

Author: Leonard
Illustrator: Won

The Poison King:

Now that
I've Gained
Ultimate
Power,

the
Bewitching
Beauties in
My Harem
Can't Get
Enough
of Me



1

Author: Leonard
Illustrator: Won


The Poison King:

Now that
I've Gained

Ultimate
Power,

the
Bewitching
Beauties in
My Harem
Can't Get
Enough
of Me





“Quite so, brat. You have finally realized the truth.”

“You’re the **Poison Queen!**”

Caim instinctively understood—she was indeed the Poison Queen, the strongest of all monsters, the dreaded Demon Lord that had plunged the northern part of the Jade Kingdom into the depths of despair.



Lenka

A swordswoman working as Millicia's guard. She is straitlaced and wary of Caim at first, but...?

Tea


A white tiger beastfolk working at Caim's former house. She is the only person the cursed Caim trusts and feels safe around.

Caim

A boy hated as a cursed child because of the poison eating away at his body. He awakened as the Poison King after conquering the curse.

Millicia

Noble lady from the Garnet Empire. She and Lenka were saved by Caim before bandits could make them their playthings.



“Mmmh,
aaah... Please,
Master Caim,
don’t be so
rough!”

Caim had extended both his hands
and grabbed her breasts from below,
seizing the swaying lumps of flesh like
a raptor diving for its prey, and was
now vigorously massaging them.

Table of Contents

1. [Cover](#)
2. [Color Illustrations](#)
3. [Prologue](#)
4. [Chapter 1: The Cursed Child](#)
5. [Chapter 2: The Poison Queen](#)
6. [Chapter 3: Severing Family Ties](#)
7. [Interlude: The Ones Left Behind](#)
8. [Chapter 4: Departure and New Meetings](#)
9. [Chapter 5: Fellow Travelers](#)
10. [Chapter 6: Caught Up](#)
11. [Epilogue](#)
12. [Extra Story: The Maid's Intense Love and Bathing](#)
13. [Afterword](#)
14. [Bonus Short Stories](#)
15. [About J-Novel Club](#)
16. [Copyright](#)

Prologue

“Aaah, Master Caim...”

“Mmm...wonderful...”

Honeyed voices tickled the young man’s eardrums as the sultry breathing of two women caressed his chest. The voices that poured into his ears were filled with profound love, and it made him feel as though his mind was on the verge of melting.

Seriously...this isn’t what I’d been hoping for. The young man—Caim—sighed internally as he felt the soft, warm weight against his entire body.

He was currently lying on a bed large enough to hold more than ten people. With him were several beautiful women, all clad in underwear or negligees, and their glistening eyes, glazed with lust, were fixated on Caim. Soft breasts pressed on him from all angles, and long, slender legs twined around his body. Every time the bed squeaked with their up-and-down movements, coquettish moans rang out. The peerless beauties surrounding Caim yearned for him, their cheeks so flushed one might think they were afflicted by some sweet poison.

Well, they are poisoned. Caim smiled bitterly as his hands slid across their smooth skin, playing with their breasts and buttocks.

Indeed, all the women were Caim’s captives, and it was his sweet poison that controlled them, laying bare their instincts and causing them to seek more and more pleasure with him.

I have to take responsibility for that. This is just the consequence of my actions...or rather, of my poisons.

“Master Caim...please, I beg you, give me your love... I want more...more...!” One of the women couldn’t endure it any longer and threw away her soaking wet underwear. The others followed suit, stripping themselves naked.

“Fine... Bring it on. I’ll take you all together,” Caim declared as he wrapped one arm around the woman and stole a kiss.

As his other arm and his legs were seized by the other women, Caim began to reflect on the events that had led him to this point.

The story that follows shall recount the birth of a king who would later be called everything from a wise ruler to a tyrant—and even a Demon Lord.

This is the epic tale of the strongest daemon's battles and adventures—the tale of the Poison King.

Chapter 1: The Cursed Child

To see how it all began, we must go back thirteen years in the past. The first act of this story occurred in a small country at the center of the continent—the Jade Kingdom.

Breathing heavily, a woman in her early twenties groaned painfully, lying on a bed. Her body was drenched in sweat and her cheeks were hollow, showing that she was afflicted by an illness. Moreover, her symptoms were quite advanced. It was obvious that she wouldn't last much longer.

"Sasha..." the man next to the bed muttered, his back hunched as he looked down. His face was full of grief as he called the woman's name, but she didn't reply. In fact, it was doubtful whether Sasha even heard him at all.

The two of them were husband and wife, but they were no ordinary married couple. They were both heroes who had saved the people from a great calamity.

A year ago, a calamity going by the name of the Poison Queen had appeared in the Jade Kingdom. This Poison Queen was a Demon Lord-class monster who had destroyed countless villages and caused immeasurable damage in the northern part of the country. The very heroes who had put an end to her atrocities were the woman on the bed—Sasha Halsberg, a formidable mage bearing the title of Sage—and the man watching over her—Kevin Halsberg, an expert in martial arts extolled as the Master Pugilist. The couple had been part of the group that defeated the Queen and brought back peace to the kingdom.

However, as revenge for their deed, the Queen had cursed Sasha before she perished, afflicting the Sage with an incurable illness. As Sasha's life left her little by little, many doctors, apothecaries, priests, and royal mages had tried to save the country's hero. However, no one was ever able to find a cure for her affliction.

The woman's breathing only grew more labored.

“Sasha...why did it come to this...? Why must you endure this pain?! God, just *why* are you doing this to us?!” Kevin cried, appalled at himself for being capable only of watching his wife suffer.

Kevin was known as the Master Pugilist, the strongest martial artist in the kingdom, someone powerful enough to kill a dragon with his bare fists, but he could do nothing against the curse laid on his beloved. He was so stricken with grief that he started to have thoughts unbecoming of a hero—that they shouldn’t have fought the Poison Queen and ought to have run away instead, even if it meant the fall of their country.

“Please, Sasha...don’t die. Don’t leave me alone...”

“Excuse me, Master.”

As Kevin lamented, he heard a knock and a voice. After a few seconds of silence, the elderly servant understood that his master would not reply and entered the room. He threw a pitying glance at his employers and spoke to Kevin in a reserved tone.

“Master, there is someone claiming to be a doctor at the entrance to the mansion. Should I let them in?”

Kevin gritted his teeth so hard it made a clearly audible sound. Many doctors had examined his wife, only for them to give up. He knew that nothing would come of it this time either.

“...Fine. Let them in.”

And yet, Kevin accepted. He couldn’t flatly dismiss someone who had come to try to save Sasha. It also might have been a doctor sent by the king. As thanks for having defeated the Poison Queen, there were talks of giving a peerage to Kevin and Sasha, so it wasn’t impossible.

“Certainly.” Having received his master’s approval, the servant bowed and went out into the corridor.

Before long, another person entered the room.

“Hey, Kevin. It’s been a while. Remember me?”

“You’re...!”

The person in question—who gave a friendly wave—was a tall woman who looked to be in her early twenties, wearing a white coat over her black suit. What’s more, Kevin knew her—she was a former comrade with whom he had broken off relations years ago.

“You! Why are you here, Doctor Faust?!” Kevin snarled.

“Ha ha! Is that any way to greet me? Good to see you’re doing well,” the white-coated woman replied, her red lips curling into a crescent-shaped smile.

The assessment of Doctor Faust varied greatly depending on the people and countries involved.

Some of her good deeds included developing a cure for a formerly incurable illness, sealing a devil before it could destroy a country, and stopping a monster swarm all by herself. The people who held her in high esteem praised her as a wonderful woman, noble as an angel.

On the other hand, she had experimented on and killed hundreds of people to develop her cure, sacrificed a whole village to seal away the devil, and altered demi-humans for use as biological weapons. The people who hated her scorned her as a terrible woman, cruel as a devil.

Kevin and Sasha had been Faust’s comrades in the past, but they had never been able to accept her twisted actions and ultimately severed their connections with her. So why had she suddenly appeared before them now?

“Rather cold of you to question my motives, don’t you think?” Faust said. *“I’m not so heartless that I would turn a blind eye to the troubles of my old friends. I rushed here when I heard that Sasha had been cursed by the Poison Queen.”*

“How shameless! Don’t you remember what you did to that village five years ago?!” Kevin replied.

“Of course I remember. It’s a researcher’s duty to never forget the people who sacrificed themselves for our experiments. More importantly, would you just let me examine your wife already?”

“You...!” Kevin glared at Faust, but at the same time, he realized that she might be his only hope.

True, she's a madwoman who has transgressed the boundaries of humanity. But it's also true that she's the finest doctor in the world and an incredible mage. Maybe she'll be able to save Sasha... In fact, if she can't, then nobody can.

"...If you do anything untoward to my wife, I won't show you mercy," Kevin said with a groan, frustration clear on his face as he allowed Faust to examine Sasha.

"Fine by me. You should just have said so from the start." Faust smiled wryly as she tapped Kevin's shoulder. Then, she started her examination. "First, I need to undress her."

Sasha groaned in pain as Faust stripped her to reveal purple bruises on her skin. The marks seemed to originate near her heart, and they had spread to just below her face.

"Well, well... Interesting," Faust muttered, groping Sasha's body.

Kevin watched her silently, telling himself he would never allow her to do this if she weren't a doctor...or a woman, considering how carefully she was examining certain parts.

"I think I've got the gist. Basically, the Poison Queen's curse is a cursed illness, as the name suggests. It's a pretty annoying one, but there is a way to heal her...somewhat."

"Really?!" Kevin couldn't keep himself from shouting. Countless renowned doctors and great mages had tried, but none had found a way to cure Sasha. And yet, in just a few minutes, Faust had done that very thing.

Faust first calmed him down, then explained the details to him slowly. "Sorry to dash your hopes, but I can't dispel the curse of the Poison Queen, a Demon Lord-class calamity, without risk. The only thing I can do is transfer it to someone else."

"What do you mean?"

"Ever heard of the Soul Exchanging Technique? The one where you sacrifice someone's life to revive a deceased person? Well, it's possible to use that to transfer the curse from Sasha to someone else."

Kevin gasped. To save his wife, he would have to inflict the curse on someone else—a truly selfish and blasphemous act.

“Fine. In that case, I’ll do it,” Kevin said, resolved to sacrifice himself for his wife.

However, Faust shook her head. “Unfortunately, it can’t be you. It has to be someone with a soul close enough to hers, which means only direct blood relatives like parents, children, or siblings.”

“What?! Then it’s impossible to save her!” Kevin slammed his fist into the wall. “Sasha has no relatives! Her parents are dead and she was an only child! There’s nobody to transfer the curse to!” He had seen hope for an instant only for it to immediately escape his grasp. Kevin sank again into despair, but Faust smiled bitterly as she pushed up her glasses.

“That’s not true. There is someone, actually.”

“What...?”

“Blood relatives include the unborn.”

“Wait, don’t tell me...?!” Kevin understood the implication behind Faust’s words and looked at Sasha’s naked body as she struggled to breathe.

Was a new life budding inside her?

“You mean she’s carrying my child?”

“Well, I don’t know if it’s *yours*... Ah, sorry for that nasty comment. Anyway, she’s indeed pregnant. As a doctor, I can guarantee it.”

Kevin’s expression warped. He had been ready to sacrifice a lot of things to save his beloved wife, but he had never imagined the possibility of using his unborn child.

“How can this happen...? Is there no God in this world?”

“I don’t care what you do, and I’ll respect your choice either way. But if you leave her like that, just know that she won’t be the only one to die.”

Kevin groaned. He closed his eyes and clenched his fists for a few seconds and...then made a cruel decision.

“Please, save my wife. Transfer the curse to our child.”

“No problem. I’ll do—”

“W-Wait!”

“Sasha?!”

Sasha, who had been breathing faintly until now, interrupted Faust. She had woken up without anyone realizing, and she glared up at Kevin from the bed.

“Don’t do...something so...foolish... I don’t want to...survive...if it means...sacrificing my child!” she said in between pained breaths.

“But Sasha! It’s the only way! If you die, then the child will too! In that case, I would rather at least save you!”

“It’s my baby! I won’t let them die alone! I will hold them in my arms as I pass through the gate to the underworld!” She might have been panting as she spoke, but the resolve in her eyes was clear. Even at the cost of her life, Sasha refused to abandon her child. Her unshakable will was truly the embodiment of maternal love.

“Hmm...you sure?” And yet, Faust asked Sasha this question, cocking her head. “You’re certain that you don’t want to transfer the curse to your child and instead let yourself die?”

“Of course... Parents must protect their children, not sacrifice them!”

