What are you talking about?!”

At the mention of an engagement, Tang Sowol’s face turned blank with shock. She opened and closed her mouth several times, unable to form coherent words, alternating her gaze between her father and me.

Meanwhile, I continued calmly chewing on a piece of Braised pork, unfazed by the bombshell that had just been dropped.

“Excuse me, Cheon Hwi-da? Did you not hear what my father just said? He’s talking about an engagement, and you’re still eating?!”

“There’s never a situation dire enough to make me lose my appetite. Besides, you heard our conversation earlier, didn’t you? Why are you acting surprised?”

“I knew you two were talking, but I didn’t understand what was being said!”

“To summarize, the Poison King asked if there was anything I wanted, and I replied that I wished to become part of the family.”

“That’s what you meant?!” Tang Sowol gawked, her mouth hanging open. Honestly, I wish she wouldn’t do that while we’re eating—it’s unsightly.

I reached over and gently closed her mouth before more food could spill out. Seeing this, Tang Jincheon finally spoke again.

“Sowol, I’m not saying you have to marry him right away. Nor am I suggesting we hold a grand engagement ceremony and announce it to the world. All I’m saying is that, for now, we acknowledge Master Cheon as your fiancé and keep him by your side.”

“But...”

“Frankly speaking, we owe him a great deal. He not only saved your life but also offered us the priceless **Jahua Poison Bud**, something even a thousand gold wouldn’t be enough to buy. You know how valuable that will be to you.”

“...Yes, that’s true.”

Still sounding reluctant, Tang Sowol pouted slightly. Tang Jincheon continued his explanation patiently.

“I admit that his methods were a bit extreme, but even so, Master Cheon has earned the right to ask to become part of our family. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“...Yes.”

“Good. That was my reasoning from the standpoint of our clan’s values and principles. Now, I’ll explain from a more practical perspective as the clan leader.”

“There’s more?”

“There’s quite a bit more. Look at Master Cheon’s martial prowess. At his age, he managed to defeat a **Peak Realm master** and cut down dozens of martial artists. Such feats suggest he possesses an extraordinary talent that rivals your own. And

while there are some aspects I find curious, if we can bring him into the Tang Clan, it would be a great boon.”

“...Hmm...”

“Furthermore, he has no existing ties to any other powerful faction, which makes him an ideal candidate for a live-in son-in-law.”

“Is that something to be thankful for?”

“For us, it is. Perhaps not for him.”

Tang Jincheon shot me a brief glance. I didn't particularly mind the conversation, so I gave him a small nod before picking up a piece of **sweet-and-sour pork** and popping it into my mouth. Its tangy sweetness was so delightful that it whetted my appetite even more, despite already feeling quite full.

The chef truly was exceptional.

As I involuntarily smiled at the taste, Tang Sowol, still looking conflicted, let out a long sigh.

“Great. I’m in turmoil, and here you are, looking perfectly content.”

“Thanks for the compliment.”

“That wasn’t a compliment!”

Tang Sowol shot me a glare before turning back to her father.

“There must be another reason, right? Tell me, Father.”

“Yes. The earlier reasons were about the benefits of bringing Master Cheon into our family. But now, I’ll explain the problems that could arise if we don’t.”

“...I mean, Cheon Hwi-da may be a little strange, but he’s not a bad person. He wouldn’t cause trouble just because we turned him down.”

“That’s not what I meant. I’m referring to the fact that the two of you essentially lived together in that cave.”

“W-We didn’t ‘live together’... But you were the only one who found us, so there shouldn’t be any issues, right?”

Tang Sowol blushed furiously, either embarrassed by her misunderstanding or by the realization of how it might have appeared.

Tang Jincheon, his expression growing more serious, continued speaking.

“How do you think I managed to find you after you disappeared without a trace?”

“...The Tang Clan’s tracking team?”

“That might have worked if you’d gone missing within Sichuan Province. But your trail was lost in **Hubei Province**, beyond our direct reach. Extending our influence that far would draw attention from **Wudang** and **Zhuge Clan**, making it difficult.”

“Then... Ah! The **Beggar’s Sect!**”

“Correct. We enlisted the help of the Beggar’s Sect, which is how we located you.”

“In other words, the Beggar’s Sect knows enough about our whereabouts to deduce that we spent over a month together.”

“Indeed. While the Beggar’s Sect won’t spread the information publicly, it’s difficult to guarantee complete secrecy given the nature of their organization.”

The Beggar’s Sect was an alliance of beggars. Though its officially trained members were strictly regulated, it was impossible to fully control the countless ordinary beggars affiliated with it.

Inevitably, rumors would spread—rumors that **Tang Sowol**, the daughter of the Tang Clan, had traveled the martial world and ended up practically living with an unrelated man.

“If you’re formally engaged, the rumors will die down quietly. But without that, the gossip could spread like wildfire, tarnishing not only the Tang Clan’s reputation but also your future prospects for marriage.”

“Father, you’re overthinking this. I’m still young—I’ve only just reached my early twenties. Besides, our family background is strong, thanks to you.”

“That would be true if you were an ordinary girl. But Sowol, you are a **Toxin Spirit Physique**. You were born with a body that others can only acquire after undergoing complete rebirth through mastering toxic arts.”

“...Ah...”

“You know what that means. The **Toxin Spirit Physique** is both a blessing and a curse. Without training, your body will naturally accumulate more poison over time. Eventually, you may become incapable of bearing children. And now, you’ve even absorbed the Purple Flower Poison Enhancing Grass.”

Tang Sowol lowered her head, her expression heavy with gloom. Seeing her like this, Tang Jincheon spoke gently but firmly.

“There’s no need to rush into marriage. If you’re fine with never having children, we won’t pressure you. But if you have any intention of starting a family, you must remember that time is not on your side.”

“...I understand, Father.”

“I’m sorry, Sowol. But it seemed to me that you had taken a liking to Master Cheon, so I thought it was worth discussing seriously.”

“I know you said that for my sake, Father. You don’t need to apologize.”

Tang Sowol smiled softly, shaking her head. The warm, sentimental atmosphere between the two made me feel strangely uneasy—like I was about to lose my appetite.

So, I set down my chopsticks and wiped my mouth.

“If that’s the issue, I have a solution.”

“...What?”

“What did you say?”

Both Tang Sowol and Tang Jincheon turned to me simultaneously, their gazes filled with disbelief. Tang Jincheon, in particular, exuded a palpable intensity, likely due to his advanced cultivation level.

Sensing the tension, I carefully revised my words.

“There is a solution.”

“Enough with the suspense. Speak plainly. If you’re lying, I won’t forgive you, but if it’s true...”

“It’s simple. The problem stems from the excessive accumulation of poison in her body, correct? If we can control the flow of poison, the issue can be resolved.”

This was a problem that Tang Sowol had struggled with deeply in my previous life.

In the end, she had never married, dedicating herself entirely to martial arts. But then, the Tang Clan had been annihilated...

As the last surviving member of the Tang bloodline, she bore the responsibility of reviving her clan.

Thus, she had spent a long time searching for a solution to this problem, and eventually, she found one.

I remembered it vividly because she had confided in me over drinks, sharing every little detail late into the night.

“I’ll teach you a method to regulate the poison in your body.”

Back then, I hadn’t realized it, but in hindsight, it might have been her roundabout way of confessing.

There was no way to confirm that now, though.