“But...if you do that, your children will also die. By sacrificing one, you can save the rest. I don’t think it’s worth killing all of you.”

“I told you—” Irritated, Sasha forced her weak body to shout at Faust, but as she started to speak, she realized something about the doctor’s words.

“Wait...children?”

“Yep, *children*.” Faust nodded. “You have two fetuses in your womb, which means twins.”

“What? Twins?!” Kevin yelled as Sasha gasped in shock.

If there were two babies, then that changed everything.

“If you transfer the curse to one of the children, then the remaining child and

the mother will be saved. So either all three will die, or you sacrifice one to save the other two. These are your choices.”

“I can’t believe it...”

“So, which one is it, my old friends? I’ll respect your decision. Will you die together with the two children or save at least one of them? The choice is yours.”

The spouses stayed silent.

“No matter which option you go with, I’ll just say that neither is wrong. After all, there is no right answer when it comes to who lives or dies.” Faust’s expression as she urged them to make a decision was calm and gentle—compassionate, even. However, to the Halsberg couple, she looked just like a devil pressuring them to make a pact with her.

That day, the Halsbergs made a decision. At that time, though, no one could have predicted that this painful choice would influence the fate of countless people a little more than a decade later.



Why do I have to suffer like this?

That was the unanswerable question that ran through his mind again and again, causing immeasurable anguish.

“Hey, the cursed child is here again!”

“Stay away! You’re gonna infect us!”

“Ugh...” Caim Halsberg groaned in pain as a stone thrown by one of the kids struck the back of his head.

Caim was a thirteen-year-old boy with ashen hair and eyes, whose handsome face might make him irresistible to girls in the future. Unfortunately, his looks were tainted by purple bruises on the fair skin of his face and limbs. These bruises were caused by the curse that had afflicted him since birth—the same reason he was persecuted as a cursed child.

“Run! He’s gonna give us his curse!”

“Just get out of our village already, you monster!”

The boys guffawed as they fled.

“Ow...” Caim let out another pained groan as he touched the back of his head, staining his fingers with blood.

Caim lived in a small village in the corner of the Halsberg territory—or more accurately, he lived in a small hut in the forest a little ways away, only ever entering the village proper when he needed to buy food.

“The cursed child is back!”

“The one with the Poison Queen’s... Damn, he’s so disgusting!”

“His filthy presence is so unpleasant. I just hope he leaves quickly.”

While the adults didn’t throw stones like the children did, they certainly didn’t refrain from gossiping about Caim as he passed by.

Caim arrived at the shop he usually went to, only to be welcomed by a glare from the owner.

“You again... How annoying.”

“Um... Food, please...”

“I know. Just take it and get out of here already!” The shopkeeper threw a jute bag at Caim’s feet; bread, fruit, and cheese spilled out from it onto the ground. “I’ll just get the lord to pay for it as usual, so get lost! You’re driving away the other customers!”

Caim grimaced.

“What?” the shopkeeper snapped. “Don’t give me that look. You’re just a cursed child—you have no right to resent me when I’m so generously giving you food!”

Intimidated by the shopkeeper, Caim gulped down his complaints as he picked up the food on the ground and put it back inside the bag. Even if the food was dirty now—it was really just a bunch of moldy leftovers anyway—to Caim, it was precious nutrition that he needed to live.

Caim finished gathering the food and did his best to endure the humiliation

before heading out as quickly as he could. Slandered by every villager he passed, Caim left the village and followed the animal trail back into the forest.

As he walked, his body hurting here and there, the usual question crossed his mind: *Why...just why am I the only one who suffers like that?*

Caim had started living in the forest hut a year ago. An elderly man had been taking care of him, but he had unfortunately died three months ago, leaving Caim alone. Since then, every time Caim went into the village to stock up on food, he was slandered and showered with malice even though he hadn't done anything wrong.

"Why was I born as a cursed child? What did I do to deserve this?" he complained under his breath, but he knew that it would change nothing. Caim had been born cursed, and he would stay that way for the rest of his life. He had to live alone so that he wouldn't draw any attention.

Suddenly, pain shot through Caim's chest, and he let go of the bag to cough violently into his hands. When the fit was over, he looked at his palms and found them stained with blood—so much that it dripped onto the ground, where it sizzled and created a terrible stench. Caim looked down at his feet and saw that the stone there had dissolved, as though it had been drenched in acid.

"The poison curse, huh...?"

Caim had been afflicted with the poison curse since his birth, so he occasionally vomited blood just like he had a moment ago—and because of that curse, his blood was so toxic it could melt stone.

And that's why I was driven out of the house immediately after Mom died...

Though he currently resided in the forest hut, Caim was actually the son of the local lord. Until his mother's death last year, he had lived in a large mansion.

It was so much better when Mom was alive. Nobody threw stones at me back then...

Caim's mother had been one of the rare people who had truly loved him. She had always smiled freely at him, even though his father and twin sister avoided him.

Now that I think about it, Mom sometimes told me she was sorry. I wonder what she meant by that.

When she was still alive, his mother would periodically apologize to Caim as if repenting for something. Caim had always found it strange—he should really have been the one apologizing for being born cursed. So why was his mother always saying it instead?

“Huh?” Noticing something, Caim lifted his head.

“Grr...” A few meters away, several wolves were hiding in the shadow of the trees, growling and baring their ferocious fangs at him.

“Wolves, huh? It’s been a while since I’ve seen any. I wonder what they want.” Caim cocked his head and stretched his hand toward them.

The next instant, the wolves whined like puppies and fled. The stench of his poisoned blood was so strong it could even drive away animals and monsters. In fact, before Caim started to live in the forest hut, the wolves had frequently terrorized the area, but now they hid and kept a low profile.

“I’m useful as beast repellent, so I hoped I’d be treated a little better...” Caim whispered in a self-deprecating tone before gathering up the food that had spilled on the ground.

Because of the poison curse, my body is far filthier than any mud, so it’s not like I need to care about my food being soiled.

Caim’s shoulders slumped, and he started to walk back home—all the while unable to shake the worry that he would spend the rest of his life suffering malice and scorn.

“What?”

When Caim reached his destination, he saw a woman standing in front of the dilapidated hut that served as his home. The woman, who looked to be in her early twenties, was wearing a maid uniform. Her long silver hair was striking enough, but it didn’t stand out nearly as much as the pair of triangular animal ears atop her head and the tail stretching out from beneath her long skirt.

“Tea...”

“Master Caim! Welcome back!” When she realized Caim had returned, the woman’s expression brightened, and she ran to him.

The woman’s name was Tea, and she was a maid serving Count Halsberg’s household—meaning Caim’s family. She was a beastfolk, and her black-and-white striped ears and tail showed that she was a very rare kind of tigerfolk—a white tiger.

Tea had been the personal maid of Caim’s mother and had looked after him during his childhood. While the other servants had always shunned him, Tea had been the only one to treat him kindly, and even now that he’d been driven out of the mansion, she was so concerned about Caim that she regularly visited him.

“Were you out buying food? You were so late I was starting to get worried!”

“Ah! Stay away! You shouldn’t touch me!” Caim hurriedly stopped Tea from hugging him as she usually did.

“Huh?”

Tea loved physical contact and would always embrace Caim whenever she saw him. However, Caim was currently injured, with blood still flowing from the back of his head. If Tea carelessly hugged him, his poisoned blood might get on her.

When Tea noticed Caim’s injury, her friendly smile darkened.

“Master Caim, what happened to you?”

“Well...I fell and hit my head...” He awkwardly tried to make up an excuse, but that only made Tea frown.

“I don’t buy that. It was the villagers, right? I can’t believe they’d dare to harm *you*, a member of the count’s family! I’ll go knock some sense into those fools right now!”

“Wait! Don’t do that! I’m fine!” Caim hastily stopped Tea before she could storm off.

In fact, something similar had happened once before—Tea had flown into a

rage and gone to the village. There she had spanked the kids and yelled at the adults until they apologized. However, a few days later, she had been reprimanded severely by Count Halsberg—Caim’s father. Apparently, the mayor had complained to Count Halsberg that Tea had ranted at them and even used violence unprovoked. In response, instead of protecting Caim, who was being persecuted, or Tea, who had been angry on Caim’s behalf, Count Halsberg had supported the villagers. He’d said that they shouldn’t cause a commotion, since the village was generous enough to look after a good-for-nothing cursed child like Caim.

“Father is keeping an eye on you, and the only reason he’s overlooked that trouble is because you were Mother’s favorite. If you keep causing problems on my account, you’ll be fired.”

“But if I don’t do anything, the villagers will get carried away and abuse you even more!”

“We can’t do anything about that. It’s my fault for being born cursed. Besides, if I’m driven out of this village, I really won’t have anywhere to go this time.”

“Grrraow...” Tea whined sadly, looking as though she was about to burst into tears at the sight of Caim’s gloomy expression. “I’ll at least take care of your injury. Come here, please.”

“No, you’ll...” Caim started to refuse, not wanting to let her touch his poisoned blood, but when he saw that Tea wouldn’t take no for an answer, he paused. “Fine, but be careful about my blood.” He reluctantly relented and followed Tea inside the hut.

There was no furniture inside the hut—only a wooden plank on the ground for Caim to sleep on.

“I’m going to clean the wound. It might sting a little, but please bear with it.”

Caim did whine a little, but it wasn’t because of the pain. To deal with the injury on the back of his head, Tea had pushed him right up to her chest. With his face buried between the wonderful mounds concealed beneath her maid uniform, Caim couldn’t keep himself from flushing.



“You won’t have to deal with it too much longer, Master Caim.”

“I’m fine. It hurts a bit, but I can put up with it.”

“Just a little longer and I’ll have saved enough money. Then you won’t have to stay in a place like this...” Tea added in a whisper.

Caim, however, didn’t catch what she said, as his face was still buried in between her large breasts, so he could only make a questioning expression. When Tea finally finished treating his wound, she released his head and he could at last breathe freely.

“By the way, why did you come here today?” Caim quickly asked to hide his embarrassment. Tea came at least once a week to see him, so the question was truly only to gloss over his bashfulness. He didn’t expect her to have any special business.

“Grrraaw... I almost forgot.” After putting away the supplies she’d used to treat Caim, though, Tea blinked a few times as she recalled something. It seemed she *did* have a specific reason to visit today. “Well...the master ordered me to bring you to the mansion...”

“Father did...? It’s rare for him to have any business with me.”

“It’s almost the anniversary of the mistress’s death, so he wants you to come before that.”

“I see,” Caim said in realization, his expression darkening.

The anniversary of his mother’s death was a week away, so his father wanted him to return home to pray for her. As for why it needed to be *before* and not on the day itself...well, that was because his father didn’t want to see his cursed son on the day his beloved wife had died. It was heartless and selfish of him, but at least that way he fulfilled what little obligation he had toward his son while still showing his love to his wife.

“Fine, I’ll return to the mansion.”

“I know I shouldn’t be saying this since I’m the one who’s supposed to bring you there, but...I know everyone there really hates you. You don’t have to force yourself to go if you don’t want to.”

“It’s okay. I want to mourn for Mother, and was even planning to pray in front of the gate if I wasn’t permitted to return, so this just saves me the trouble,” Caim said with a sad smile.

Caim had made his decision. He would return to the mansion he had resided in until a year ago—to the Halsberg’s home, where his twin sister and his father, the Master Pugilist, lived.



The head of the Halsberg’s county was a renowned former adventurer who had defeated many monsters and bandits. However, thirteen years ago, he had been granted a peerage as a count and the territory that came with it as a reward for eliminating the Poison Queen. The established nobles weren’t happy that a mere adventurer had joined their ranks, but as Kevin was extolled as the Master Pugilist—the strongest man in the kingdom—no one was openly antagonistic to him. Gathering retainers using the connections he’d forged during his adventuring days, Count Kevin Halsberg governed his domain peacefully and earned the love of his people.

“Back when I was driven out, I never thought I’d return...” Caim, the lord’s son, grimaced as he looked at the home he hadn’t seen in a year. While the mansion held precious memories of his mother, it was also packed with painful ones. If possible, Caim would have preferred never to return there at all.

“Master Caim...are you all right?” Tea asked, sounding concerned.

“Yeah, don’t worry.” Caim shot her a feeble smile and walked through the mansion’s gate.

As they made their way inside, they passed by the gardeners and the soldiers in charge of security. However, none of them greeted Caim. In fact, they averted their eyes as if they didn’t want to look at something so filthy.

“They’re so rude!”

“Leave them be. I don’t care.”

Caim was used to people acting like that. The only ones who had ever treated him normally were his mother and Tea—and in a way, the fact that the soldiers and staff didn’t throw stones at him made them better than the villagers.

As Caim and Tea neared the mansion, they noticed two people moving around in the garden—Kevin Halsberg, the master of the residence, and Arnette Halsberg, Caim’s twin sister.

“Well then—today I’m gonna instruct you in the Toukishin Style too!”

“Yes, Father!”

Dressed in clothes that allowed for easy movement, the pair were practicing hand-to-hand combat.

“First, let’s review a little. The Toukishin Style—or the Fierce Fighting God Style—is a martial art that focuses on covering your body with mana. Not a sword or a spear, mind you—only your body. Using your mana to reinforce yourself is a standard technique in basically every martial art, but the Toukishin Style goes even further!”

The large red-haired man—Kevin—took a sharp breath, and the next instant his body was completely surrounded by the aura of his mana, which gushed out of him like steam. Little by little, the volume of it shrank down to an unusually small size. However, that wasn’t because Kevin had reduced the amount of mana he was releasing but because he had compressed it to make it more dense.

“By condensing the mana enshrouding your body to its limit, it becomes as hard as steel. This technique is called Mana Compression, and if you master it, even a dragon’s scales can’t outmatch it. And of course, it also raises the power of your fists!”

Kevin punched a human-sized rock in the garden, his mana-clad fist pulverizing it in a single strike. He hadn’t been nicknamed the Master Pugilist for nothing.

“You just saw how strong Mana Compression can be, but not being able to use it on weapons will be a disadvantage at first. After all, no matter how talented you are, it takes at least five years to learn how to use this technique easily. But once you’ve mastered it, you’ll never require a weapon again—and you can use it whenever you need. Plus, you won’t have to carry any additional weight. You can obviously run faster if you’re not wearing heavy armor, right?”

“I see... I expected no less from you, Father! Do you think I will ever be as strong as you are?”

“Of course! You’re my daughter, after all—I’m sure in ten years or so you’ll be a first-class martial artist. And to make sure that happens, we’re gonna train hard today too!”

“Yes! I shall do my best!”

Caim’s expression darkened as he watched the father and daughter pair practicing harmoniously.

“It looks like they’re still training, so should we go inside the manor first?” Tea asked him.

“No...I want to watch.” Caim refused Tea’s kind proposal, instead staring at his twin sister.

Arnette... My little sister, my other half...

When he looked at her, Caim couldn’t help but feel empty. They had been born on the same day and of the same mother, but their relationship was far from close. In fact, it was terrible...or rather, it was on Arnette’s side. She hated Caim because their mother, Sasha, had been *very* protective of him due to his curse and had always stayed by his side to take care of him. That had made Arnette despise her brother for monopolizing their mother’s attention, and her hatred had only worsened after Sasha’s death.

“Well then, let’s start. Try to condense the mana around your body as much as possible, and it’s fine to go slow,” Kevin said.

“Yes!” Arnette replied enthusiastically.

Caim watched them in silence. Just as his sister hated him for monopolizing their mother, he in turn envied how she could monopolize their father. He couldn’t help but be jealous of her for not being cursed, as that meant she could learn martial arts from her loving father.

It feels like they’re doing this on purpose to upset me. After all, there’s no way they haven’t spotted me here... If you’re going to ignore me, then just don’t ask me to come.

“Good! Next, I’ll teach you the basic techniques. First...Kirin!”

“Yes! Am I doing it right, Father?!”

The father proudly demonstrated the move, and the daughter tried to replicate it. And all the while, Caim—feeling increasingly alienated—watched them from afar, focusing on their training until the very end, as if averting his eyes even for a moment would be a terrible loss for him.

Once done with their practice, Kevin and Arnette went back to their rooms to clean up, so Caim used the opportunity to go pray for his mother.

“I’m back, Mother.”

An altar had been set up in Sasha’s former bedroom, decorated with flowers and featuring a portrait of her atop it. Caim knelt in front of the altar and offered a prayer to the only member of his family who had ever loved him.

Because of his curse, Caim had always been treated coldly by his father, and his sister hated him too. The majority of the servants felt the same. And yet, despite all of that, his mother had always cheered him on.

“Don’t hate yourself, Caim.”

“You did nothing wrong. Don’t think it’s a sin for you to have been born.”

“Your father doesn’t hate you. It’s just that...he doesn’t know how to deal with you. You haven’t done anything wrong, and it’s not your fault that you are cursed. So...love yourself.”

“It’s so hard for me to do that, Mother...” Caim muttered, recalling what she had said to him.

No matter how Caim thought of himself, other people would still treat him as a cursed child. The moment his mother had died he had been expelled from his house, and he was now living a life where villagers would throw stones at him—those were simply the facts. How could he even begin to love himself in such a situation?

It might be different if I had a caring family, but now that Mother is dead, I’m all alone...

“Grrraow! You have me, Master Caim!” Tea declared.

“I know... Wait, did you just read my thoughts?”

“How long do you think I’ve been serving you? I can tell what you’re thinking just by looking at your face!”

“Ha ha, that’s impressive,” Caim replied to his perceptive maid with a strained laugh before bringing his reunion with his mother to an end.

Just when Caim was finished, the door opened and a butler with severe looks entered. “Dinner is ready. Please come to the dining room,” he said dispassionately.

“No, I’m done with my business, so I’ll leave.”

“Master and milady are waiting. Do not make them wait,” the butler said before exiting the room without even waiting for an answer. While Caim *was* part of the Halsberg family, the butler hadn’t shown him a single ounce of respect.

“Grrr...how rude. Who does he think he is?!”

“It’s fine, Tea.” Caim paused. “I can manage a dinner, even if I’m not going to enjoy it. And I would feel bad for Mother if I left too soon.” He sighed and headed toward the dining room.

When Caim and Tea arrived, they found the father-daughter pair clean and already eating—they hadn’t even waited for Caim before starting. Caim’s own meal sat at the other end of the table, far away from them.

“It is a pleasure to see you again, Father. I am grateful that you allowed me to pray for Mother.”

“I don’t need your greetings. Just sit and eat.”

“Yes... Thank you for the meal.” Caim grimaced at the fact that his father didn’t even look at him as he sat and began to eat.

“This steak is delicious! Eating after training is so much better!”

“Don’t eat so fast, Arnette. It’s indecent.”

“Yes, Father!”

In contrast to Arnette, who was eating heartily, Caim was gloomy. It was the twins' first meal together—or rather, their only meeting at all—in an entire year, and yet the way their father treated them was completely different.

“The food isn’t going to run away, so slow down a little.”

“Milady, you have crumbs around your mouth.”

“There is also dessert after this. I made your favorite pear pie, milady.”

“Eh heh heh heh... I’m so glad! I can’t wait for dessert!”

Arnette ate happily, surrounded by her father and the servants gazing at her with smiles on their faces. It was as if she were boasting to Caim as he watched her silently.

Are they showing off...? Is that why they sent for me? he thought as he scooped up soup with his spoon and ate it. It was tasteless, and he couldn’t tell if it had been made that way on purpose to harass him or if he was simply so depressed he couldn’t register the flavor.

“Master Caim...”

“Don’t worry. I’m fine.”

Cheered up a little by Tea’s presence behind him, Caim mechanically continued to put food in his mouth to finish his meal as soon as possible.

“Well, I will be going then, Father.”

“Wait, Caim.” Kevin stopped his son as he was trying to leave. “I received a petition recently. Apparently you’re throwing stones at the kids of the village?”

“I am not. *They* are the ones throwing rocks at *me*.”

“Shut up! How dare you hurt innocent kids who are kind enough to accept a cursed child like you?! This isn’t how I raised you!”

Caim was on the verge of saying, “You didn’t even raise me,” but immediately realized it would be pointless. Instead, he just shook his head with a sigh before replying in resignation, “If you say so, then it must be true. After all, you are always right.”

“What did you just say?! That’s not how you should talk to your father!” Kevin stood up in rage and lunged straight for Caim, swinging his fist at him without a second thought.

Caim, however, quickly inclined his head to the side and avoided the blow.

“You little—!” Kevin widened his eyes in surprise for a moment, but he immediately followed up with a kick at Caim’s torso. This time, Caim couldn’t dodge and was knocked back to the door of the dining room.

“Gah!”

“Master Caim!” Tea rushed to Caim’s side and helped him to sit up as he tried to endure the pain.

“Why was a cursed child like you even born? If not for you, Sasha would have lived longer! Damn it!” Kevin shouted spitefully, then slumped into a nearby chair, looking exhausted.

Arnette and the servants ran to Kevin’s aid.

“Father!”

“Master...”

Caim groaned in pain as the servants and even his twin sister glared at him like it was his fault. How unfair—*he* was the one who had been kicked.

“Are you all right, Master Caim?!”

“I’m fine. It doesn’t hurt that much,” he replied as Tea helped him stand up. They then slowly made their escape from the dining room.

“Are you really all right?” Tea asked worryingly. “They’re so cruel! Why do you have to suffer like this?!”

“I promise I’m fine. Let’s hurry up and head back,” he answered with a smile as he examined his body. While he had been sent flying, he was surprisingly not wounded. Kevin had likely controlled his strength perfectly so as not to seriously injure Caim.

I guess he is the Master Pugilist. Kind of a waste of his abilities though.

“Wait, Master Caim,” the butler called out just before they could exit the

mansion. "Tea still has work to do, so please return on your own. I am truly sorry that no one will be able to send you off."

"Grrraw! Are you saying we should let Master Caim go home by himself in such a condition?!" Tea snapped at the butler in protest. "I'm Master Caim's maid! What's wrong with me accompanying him?!"

"Remember your place. You are a maid of the count's household. Have you already forgotten the debt you owe to the mistress for hiring you?"

"The mistress is the one who asked me to take care of Master Caim in the first place! Why are you treating him so coldly?! He's part of the count's family too!"

The butler clicked his tongue. "This is why beastfolk are just... Ugh, what a nuisance."

Beastfolk were discriminated against and treated poorly in this country, so Tea was actually extremely lucky to be working for a count's household.

If this continues, I'll cause trouble for Tea too.

"I'm fine, so it's all right if you take care of your work, Tea."

"Master Caim?!"

"I can return home alone." He turned toward the butler. "Do you have any more complaints?"

"No, this will do. Please be careful on your way back," he scoffed with a sneer before he returned to the mansion.

"You heard us, Tea. Get back to your work."

"It's too dangerous! I can't let you go back alone when you're hurt!"

"It's really not a problem. That blow might've looked impressive, but it doesn't actually hurt that much. I can walk back home on my own."

"But...!"

"Tea," Caim said firmly to the older maid, who looked on the verge of bursting into tears. "I promise I'm all right, so please...take care of the mansion Mother loved."

"Grrraooow... Master Caim!" Tea chewed her lower lip bitterly, but she ended

up agreeing and sent him off with tears in her eyes.

“You’re just like a faithful dog...even though you’re a tiger,” Caim muttered with a wry smile as he left the mansion.

It was night, but the moon brightly illuminated Caim’s path as he slowly but surely headed back to his hut in the forest.

Chapter 2: The Poison Queen

"You did nothing wrong, Caim."

That was Caim's last memory of his mother. He listened, crying next to her as she lay on her bed.

"I'm truly happy that you were born. There is no greater blessing than having been able to hold you in my arms and see you grow. So, please...don't blame yourself."

Caim knew that Sasha's body was weakened by the birth of the twins and her health had been deteriorating ever since, that she sometimes coughed blood, and...that the reason for all of this was the faint toxins that Caim unconsciously emitted from his body.

Poison wasn't only in his blood but in his other body fluids and even his breath too. It was weak enough that it wouldn't affect people in good health, but to his mother...it had been deadly. Because of that, Kevin had tried many times to separate Sasha from her son, to not let her touch him, but she had firmly refused. No matter what her husband said, no matter how much Arnette implored her, she'd always stayed by Caim's side.

"It's my fault that you were born as a cursed child. You did nothing wrong, so don't blame yourself."

She took his hand using all the strength in her weakened limbs. Then, as if burning her life away, using the last remnants of her vitality, she said to the son she was leaving behind, *"Find happiness. Make your own family and live your life with them."*

These were her last words. After that, she vomited blood in anguish and fell into an eternal slumber. After that, Kevin had declared that his wife died because of Caim and driven him away from the mansion, raising Arnette as his only child.

“Phew... Finally home...”

A few hours after leaving the mansion where he'd been born, Caim arrived at the forest hut where he currently lived. It had taken that long because he'd needed to rest several times on the way.

“I'm so tired. I just want to lie down and sleep...” Caim's shoulders drooped in exhaustion as he opened the door of the tattered hut.

Unfortunately, there was no lamp inside, so he would need to rely on his memory to navigate the darkness and find the wooden plank that served as his bed. However, he stopped as soon as he entered.

“Who's there?!” he shouted, sensing someone's presence. Whoever it was, they weren't making any sound—likely they were holding their breath—but Caim still perceived something different from usual in his house.

It can't be a thief—there's nothing to steal here. Can't be one of the villagers either.

The villagers avoided Caim because he was a cursed child and never approached his hut. After that, he wondered if it was a beast or monster, but he didn't smell the peculiar odor they emitted.

Silently, Caim fumbled for the hatchet he used for splitting wood, picked it up, and surveyed the interior of the hut. He cautiously made his way deeper, holding his breath and straining his ears and eyes for any sign of the intruder's whereabouts.

“Oh? What a surprise. You're more perceptive than I expected.”

Caim gasped in shock—the voice had come from right next to his head. The intruder was standing behind him, bending to whisper close to his ear.

“Take this!” He tried to turn around and swing his hatchet, but the intruder easily caught his wrist and stopped him.

“Huh, you've got a good reaction speed too. I guess I should have expected as much from the son of the Master Pugilist. It doesn't seem like you've trained much, but I do feel that you have a lot of potential.”

The intruder was a tall woman wearing a man's suit under a white coat. Her

black hair and the intellectual eyes behind her glasses left quite a strong impression.

“If I had to give you some advice,” the woman said, “it would be once you let someone know that you’ve spotted them, everything else is meaningless. You have to either play dumb and launch a surprise attack or run away.”

“L-Let me go!”

“I will if you let go of that dangerous weapon you’re holding,” the woman answered. “I apologize for entering your house without permission. I’m not your enemy, so could you please put down your hatchet?”

Caim stayed silent. The woman’s voice was calm, and he didn’t feel any hostility from her, so he suspected she was telling the truth. He didn’t know her objective, but if she’d really wanted to harm him, she could just have stabbed him from behind.

With no other choice, Caim let go of his hatchet with a frustrated expression.

“Good boy.”

Once the woman released his arm, Caim immediately jumped away from her.

“Who are you?! Why are you in my house?!”

“No need to be so defensive. You’re like a wild animal.”

“Just answer already!”

“I will, I will. You don’t need to urge me; I planned to introduce myself from the start,” she replied, raising her hands as if surrendering to him. “My name is Faust. I’m, well...your parents’ friend, I suppose.”



Caim gasped, his eyes widening in surprise.

“I came here today as a doctor to visit you as my patient,” Faust said with a friendly smile. “I’d like to see how far the curse of the Poison Queen that was transplanted into your body thirteen years ago has progressed. Would you let me examine you?”

“The Poison Queen...? Transplanted...?” Caim frowned, not understanding anything.

Faust smiled wryly in understanding when she saw the lack of comprehension on Caim’s face. “How much did your parents teach you about the curse eating away at you?”

“...Nothing much.”

“Could they just not bring themselves to tell you, or...did they fear you’d blame them?” Faust searched in her luggage and took out a lamp. Then she lit it, illuminating the pitch-black room with orange light. “Well, sit. I’ll teach you about your curse,” she declared, sitting down on the wooden board.

“This is *my* house, you know,” Caim complained, frowning at how she just naturally acted as if his makeshift bed was hers, but he did sit next to her. He didn’t trust the suspicious woman, but he did have a great interest in learning more about his curse.

“Ah, do you have any tea? I’m a little thirsty.”

“You have no shame! There’s some in that bottle, so just serve yourself!”

“Oh, you actually do have some? I kinda wasn’t expecting anything.” Faust picked up the bottle that sat on the ground, opened it, and sniffed at the liquid inside, which made her blink in surprise. “My, what an interesting tea. Did you make it?”

“It’s not actually tea. I just used herbs I found around here. It tastes gross, but I feel great when I drink it.”

“Of course you would—it uses healing herbs that are common ingredients for potions. You have great taste, drinking medicinal tea made with them.” Without hesitation, she took a swig of the muddy water that could hardly be called tea,

squinting as if enjoying the bitterness. “Yup, it is gross, but I don’t mind. After all, they do say that good medicine is bitter and everything that’s good for you tastes bad. So, thanks for your hospitality.”

Caim didn’t say anything, as none of this had been his intention—this woman had arbitrarily entered his house and just as arbitrarily drunk his tea. However, he couldn’t stay silent forever.

“So...what was that about examining me?” he asked bluntly. Faust had called herself his parents’ friend. While he could trust someone who was close to his mother, he couldn’t open his heart to a friend of his father. “And you also mentioned the curse being transplanted into my body. What does that mean?”

Caim couldn’t just ignore these words. He had been born with the poison curse and had always thought that he had just been unlucky and contracted it by coincidence, like someone would an ordinary epidemic disease. But if what Faust had said was true, it had actually been transplanted into his body intentionally.

If that’s the case...then I won’t ever forgive the one who did it!

If someone was responsible for all the hardships in his life, Caim would show them no mercy.

No matter what I have to do, I’ll kill them!

“Don’t throw so much bloodlust my way. One of the reasons for my visit is to explain everything.” Faust gave a troubled smile as she placed the bottle on the ground.

Caim felt like she was dodging the issue, slipping through the cracks in his heart with her carefree attitude.

“Well then, back to your curse,” Faust went on. “Its source is a Demon Lord-class monster called the Poison Queen.”

Caim stayed silent. The Poison Queen... Faust had said the name earlier, and now that he thought about it, he’d heard the villagers who persecuted him mention her a few times.

“Your parents really *didn’t* tell you anything. How irresponsible.”

“What do you mean?”

“While the Poison Queen is the source of your curse, your parents weren’t totally uninvolved. Of course, that’s also true of me, so I, too, share some of the blame.”

Then Faust began to talk about what had happened a little more than thirteen years ago, before Caim and Arnette were born.

Back then, the Demon Lord-class monster called the Poison Queen had appeared in the northern part of the Jade Kingdom. Monsters were divided into classes to indicate their strength, and starting from the weakest, the order went: Commoner, Knight, Baron, Viscount, Count, Marquis, Duke, and Demon Lord. Demon Lord-class monsters were said to be calamities that could destroy entire countries.

And the people who had defeated one such calamity—the Poison Queen—and saved the kingdom were a party of adventurers who were known as the strongest on the continent at that time: the Divine Iron Fist. To be more precise, the party had been the core of an entire group of people who had worked together to subjugate the Poison Queen, and their victory had only been earned after many sacrifices. In the end, Kevin, as leader of both the Divine Iron Fist and the group as a whole, had been granted a peerage as a count, and the other members had received various rewards as well.

“However, misfortune struck in exchange for the glory they earned. The Poison Queen cursed the woman who dealt the final blow—Sasha,” Faust explained calmly, her voice slipping inside Caim’s brain the way water soaked into sand. “The Poison Queen’s last curse was powerful, and Sasha grew so weak that she was on the verge of death. No doctor or mage could find a way to cure her—not even me. So instead, I suggested to them that I could save Sasha by transferring the curse to one of the twins in her womb.”

“Then you mean that...?”

“Indeed. I’m talking about you, Caim Halsberg. Your parents intentionally transplanted the curse into you to save your mother and your twin sister.”

Caim gasped, speechless. If what Faust had just said was the truth, then it *wasn’t* his fault that he had been born as a cursed child, nor was it because he

had been unlucky.

Then it's actually Mother and that man's fault?!

Did that mean the reason Sasha had always apologized to him while she was alive, as if repenting for something, was because she had pushed the curse on him?

"Isn't that... Isn't that totally unfair?!" Caim unconsciously raised his voice and stood up, fierce emotions raging in his chest. "I've been blamed for being cursed since I was born! And you're telling me it wasn't my fault but my parents'?! I can't possibly believe something so unfair! Why is everyone blaming me, then?! Why are they throwing stones at me and scorning me?!"

"You did nothing wrong. Everything is your parents' fault, as well as mine." Faust accepted Caim's sorrow and bowed. "As a doctor, I tried my best to save as many lives as possible. However, I do feel guilty for forcing you to carry that burden. I'm truly sorry."

Caim gritted his teeth at Faust's sincere apology. He was already thirteen, the age when children started to be able to make their own judgments. In his head, he realized that she wasn't a bad person, but his heart couldn't forgive her that easily. Lowering her head wasn't enough to erase all the malicious things that had been done to him.

"And so, as your attending doctor, I want to take responsibility. I came here to save you."

"You came to...save me?" Caim repeated her unexpected words.

Faust lifted her head and looked straight at him. "There's a way to dispel the Poison Queen's curse afflicting your body. It wasn't possible thirteen years ago, but it is now. So please, would you let me save you?"

○ ○ ○

"What I'm going to say might anger you, but...back then, thirteen years ago, I had planned to transplant the poison curse and just let you die."

Caim's hut didn't have any furniture, so whenever he went to sleep, he would lie on the wooden board and cover himself with animal pelts. And, right now,

he was lying down half naked on it with Faust on her knees next to him, examining his body.

“The Poison Queen was the strongest monster on the entire continent. As her name implies, she had the power to control poison and used it to kill thousands of people thirteen years ago. The scars of her atrocities still affect the northern parts of the kingdom to this day, and this is also why people living around here hate you unfairly. Anyway, what I want to say is that I didn’t expect you to survive such a curse.”

Faust slowly caressed Caim’s body with her palm, palpating the purple bruises scattered across his skin. These marks were proof he was afflicted with the poison curse, as well as the reason the village’s kids avoided him and pelted him with stones.

“And yet, you did,” she continued. “Your organs may be ravaged by toxins, causing you to often vomit blood, but the fact that you can still move—that you can actually *live* with the Queen’s curse is abnormal. After all, even Sasha, who was extolled as the Sage, was brought to the edge of death after only half a year.”

“So...what’s your point? Just tell me what you want to say already.”

“Your body has some resistance to the Queen’s curse. I don’t know if you were born with it or acquired the resistance a posteriori, but thanks to that, you may be able to overcome the curse,” Faust explained, looking down on Caim.

She raised her right hand, and a magic circle with a geometric pattern appeared in the air.

“This is a spell to influence your mind and allow you to confront the curse. I couldn’t use it thirteen years ago, and even if I could, Sasha probably wouldn’t have been able to endure it. This spell will force you to face off against the curse inside you, and if you win, you should be able to make its power your own.”

“So...I won’t be a cursed child anymore? I’ll just be a normal kid with no eerie bruises, and I won’t vomit toxic blood anymore?”

“The poison itself won’t disappear, but at least it’ll stop ruining your body.

You won't vomit blood anymore, and your weak constitution should be improved."

Caim stayed silent.

"You're currently resisting the curse, but we don't know when that equilibrium will be broken. And considering the state of your organs... Well, if you want to change your situation, I think it's worth trying."

"...I'll do it. Use the spell on me," Caim replied. He didn't even have to think about it that long—if he could remove the cause of all his misfortune, he would even sell his soul to the devil. He wasn't going to let an opportunity like this escape him. "I'll overcome the curse...get a normal, healthy body, and then..."

"And then what? You have something you want to do?"

"No, it's nothing." Caim didn't reveal his secret wish—he felt like it would cheapen it if he said it out loud. "I'll tell you if you actually cure me. Anyway, I'm ready, so hurry up."

"Hmm? Oh well, if you've made up your mind, then I'm fine with it. Well then...let's start." Faust then thrust the magic circle in her right hand inside Caim's chest.

The next instant, Caim felt like molten iron had been poured into his veins.

He screamed, unable to bear the scorching heat, and as the pain began to make his vision go white, his consciousness faded.



"Where am I?" Caim asked, finding himself drifting in a strange place.

Everything around him was white, and while it felt the same as floating in water, it wasn't suffocating and he could breathe just fine.

"Huh?"

Suddenly, color appeared among the white. At first, it looked just like a dirty spot on a clean towel, but little by little, more spots appeared and grew larger until they completely encircled Caim.

"Could these be...the bruises from the curse?!" The wall surrounding him was

of the same dark purple as the marks that covered his body. “Then does that mean this is the Poison Queen’s curse itself?”

“To think that *you* would be the one to come to Us... That heretic mage has done something truly unnecessary. ’Tis quite vexing.”

“Who’s there?!” Caim shouted, hearing the voice emanating from the violet wall.

With a splash as though she were emerging from water, a woman’s head appeared from the wall; then she used her arms to push herself out until her naked upper body was visible.

The woman was made of two colors.

The first was white. Her skin was pale and unmarked like a fresh sheet of paper, with not a single freckle or sunburn—as if she had never been exposed to the sun in her life. Her bare breasts were a troubling sight for the young Caim, and yet their beauty was so captivating that he couldn’t look away.

The second was purple. Aside from her skin, everything else was violet: her hair, her eyes, her lips, her tongue, even some other parts of her body. The effect was so eerie that Caim felt he would go mad if he looked at her too long.

“You’re the Poison Queen!” Caim instinctively understood—she was indeed the Poison Queen, the strongest of all monsters, the dreaded Demon Lord that had plunged the northern part of the Jade Kingdom into the depths of despair. She was the reason for the curse eating at his body. “I was never *cursed* by you... I’ve been *parasitized* by the Poison Queen herself!”

“Quite so, brat. You have finally realized the truth.” The eerie woman—the Poison Queen—smiled. “We are immortal thanks to Our devilish divinity, which allows Us to be resurrected after death. Even if Our flesh perishes, We can commandeer the body of Our killer by corrupting them with Our poison—and thus extend Our life across the centuries”

Caim gasped in shock.

“That mage’s intervention prevented Us from claiming your mother’s body, but...now, We have you, her son, instead. While We did not expect Our soul to be meddled with, We shall seize this opportunity nonetheless. Brat, surrender

your body to Us!” The Queen raised her hand in Caim’s direction, and in the next instant, parts of the purple wall transformed into tentacles that proceeded to assault Caim.

“Damn it! Stop—stay away!” Caim frantically resisted, maneuvering through the white space to avoid the tendrils while punching at the ones he couldn’t dodge.

“Oh? Isn’t *this* a surprise? We thought you nothing but a helpless little brat, but it seems you’re actually rather dexterous.”

“I’ve been living on my own since I was driven out of the mansion! You won’t beat me that easily!”

After being expelled because of his mother’s death, Caim had trained in secret. While he couldn’t do it every day, as the curse weakened him and caused him to cough and vomit blood unexpectedly, he did practice his punches on the days his body was relatively healthy.

“Aaaaaaaaah!” He punched yet another violet tentacle. Caim hated his father, but he still imitated the man extolled as the strongest martial artist as he struck each tendril coming at him. His blows were surprisingly precise—so polished that even the Queen was astonished.

“Hmm...you are actually quite the *interesting* brat. However...”

The Queen snapped her fingers, and the next instant, the tentacles transformed into countless needles that pierced Caim’s body.

“Gaaah!”

“’Tis over—though We must congratulate you for lasting this long against someone equal to a god.”

“Ugh...” Caim groaned in pain, needles stabbing into him from every angle. He wanted to resist, but he couldn’t move anymore, pain flooding his body.

“Well then... ’Tis high time We took over your mortal form. With this, the Poison Queen shall be reborn!”

Caim screamed as the Queen injected poison into him through the needles.

Pain, anguish, numbness, heat, cold...and many other kinds of agony

accompanied the poison. Caim shrieked so much that no air was left in his lungs—instead, he began to vomit. The pain was so great that he would have rather died. Wanting to escape the agony as soon as possible, he tried to let go of his consciousness, but...with a gasp of surprise, Caim suddenly realized that overwhelming pain and despair weren't the only things flowing into him along with the poison.

Are these...the Poison Queen's memories?

Indeed—to take over Caim's body, the monster before him was transplanting her memories and her mind inside him.

And thanks to that, Caim was able to experience the Poison Queen's past.

The Poison Queen had been born in a small country in the southern part of the continent around five hundred years ago. Because she was gifted with the ability to control poison curses from birth, her country had used her overwhelming power to crush the enemy army in a war against one of their neighbors. The king, the nobles, the common people—everyone praised her achievements and called her a hero.

She was glad of that, and it made her proud. But more than anything, she was happy that she was useful to her homeland and able to protect her loved ones' futures. With pride in her heart, she continued to fight battle after battle until, finally, her country emerged victorious.

However, what was waiting for her wasn't more glory. When the war ended, so too did her purpose—and everyone's attitude toward her changed.

"Kill that vile monster!"

"She's a witch! Burn her at the stake!"

The people she had protected completely reversed their stance after the war ended. Now, they tried to murder her instead. Even the king, to whom she had sworn her allegiance, sent soldiers to dispose of her.

"What did I do?! I'm innocent!"

"Shut up, witch!"

“I don’t remember bearing a daughter like *you*!”

“Die, you accursed witch! You’re a disgrace to our family!”

Even her family and her friends vilified her and called her a witch, throwing stones and pointing weapons at her with intent to kill.

“Why...why is this happening to me...? I did nothing wrong... All I did was protect my loved ones... I am... We are... Ahhh!”

Swallowed by despair and loneliness, she transformed into a new Demon Lord—the Poison Queen. Then she raged with her newfound power, wielding her hatred for her homeland as she destroyed it.

Heroes, mages, and priests would occasionally manage to eliminate her, but thanks to becoming a Demon Lord, she had attained immortality through cursing the person who killed her to take over their body.

She would later be sealed and disappear from the world for some time—but she never forgot humanity’s betrayal and swore vengeance against it for eternity.

Caim’s expression warped as he witnessed the Poison Queen’s memories. What pained him wasn’t how she had forcibly made him share her despair but rather the opposite.

“We’re the same... We share the same suffering!”

Caim felt sympathy *and* empathy toward the Poison Queen. While the level of persecution, their positions, and their circumstances were different, the way people blamed them for something they weren’t responsible for and the betrayal of their families were all the same.

Caim had felt deep rage and hatred toward the Poison Queen when he had heard of her from Faust. But now that he had seen her memories, his feelings had changed. The Poison Queen went from a strange monster to a sorrowful and lonely woman tormented by despair—just like him.

“...I can’t. I just can’t see her as my enemy.”

His objective of defeating the curse was no longer possible. After all, Caim had

realized that he couldn't feel any hostility toward her anymore.

However...

"Ahhh!" The Poison Queen, too, was undergoing a change.

She had stabbed Caim everywhere with her needles and injected her memories inside him to take over his body, but she was now screaming with her head clutched in her hands.

"Ugh... You brat... You...!"

"Just like how I saw yours, you saw mine too, right?"

Caim immediately realized that the Queen—looking at him with tears in her eyes—had seen his past. By connecting to his mind to usurp his body, she had also received his memories.

She had stolen the bodies of many people—but these people had been heroes who had defeated her, a Demon Lord-class monster. They had been blessed individuals, so she had never hesitated to crush their minds and take them over. In a way usurping the bodies of those who had what she didn't was a form of the Poison Queen's vengeance.

But Caim was different. He was the same "have-not" as she was—someone tormented by solitude and despair.

"I can't fight you anymore..."

The Queen stayed silent, but he could feel that she was of the same mind. As proof, all the needles that had been piercing him now vanished.

"I don't want you to disappear—but I don't want to disappear either, if possible."

The Queen listened to him.

"So...how about this?" Caim presented a proposition to her.

The Queen didn't answer, but he took her silence as approval for his idea.

"Thinking about it, we've always been together. Even after my mother's death, when I was driven away from the mansion, you've always been with me..." Caim said softly, approaching the Queen. Then he extended his hand and

caressed her cheek.



“We are...” the Queen muttered, not finishing her sentence. However, she didn’t need to give voice to her words for Caim to understand.

The Poison Queen accepted Caim’s hand, and just like him, she extended hers to his chest. The next instant, their bodies overlapped. White and purple, the two colors that dominated this strange space, mixed together, melting into each other to become one.

It created a dazzling flash of light, and when that had faded, what was left was...



“Oh, what a surprise. I didn’t expect a result like *this*.”

Caim heard a voice as he awakened. Above him was the familiar ceiling of his forest hut—it was as shabby as he remembered it, full of holes that would leak when it rained.

“Unexpected, yes, but very interesting. If you would allow me to ask... Who are you?”

“Faust...” Caim called her name, then sat up and examined his bare upper body. The purple bruises had disappeared, and his skin, which had always been as pale as paper, was now a healthy tan. He felt that his body was in the best condition it had ever been, with no difficulty breathing or urges to cough. It was as if he had been completely reborn.

“I’m... We are...” Caim began, but then he felt a slight discomfort. His body was in its best condition ever, but something simply wasn’t clicking.

As he tilted his head in wonder, Faust created a mirror using magic and placed it in front of him.

“Ah...” Caim let out, seeing the unfamiliar person reflected in the mirror.

Overall, he was still the same Caim as before, but he was now a man—a grown adult. His hair wasn’t ashen anymore but purple. The same went for his eyes, but the color was not the same toxic violet as the Poison Queen. Instead, it was a vivid purple close to amethyst. And most importantly, the violet bruises on his face had vanished. What was reflected in the mirror was a handsome

young man with, though slightly androgynous, sharp and boyish good looks.

“Did I become an adult...?”

Caim stood up, noticing that his line of sight was almost two heads higher than before and his body was robust and muscular.

“Well then... Now that you’ve finished looking at yourself, allow me to ask once again. Are you Caim Halsberg? Or humanity’s enemy, the Poison Queen?” Faust repeated her question. She was no longer taller than Caim, just below his eyes now.

He stared at Faust and said, “I...I am... No.” He stopped himself from using his usual childish tone and changed to a firmer, more masculine one. “I’m Caim, the Poison King.”

Chapter 3: Severing Family Ties

“The Poison King, huh? I suppose you couldn’t exactly be called a queen.” Faust smiled contentedly as she peered at Caim’s face. Her satisfaction was that of a researcher who had achieved the best result possible from her experiment. “Still, I’ve met a few Demon Lord-class monsters in the past, and your eyes are different from theirs. I can’t sense any hatred or resentment toward humanity from you.”

“That so? I can’t really tell, personally...”

“Before talking to the Queen, your eyes were terribly clouded by your discontent with your circumstances, your envy of the more fortunate, and your bottomless resentment toward the world that persecuted you, as well as your feelings of inferiority and self-loathing. But now, all that has disappeared. Your tone has changed too, so I suppose it’s not just your body that has matured but your mind as well.”

“That so? I can’t really tell, personally...” Caim repeated the same thing, tilting his head.

But soon enough, he found himself agreeing with Faust’s assessment. His mind was surprisingly clear and serene. All the dark thoughts he had held until now had vanished, like a gentle breeze had blown them away.

As for what she’d said about his tone, he disregarded it.

“Maybe it’s because I fused with her? I just feel so good—even better than when my mother was alive. It’s as if I’ve been born anew.”

“Hmm? Did merging two opposite poisons neutralize them? Or by multiplying two negatives together, you became a positive? My interest in you just keeps growing,” Faust said teasingly.

“So what? Are you planning to make me a guinea pig or something?” Caim answered half jokingly. “I’m grateful to you. I’m not angry at you for transplanting the curse into me back then. I even think of you as my benefactor.

But if you ever plan to oppose me...well, I won't show you any mercy."

Caim raised his hand, and mana so violet it looked toxic gathered around it. He had inherited the power to control poison from the Queen.

"I have decided that from now on, I'll live to grant the wish that my past self, *she*, and my mother all shared. If you're gonna hinder me, then I'll crush you."

"You say some pretty fascinating things. Can you tell me what that wish is?" Faust asked, raising her hands in surrender.

Caim puffed out his chest and brazenly answered, "To make a family. That's my...*our* wish."

"What do you mean?"

"I want a family that won't betray me—one that will feel natural to be with. A family that will cooperate, laugh together, and sometimes fight, but never hate one another. I'm gonna find a family like that. Not one with a father who uses violence against his son or a sister who hates her twin brother. I'm gonna find my true family."

Faust chuckled at Caim's explanation. She hid her mouth, but she couldn't stop her shoulders from trembling as she laughed. After she finally stopped, she said, "That's a wonderful wish."

"Are you mocking me?"

"No, I really do think it's splendid," she replied with a wide grin, cheerfully pushing up her glasses, which had slid down a little. "If that's your objective, then I guess I can leave you be."

"What do you mean?"

"Now that you've made the Queen yours, no matter what you do, you'll attract many people—and some among them will see you as dangerous and want to eliminate you."

"Then I won't show them any mercy. I won't let them hinder my wish."

"If you say so. But...do be careful about the Holy Spirit Church. They detest Demon Lords, so if they learn about you, they're likely to act."

“The Holy Spirit Church...” Caim repeated, committing the name to memory.

“If you’re going to leave this country, you should go to the empire east of here. The church doesn’t have much influence there.”

Caim pondered Faust’s suggestion. He had already been planning to leave this territory governed by his father to search for a family of his own.

After all, this country was badly damaged by the Poison Queen, so a great many people would come after me if they knew who I was.

In that case, Faust’s suggestion of going to another country was a good idea. While Caim himself had never left the Halsberg domain, he did have the Queen’s memories and her experience now, so he thought he could manage traveling alone.

“Hmm... Well, I guess that’s what I’ll do,” Caim said. “I do want to go on adventures, like in the stories my mother read to me when I was little.”

“Traveling is great. I’ve been almost everywhere on the continent, and it’s pretty exciting to go to unfamiliar lands. But before all of that, shouldn’t you check how much of the Poison Queen’s power you can actually use?”

“Do I really need to?”

“Of course. Even if you did inherit her power and her memories, you don’t have any *actual* combat experience, do you? I don’t think trying your strength before setting off is a bad idea.”

“That’s...fair. But whom should I fight? You’re not gonna say *you*, right?”

“That might be fun in its own way, but there are better opponents for you.” Faust grinned, then suddenly grasped Caim’s hand.

“What?!”

The next instant, they were no longer inside the hut, but instead somewhere Caim didn’t recognize...or to be more precise, they were currently in the sky.

“Whaaa?!” The bizarre situation of suddenly being a few dozen meters away from the ground made Caim scream. Below him, he could see a plain with countless shadows squirming around.

“See the swarm of monsters down there? They’re the ones that have been hiding in the forest in fear of your poison. Just in case something like this happened, I used a special drug to excite them. If we leave them, they’re going to march on the nearby village. They’re small fry, but with how many there are, it should be perfect for you to test your power, don’t you think?”

“You can’t just— Aaaah!” Caim tried to complain but was suddenly seized by the pull of gravity. He was the only one affected, though—Faust continued to float through the air, probably using some kind of magic to fly.

“Ah, I forgot,” Faust began, remembering something as she saw Caim fall. “While it’s true that your mother—that Sasha felt guilty for what she did to you, her love was genuine. She even thanked God with tears of happiness when you survived your birth despite being cursed.”

Caim gasped.

“Well, that’s all. As your friend, I hope you’ll stay in good health. Bye.”

“Just how selfish can you beeeeeee?!” Caim yelled at Faust as he continued to plummet downward.

“Damn...iiiiit!” Caim shouted as he neared the ground, quickly rotating to land on his feet and gathering mana in his legs to reduce the damage from the fall. If this had happened before his transformation, he would have broken his legs, but now the impact only resulted in a slight numb sensation.

“She’s really high-handed... Next time we meet, I’m gonna punch her!”

The monsters roared loudly.

“What?” Caim raised his head and looked at the creatures surrounding him in the forest clearing. There were more than a hundred of them, mainly wolf and bear monsters. Thanks to the Queen’s memories, he could easily gauge their strength.

“Knight-and Baron-classes, huh? They’re trash compared to a Demon Lord, but they’ll do for a little warm-up.”

Caim was a little peeved to be following Faust’s instructions, but she had been

right in saying they would be a perfect test of the Queen's power. The monsters were numerous enough that he could experiment to his heart's content.

"Well then...time to fight!"

As Caim prepared himself for battle, two wolves jumped at him from the left and right.

First, he drove the back of his mana-clad fist against the right wolf, smashing its skull and killing it in one blow. Then he avoided the left one by bending backward, following up with a kick into the monster's stomach. It flew several meters away, though it did not die immediately—but considering the force of the kick, its internal organs were probably ruptured and it didn't have much longer to live.

"Let's not waste time. Come at me!" Caim provoked them.

Wolves assaulted him one after another, and he defeated them with punches and kicks. Sometimes, he simply trampled them.

Incidentally, these creatures were known as black wolves, and they were Knight-class monsters. Anyone less than a trained soldier or adventurer would usually find it difficult to beat a black wolf, but just strengthening his body with mana was enough for Caim to easily crush them. He didn't even feel the need to use the Queen's power.

"I can scarcely believe this is my body! I never thought I'd ever be so strong and fast!"

It was as though his body had become like a dragon's as he swiftly dealt sharp blows, mowing down the wolves. Compared to before, when just a little bit of exercise would have caused a coughing fit, his body now felt astonishingly light.

"Ha ha! I didn't know that being healthy was so amazing!"

"Groaaah!"

"Oh? This one should have more backbone!" Caim exclaimed happily.

The new monster that appeared looked like a bear with horns. It was called an armored bear, and it was two levels above the black wolves—a Viscount-class monster, equivalent in strength to an entire platoon. It was almost three

meters tall and fairly broad, and its body was covered in an armor-like carapace that could easily repel ordinary swords.

“Groah!”

The armored bear clawed at Caim, who stepped back, avoiding the strike. The blow landed right where he had been standing, leaving a large gouge in the ground

“Phew, that was close. Guess I need to take this a little more seriously!” He smiled and drew his right arm back like one would with a bow, focusing his mana toward his fist as he targeted the armored bear’s trunk.

“Toukishin Style—Kirin!” Caim condensed his mana tightly around his pulled-back fist, then unleashed it as he launched his arm. The mana spiraled and created a shock wave as Caim’s fist struck the bear’s chest.

The beast roared in pain as its armor was smashed to pieces. But the shock wave didn’t stop—it pushed on, destroying the monster’s muscles, bones, and internal organs as it pierced it all the way through to the creature’s back. True to the technique’s name, it was as if it had been stabbed by a giant one-horned beast, leaving a massive hole. The armored bear stopped moving, dead.

“Yup, I’m in perfect form.” Caim smiled in satisfaction at his successful use of the technique.

The Toukishin Style was a martial art from the East that Kevin Halsberg, the Master Pugilist, had mastered. Its main principle was to not use any weapons or armor, instead garbing one’s body in concentrated mana. Because of that, even though the style was unorthodox, some thought that anyone who completely mastered it would become the strongest in the world.

While Caim had never learned the Toukishin Style from his father—even though Kevin taught his sister almost every day—he’d learned to use it just by watching his father and sister practicing from afar. Basically, the perfect movements of his father, a master of the style, had allowed him to pick it up through observation. After being driven out of the mansion to live in the forest hut, Caim would recall Kevin’s movements and try to reproduce them almost every day. He often ended up vomiting blood because of that, but his efforts finally paid off now that he had conquered the curse.

The monsters stopped attacking, whining in fear as they watched Caim. Most likely, the armored bear had been the leader of the swarm, so with its defeat, the other monsters had now lost their leader. If Caim let them go, they might just scatter on their own, but...

“That’s enough hand-to-hand combat. Next, it’s time to test the Poison Queen’s power,” Caim said with a savage grin, his words handing down a death sentence to the monsters that were trying to flee.

He focused on his right hand, and the Queen’s power overflowed from it in the form of purple mana.

“This will be my first use of magic as the Poison King. Kind of a waste to use it on trash like you, but do try to enjoy it until your flesh disintegrates! Purple Poison Magic—Acid Rain!”

Caim raised his hand above his head, and highly concentrated mana shot into the sky from his palm. The next instant, the monsters screamed in pain as violet rain showered down upon them. The acid droplets burned their bodies and melted them away, the same happening to the trees and the ground.

In the end, nothing was left but the bones of hundreds of monsters. Not a single one had managed to survive.

“What is this...? What happened here?” Kevin Halsberg asked, shocked.

After hearing about the monsters, he had rushed to their location accompanied by the knights who served his house. When they arrived there an hour later, though, they found nothing, or at least nothing alive—no monsters, no animals, no plants. The plain should have been verdant with vegetation, but instead everything was withered, leaving nothing but a dark-brown wasteland. The only things that could be found across the barren soil were countless bones. It was as if a part of hell had manifested here.

“I wonder what happened here. This does not seem to be the work of any monster, at least...” one of the knights said, but Kevin stayed silent, his face pale as he stared at the bones.

The way this looks... It’s just like... He recalled a similar scene among his

unpleasant memories from thirteen years ago when the Poison Queen had attacked the northern part of the kingdom. *But back then, it was human bones, not those of monsters...*

The Poison Queen was no more. Who, then, could have created this landscape that so perfectly embodied the word “despair”?

“Don’t tell me... Was it you, Caim?” Kevin muttered gravely as he remembered his son—the one who had received the Queen’s curse.

○ ○ ○

“That damn Faust! She just did whatever she wanted and vanished!”

When Caim returned to his hut after exterminating all the monsters, Faust was gone.

“Huh?”

As he looked around, he noticed a bag small enough to lift with one hand on the ground.

“Is this a magic bag?”

He knew what the object was thanks to the Queen’s memories. A magic bag was a very valuable item—a *magic* item, in fact—endowed with Spatial Magic to grant it the ability to hold far more than its actual volume.

Caim checked the bag’s contents and found clothes, food, and a tent as well as other essentials for traveling. There also was a pouch packed with gold and silver coins.

“Must be her parting gift... Hmph. Well, I guess I can forgive her for throwing me to the wolves.”

Thinking back on it, he realized Faust hadn’t lied to or deceived him even once. Instead, she’d told him the truth about the curse and honestly admitted that she had been the one who’d transplanted it into him—which made her far more trustworthy than his father or any of the villagers.

“...Thanks.” Caim softly expressed his gratitude toward his now-absent benefactor, then prepared for his journey. Considering the hut was basically empty, it didn’t take long.

“And...done.”

Caim was now ready to go, not having anyone to say his goodbyes to before he left... No, that wasn't exactly true. There was one person that he wanted to see again—Tea.

But with my current appearance, I don't know if she'll be able to recognize me...

Fusing with the Poison Queen had made Caim grow to look at least five years older, and his ashen hair and eyes had turned violet. If Tea saw him like this, it would only confuse her. Moreover, she had her life as a maid—she couldn't just give up on the place where she had spent more than a decade building her position to accompany Caim.

My reasons for leaving my birthland are personal. Tea is working for and paid by my father, and the only reason she started doing that was that Mother took her in. Tea has no obligation toward me. I'll miss her, but it might be better for us to never meet again.

In a way, perhaps it really was a good thing. By leaving, Caim would free Tea from Sasha's final request to take care of him. Caim had gained strength and freedom, so in that case, it should be fine if Tea was no longer bound to Caim. She could now live freely.

“We can't meet in person, but I can at least write a letter. I wish you the best, Tea.”

Caim took a pen and paper out of the magic bag he had received from Faust, wrote some words of thanks to the maid in his poor handwriting, then left it in the hut and went outside. The sun had set, and the moon now shone in the sky. It wasn't really the right time of day for embarking upon a journey, but it might have been the best option for a social outcast like him.

Considering I'm the fusion of a Demon Lord and a human—or I guess I should call myself a daemon—the night suits me. Not like I need to have a last good look at this place before leaving, anyway. I don't have any pleasant memories here.

Caim walked down the familiar forest path, brimming with excitement for his

impending departure from his homeland. However, he suddenly heard the voice of the person he least wanted to hear.

“Are you Caim?”

Caim turned toward whoever was hampering the start of his new life and found the person who was currently first on his list of people he didn’t want to meet: Kevin Halsberg. He had just arrived and finished dismounting his horse—alone, without any guards. His eyes were wide as he gazed at his son, now five years older with his hair and eyes dyed purple.

“To think we would meet at the last moment... Is this because of our bond as father and son? No...maybe it’s more like karma,” Caim said.

“Your appearance... Your hair and eyes... Are you Caim? Or the Poison Queen?”

“Whichever you want, dear Father,” Caim said with a sarcastic smile, spreading his arms wide. “I’m not gonna complain now—I suppose it must have been a really hard choice for you thirteen years ago. As for never telling me the truth and treating me coldly even though nothing was my fault... Well, as you can see, I’m an adult now, so that’s all water under the bridge. But that’s all it is...nothing more.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m leaving. I’m going on a journey to find my true family and homeland. If you hinder me, I won’t show you any mercy. I’ll crush you.”

Kevin gasped at the pressure he felt from Caim and jumped back. Since he was the Master Pugilist, he immediately noticed that Caim’s power was far beyond the ordinary.

“It seems you were swallowed up by the Poison Queen’s curse. You damn monster—I can’t let a calamity like you live!”

“So, you’ve made your choice. Not that I wasn’t expecting this.”

That was why Caim hadn’t wanted to see his father again. Kevin hated the Poison Queen for cursing his wife, so there was no way he would let Caim go now that his appearance was reminiscent of the Queen. If they’d had a normal

father-son relationship with trust between them, maybe Caim would have been able to explain everything. But for them, this possibility did not exist.

“Fine. Let’s fight. To tell you the truth, I’ve always wanted you to train me, Father. But now, I don’t care anymore.”

“Don’t call me Father, you accursed Poison Queen.”

“Hmph.”

Caim clenched his fists and faced his father. Kevin did the same, turning toward his son. Their stances were the same—the basic posture of the Toukishin Style.

“Are you trying to imitate me, fiend? There’s no way an inhuman monster like you can master the essence of my style!”

“Then try me. Act like a father for once and see how I’ve grown with your own eyes. It’ll be your last chance for it, after all.”

“Nonsense!” Kevin condensed mana around his fist and punched at Caim. The strike was amazingly sharp and fast, worthy of the man called the Master Pugilist.

However, not only did Caim splendidly avoid the blow before it could crush his nose, but he also aimed for a counterattack from below at Kevin’s chin.

Kevin groaned as he dodged the uppercut and put some distance between them, grimacing as a chill ran down his spine.

“Hmm...” Caim didn’t follow him, instead shaking his hand to confirm the feeling of the punch he had just thrown. “You’re fast, but compared to the Queen’s memories from thirteen years ago, you’ve gotten quite a bit slower. Has age weakened you that much?”

“Caim, you...!”

“Or are you holding back because I’m your son? If so, you shouldn’t. It’s too late to act like you’re my father now. Come at me for real!”

Kevin gritted his teeth at Caim’s provocation. Then the look in his eyes changed and strong bloodlust gushed out of him.

“Fine. I shall show you why I’m called the Master Pugilist. Taste the essence of the Toukishin Style!”

“That’s what I want. Bring it on!”

Kevin kicked the ground, throwing a serious strike at Caim, who smiled savagely, baring his teeth as he faced his father head-on.

How ironic that as they exchanged blows, these two—the father’s face warped with fury, the son’s expression full of joy—truly resembled each other.

Kevin relentlessly struck at the young man—the enemy—before him, mixing his punches with kicks. The Toukishin Style didn’t use any feints; living up to its reputation as the strongest style, every blow was fatal and as powerful as a cannon shot.

Caim either blocked, dodged, or parried each attack, knowing that if even a single one of them actually struck him, it wouldn’t stop at a simple bone fracture—his entire body would be destroyed. That was how powerful Kevin’s fists, clad in condensed mana, truly were. But to Caim, that wasn’t something to fear—in fact, it was quite the opposite. He found great joy in this intense fight that could cost him his life.

He’s using his full power! The Master Pugilist is seriously fighting me!

Despite being his father, Kevin Halsberg had also been an insurmountable wall to Caim. Defying him had been inconceivable, and even just talking back was enough to displease him, resulting in violence. In short, Kevin was the primary reason that Caim had ended up with a huge inferiority complex and the belief that his life would never be anything but miserable.

But now, that damn old man—Kevin Halsberg is seriously fighting me! So this is what it feels like to do battle with a powerful opponent! It’s amazing!

The exultation Caim felt right now was completely different from how he had felt against the monsters. Facing a strong foe made his heart sing with far more excitement than crushing small fry did.

“Toukishin Style—Byakko!” Kevin curled the fingers of his right hand into the shape of claws and swung them down.

Byakko—White Tiger—allowed one to mimic the power of a tiger’s claws by strengthening one’s fingers to the point they could easily gouge rock.

“Toukishin Style—Genbu!” In response, Caim made a shield with his arms.

Genbu—Black Tortoise—consisted of focusing Mana Compression into one point as a defense. Caim did this to his arms and managed to repel the tiger claw with a metallic clash.

“That hurts!” Caim shouted. “Even though I protected myself, I still felt the impact! But I guess that’s not surprising from the Master Pugilist himself.”

“You really are using the Toukishin Style’s techniques... Where did you learn them, and *how*?”

“Hah! Don’t make me laugh. *You’re* the one who taught them to me.”

“What?” Kevin frowned, puzzled.

Caim showed Kevin his middle finger and declared, “Didn’t you show them to me before driving me out of the mansion? You know, whenever you proudly practiced with Arnette like you were showing off!”

Kevin gasped.

“Thanks to you two spitefully flaunting your harmonious father-daughter training sessions, I was able to grasp the basic techniques of the Toukishin Style. After that, it was just a matter of reproducing them myself. Pretty easy, no?”

“You learned just by watching?! You got to the point that you can fight me as an equal...without anyone teaching you?!”

If that was true, then Caim was an exceptional prodigy—even a genius. Kevin had doted on and meticulously instructed his daughter, but Arnette was still far from achieving this level of skill. And yet, the son he had always treated coldly had already grasped some of the Toukishin Style’s essence. To Kevin, this was difficult to accept—it felt like it completely negated how he had spent the thirteen years since the twins’ birth.

“My wife might have loved you, but I’ve never thought of you as my son!” Kevin shouted furiously, his face contorting with anguish as he took a fighting stance. “Every time I saw those cursed bruises on your body, it felt like my sin—

the sacrifice I made to save my wife—was being shoved in my face. How can you possibly understand how that feels?!”

Caim didn't respond.

“You shouldn't have been born!” Kevin went on. “If you had died in Sasha's womb, then I could have mourned you as a noble sacrifice. I could have continued to hate the Poison Queen and give her all the blame! But you lived...so each time I saw your face, I felt like the marks on it were blaming me for transplanting the curse onto my son! How could I possibly love you in a situation like that?!”

Still no answer.

“No...you should never have been born. You should have died! That way, Sasha would still be alive, and I could live happily with her and Arnette! It's not my fault! I did nothing wrong!”

“I care so little about this that I may kill you just to shut you up,” Caim said, disinterested, after hearing his father voice his true thoughts. Before he fused with the Queen, those words would have hurt him deeply, but now he truly could not give a damn. “You're a grown man. Don't start crying—it's irritating!”

Kevin had never treated Caim as family in the first place, so his confession only made it clear that his thoughts truly matched his actions. And Caim was already determined to leave this domain and sever ties with the Halsbergs anyway, so all of this was inconsequential to him.

“I don't care what you think of me,” Caim said. “But out of respect for my beloved mother, I'm willing to let you off. Just get out of my sight already.”

“Don't you dare speak of Sasha, you monster! I'll destroy you until not a single fragment of bone remains, Poison Queen!”

Caim winced a little at the overwhelming amount of mana gushing out from Kevin. It was like a volcano erupting as the outburst of mana increased, condensing and covering his entire body like armor.

“Toukishin Style, First Secret Technique—Shiyuu!”

“This is the first time I've seen that one! You never taught it to Arnette!” Caim

said.

“Of course I didn’t! The Secret Stance and its techniques are only passed on to people who have mastered the Basic Stance. I’ll teach it to Arnette someday, but that time has not yet come. As for you...this will be the first—and *last*—time you’ll ever see it!”

“Hah! If you say so!” Caim snorted in annoyance.

Then he lowered his stance and drew back his fist to employ the Basic Stance technique with the most piercing power—Kirin. As he had only learned the Basic Stance of the Toukishin Style and still could not use the Secret Stance, Caim had no other choice but to fight with what he knew.

Kevin sneered at Caim. “You won’t be able to defeat Shiyuu with the Basic Stance! Just accept death already. Out of respect for Sasha, I’ll make it painless!”

“I don’t need your mercy—you’re neither my parent nor my teacher. If you think using my beloved mother’s name will make you look generous...well, it won’t. It’s just unpleasant.”

“You...!” Kevin’s expression warped with rage, but it immediately became serious again as he observed Caim’s stance.

No matter how furious and unreasonable Kevin was, he was still the Master Pugilist. He realized they were past the point where words meant anything. When two warriors faced each other, after all, they spoke through their bodies and their bravery, not their words.

They both stared at each other in silence for a few seconds and...finally, time began to flow again.

Kevin made the first move. “I’ll get rid of everything—my unworthy son, this unwanted past, and the Poison Queen!”

The technique from the Secret Stance of the Toukishin Style that took its name from an Eastern war god—Shiyuu. In the East, it was said that mana came from the chakras, and opening them completely allowed a martial artist to instantly produce a tremendous amount of mana. The exact increase depended on the number of chakras released, but at minimum it would double one’s

mana, and a master could increase it by as much as seven times. However, Caim only knew the Basic Stance, so while he had a prodigious natural talent for martial arts, there was no way he could know how to release his chakras, as he had never learned about the Secret Stance.

“Hyaaaah!” Caim’s answer to this was simple: he put all of his mana—everything he had—into Kirin. “Take thaaat!”

The spiraling shock wave of Mana Compression reached Kevin, stopping his rush for an instant. However, it couldn’t pierce through the bulky mana armor created by Shiyuu. Caim’s attack was repelled as Kevin closed the distance with a yell.

But Caim didn’t move. Instead, he continued to release a mana shock wave with his fist thrust forward.

They both shouted as the distance between them shortened.

Three meters.

Two meters.

One meter.

And when only a single step was left between them, Kevin smiled. “I won!”

His confidence wasn’t unwarranted. After all, from his point of view, Kirin was Caim’s best move, and he had just repelled it. His son’s defeat was imminent—there was no way he could win against Kevin, who was using Shiyuu, and all that was left was to crush him.

And yet, something unexpected happened that made Kevin gasp in shock—he grew weak in the legs and fell to his knees.

“What’s happening?!”

Caim didn’t let the opportunity go. He stopped using Kirin, grasped Kevin’s head, and drove a knee strike into it.

“Gah?!” Kevin groaned in pain as he fell on his back.

“Goodnight! Toukishin Style—Ouryuu!” Caim straddled his father and prepared his next attack.

In contrast to Kirin that projected a mana shock wave, Ouryuu—Responsive Dragon—was a point-blank strike that drove mana directly into the opponent’s body. Caim placed his palm on Kevin’s chest and released the mana he had refined in an explosive strike.

“Hah!”



The intense shock to his chest caused Kevin to vomit blood—some of which splattered onto Caim’s face, though he only frowned slightly in response.

With a last groan of pain, Kevin went limp and he lost consciousness. His chest was still moving, though, which meant he was still alive.

“If not for Mana Compression, I’d be dead,” Caim commented as he straightened his disordered clothes, looking down at his unconscious father.

Kevin had suddenly grown weak because he’d received Caim’s condensed mana. Kevin might have repelled Kirin’s shock wave, but Caim had inherited the Queen’s power and could use Purple Poison Magic to infuse his mana with toxins, which allowed him to paralyze his father.

“You were a far better martial artist...but it really was careless of you not to be more wary of poisons.”

In the end, even though Kevin had called Caim “Poison Queen,” he had still only seen his worthless son. He hadn’t expected an attack that used toxins—rather foolish for the Master Pugilist, the strongest man in the kingdom.

Caim picked up his belongings and walked away from his father, thinking that he would finally be able to leave and never return, but then he noticed people in the opposite direction.

“What?”

They were knights who served House Halsberg. As Caim wondered how long they had been there, some of them approached the fallen Kevin, bewildered.

“F-Father...”

Even more surprising, among them was Caim’s twin sister—Arnette. The knights must have been her guards. Arnette had probably come to Caim’s forest hut because she had been worried about how late her father was to return—or perhaps she’d had some sort of premonition.

“Hmph.” Caim shrugged. “I didn’t kill him. He may be a worthless man, but his death would make Mother sad.”

“W-Wait! Who are you?” A knight tried to stop Caim as he passed by.

“Don’t get in my way. You’re annoying.”

Before the five knights could even draw their swords, Caim quickly punched them all in the chin or abdomen, knocking them out.

“Just go to sleep. It’s not like you’d be able to stop me anyway.” Caim stepped on one of the knights’ bodies and walked past Arnette, ignoring her as if she were unworthy of his attention.

“W-Wait!” But Arnette didn’t let him go—she shouted at his back, settling into a fighting stance. “How dare you hurt my father! I won’t forgive you!”

“So...what? Are you gonna fight me next?” Caim asked with an exasperated sigh, not even turning back to look at his sister. “You think you can win against someone who defeated your beloved father? Didn’t he teach you to flee when facing someone stronger than you?”

“I...I’m Arnette Halsberg...the Master Pugilist’s daughter! By the Halsberg name, I would never be scared and run away from *any* enemy!”

“Kirin.”

Caim turned around and immediately launched a mana shock wave. The spiraling condensed mana flew right past Arnette’s face.

“Eek!” She squealed in fright and fell on her backside. Her head had been a few centimeters away from being blasted into oblivion.

The shock wave from Kirin hadn’t even been at a tenth of its power, and yet it had been so fast and sharp that Arnette hadn’t even been able to react to it. She was only thirteen, and this was her first time facing death. Her entire body was trembling from dread.

Caim silently walked toward her, slowly approaching his twin one step at a time.

“Eek! No! Stay back!” she yelled, frantically waving her arms in front of her, certain that she was going to be killed this time.

She tried to stand up, but her legs wouldn’t listen. Unable to make any distance between herself and Caim, she lost her nerve and started crying.

“No...I don’t want to die... Father!”

She was sitting with her legs spread and, suddenly, Caim heard a splash coming from the ground near her crotch. When he looked down, he could see that her underwear—which had been revealed because her skirt was turned up—was soaked, and a lukewarm liquid was puddling on the ground. She had wet herself out of fear.



“This is so stupid,” Caim said with a sigh, stopping as he was taken aback by the shameful sight of his sister who always told him off.

He had wanted to give her a slap or something as payback for all she had done to him, but after seeing her in such an unsightly state, he pitied her.

“I defeated your father. He isn’t dead, but his career as a martial artist is probably over,” he said, looking down at his crying sister. “If you want to avenge him, then feel free to chase after me. But next time, be prepared to die.”

And with those final words of mercy, he departed without waiting for a reply.

Caim left the Halsberg territory before the day’s end and would never return to his birthplace ever again.

Interlude: The Ones Left Behind

“Ugh... Where am I...?”

“You are finally awake, Master!”

The first thing Kevin saw when he regained consciousness was the familiar ceiling of his bedroom. Realizing he had been sleeping in his bed, he turned to see House Halsberg’s head butler next to him.

“Why am I here...? Ugh...” Kevin asked with a groan of pain.

“Be still! You have been unconscious for a week, so please, do not force yourself to move!” The head butler hastily stopped him.

Kevin noticed that this man who had been serving him for more than ten years had a bruise on his face, indicating he had been struck. He found that curious, but he wanted to confirm the situation first.

A week? How could that happen to me? And my body... It feels like all my muscles are made of lead...

Kevin’s body felt extremely heavy, and he had a hard time moving his muscles and joints—whenever he did manage it, his entire body jolted with pain. He couldn’t even do something as simple as sitting up.

Still, he didn’t give up—with a yell, he forced himself into a sitting position. He wouldn’t have minded lying down just to sleep, but his pride as the kingdom’s strongest—as the Master Pugilist—wouldn’t accept him yielding to the pain.

“M-Master! If you force yourself like this, your body will...”

“I don’t...care!” Kevin resisted the pain as he spoke. “More importantly, explain what happened! Why have I been in bed for a week? How did I end up injured like this?”

He tried to recall what had happened before he fainted, but he was still too groggy. However, just considering the state of his body was enough for him to understand one thing: he had lost. The Master Pugilist, Kevin Halsberg, had

been beaten by someone.

“I can’t remember... Who did I fight? Who defeated me?”

“We do not know...”

“You don’t? How is that possible?”

“I do not know where the person who did this to you came from,” the head butler started to explain. “I only heard from the knights that a strange young man with purple hair and eyes defeated you in the forest.”

“Purple!” Kevin gasped as a vivid but eerie violet came to mind. As if that had jogged his memory, everything came rushing back.

He had fought someone. Someone using the same style as him...someone with the same mana as the Poison Queen, his wife’s killer and his archenemy. That was the man who had defeated him, and while his appearance had changed, Kevin knew his name.

“Caim!”

In his memories, that son was only thirteen, and the man he had fought was at least five years older, with different hair and eye color and no marks of the curse on his body. And yet, he knew that man was his son. Of course, that wasn’t because Kevin actually loved him. No, it was simpler than that: growing up had made Caim look like his wife had in her youth.

Now that I think about it, Caim has always somehow resembled Sasha...

Kevin had ignored his cursed son as much as possible while he had been in the mansion. He’d never listened to his wife and refused to be involved with Caim, shouting and even growing violent whenever he saw his son. But Kevin did remember how once, when he had seen Sasha carrying the boy, he had felt shocked by their resemblance to each other—a moment which had forced him to accept that his cursed son was indeed of the same blood as his wife. That, of course, meant that Caim was also *his* son. That realization had tightened his chest and pained him greatly.

And there’s his talent with martial arts. There’s no doubt that he’s a genius. No—his talent is so fearsome that it’d be more apt to call him a monster.

During their fight in the forest, Caim had shown that he had almost mastered the Basic Stance of the Toukishin Style. He was far ahead of Arnette, who was the same age and whom Kevin had carefully trained. A chill ran down his spine at the thought that Caim had reached this level without being taught anything—only by watching Kevin and his daughter train.

There's no doubt he really is my son—the son of the Master Pugilist. In terms of talent and sheer potential, I don't even hold a candle to him. And he even looks like Sasha... Just what kind of hell have I fallen into?

Kevin's son, who had inherited his talent and his wife's looks, had also gained the power of the Poison Queen, his hated enemy. Confronted with the fact that the son he'd oppressed—the son he had committed a terrible sin against by sacrificing him to the curse—was undoubtedly his and his wife's child, Kevin was overwhelmed by despair.

"Master? Is there a problem?" the head butler asked, seeing Kevin's sorrowful expression.

"No...it's nothing." He shook his head. Kevin couldn't carelessly reveal that Caim had inherited the Poison Queen's power. If it were discovered that a Demon Lord-class calamity had been released in the wild, House Halsberg would be forced to take responsibility for it. Not only had the Queen been reborn, but she was also using the body of the count's own son. For the old nobles who already disliked Kevin for being an upstart, that would be the perfect excuse to take him down a peg.

If it were only about me, I could deal with that. But I can't endanger my daughter's future too...

"What about Arnette? Was she worried about me?"

"She is secluding herself in her room. Apparently, she met the man who fought with you—ah, do not worry, she was not injured—and your defeat must have greatly shocked her. She immediately went to her room when she returned to the mansion and has not left it since."

"I see... I don't mind, as long as she's all right. Though I suppose I must have disappointed her." Kevin sighed, dropping his shoulders. While it pained him to show such a shameful sight to his daughter, he was just glad that Caim hadn't

harmed Arnette.

More importantly, Kevin had to think about how to deal with Caim and the power he had inherited from the Poison Queen.

I should chase after him and eliminate him, but...could I actually do it? Especially considering my current condition.

Kevin wasn't young anymore, and while he did practice with his daughter, he hadn't done any serious training since his wife's death. Moreover, his body was now affected by Caim's poison. Even if he could heal his injuries, his combat capabilities would be far worse than before.

Caim is dangerous, but I can't win against him. If I want House Halsberg to survive and guarantee Arnette's future, I can't report the truth to the king. However, considering that Caim didn't kill me even though he hates me, I don't think he'll cause a huge disaster anytime soon...

"Master! I have terrible news!" A maid suddenly entered the room, interrupting Kevin's thoughts.

The head butler raised an eyebrow at his subordinate for not knocking before entering her master's bedroom. "Why are you being so loud? And how could you enter our master's bedroom without permission?"

"I-I have something extremely important to report! Milady Arnette is...!"

"What happened to my daughter?!" Kevin shouted, trying to get up from the bed, but as he was still afflicted by the poison, he fell back onto it, coughing violently.

"Master!"

"D-Don't worry about me..." he said to the head butler and turned toward the maid. "Just tell me what happened to Arnette!" he demanded, coughing a few more times.

The maid was pale as she gave a folded paper to her master. "M-Milady Arnette is not in her room anymore—or even in the mansion. I found this in her bedroom..."

"What?! Arnette has disappeared?!"

Kevin plucked the paper from the maid's hand and unfolded it. Immediately, he recognized the handwriting of his beloved daughter and was shocked by what it said:

"I am chasing after the enemy who defeated you, Father. I shall not return until I defeat that poisonous man."

"Aaah... Why, Arnette?!"

"Master?!" the head butler said, moving to support his master.

"Arnette... Arneeette!" Kevin yelled, his hands clawing at his head.

Not only had he lost his wife and been forsaken by his son, but now even his daughter, his only remaining family, was gone too...and all Kevin could do was wail in grief.



On a certain day more than ten years ago, Tea had been wandering around town. An orphan without a single relative, she was a rare white tigerfolk, a kind of beastfolk who excelled at combat—so what was she doing in a human town? Well, not even Tea herself could remember how she'd arrived here. Only one thing was clear to her: she was alone, without parents to rely on or siblings to help her.

Who am I...? Why am I here...? Tea—then nothing more than a nameless tiger girl—asked herself, tormented by hunger.

Based on the old rags she was wearing, the tiger girl was most likely a slave forced to do manual labor who had since escaped. Discrimination against nonhumans was quite severe in the Jade Kingdom, and the children of demi-humans and beastfolk were often kidnapped to serve as slaves. Because of that, it was common to find escaped slaves dying by the roadside.

The girl was more dead than alive, so weak that she probably wouldn't even last another two days.

Am I going to die...? Why was I even born...? The tiger girl couldn't help but think about the meaning of her life. Had she been given life only to suffer and die on the side of this road? Even with no memories or understanding, the girl

knew that her existence was miserable and futile.

“Ah! Ah!”

“What is it, Caim?”

However, someone extended a hand to the tiger girl as she lay on the ground. The girl lifted her head to look up and saw a baby in the arms of a woman who was likely his mother. The baby—maybe he was ill, as his face and limbs sported purple bruises—was frantically stretching his hand toward the tiger girl.

“That’s a beastfolk girl. Did she catch your eye?”

“Ah! Uh!”

“My, it’s quite rare for you to be so interested in someone, Caim.”

“Is there a problem, Mistress?” a man dressed in servants’ clothes asked the woman holding the baby. Perhaps the man was a butler or a guard.

“We’re taking this girl home. I’ll appoint her as Caim’s caretaker.”

“Is that a good idea? She is a filthy beastfolk, after all.”

“I don’t mind. Take her home, give her some food, and heal her... And could you teach her to be a servant as well?”

“...Certainly.” The man reluctantly agreed. Then, he carried the tiger girl—who was too weak to resist—back to the mansion.

After that, the girl was named Tea and became a maid of the Halsberg household. Incidentally, the origin of her name was a little silly—the first thing she had learned to do was serve tea, so they named her after it.

It wasn’t until some time later that Tea learned Caim and his mother had been in town shopping that day. To be more precise, Kevin had invited Sasha to come with him because she had been feeling unusually fine that day—and because she had refused to go without Caim, the entire family plus a butler had ended up going out together. While her husband and daughter had been away buying something, Caim had taken an interest in the collapsed tiger girl, so Sasha had decided to employ her as his future caretaker.

“I’m not long for this world, so please...take care of him for me.”

“Of course! Master Caim is the one who saved me!” Tea replied to Sasha with all her heart.

Naturally, Caim had been a baby at the time, so he didn’t remember anything about saving Tea. He’d always thought Tea was so devoted to him because of his mother, but he was wrong—it was because *he* was the one who had saved her. If not for him, Sasha would never have taken in an orphan beastfolk. The gratitude and love Tea felt toward Caim were far greater than what she felt for Sasha.

Word that Caim Halsberg had deserted his family’s domain spread quickly among the servants of the mansion.

“Grrraow! Master Caim’s left our territory?!”

Upon hearing the news, Tea hurried to his forest hut. There, she found a letter that shocked her:

“I’m going on a journey. You’ve more than repaid your debt toward my mother, so I want you to live freely now.”

The short message written on it was addressed to her.

Tea crushed the letter in her hand as she trembled, gritting her teeth and showing her sharp canines. “Why didn’t you bring me with you?! Going alone without me... It’s so heartless!”

Tea immediately returned to the Halsberg mansion and made preparations to follow Caim as soon as possible, hastily packing her luggage. The head butler stopped her before she could leave the mansion, however.

“Where are you going at such a busy time? The master is unconscious and we have a lot of work to do.”

“What a stupid question. I’m going after Master Caim!”

“You want to follow that cursed child? How foolish,” he snorted. “I can’t allow you to act so selfishly. Have you forgotten your debt to House Halsberg for employing *you*, a filthy beastfolk?”

“I have a debt...toward House Halsberg?”

“Of course you do! If not for the master, you would have died by the roadside. Therefore, you must repay us for saving you!”

“Please quit screwing around!” Tea shouted, baring her fangs. Then, she punched the head butler in the face. The blow sent him tumbling across the floor until he slammed into a wall.

The butler groaned in pain. “Wh-What are you...”

“Grrraaw! Master Caim is the one who saved Tea!” the tiger girl cried, her tone becoming more childish as she abandoned all decorum. “And the mistress was the one who took me on as a maid! I owe nothing to you *or* the master!” She took a step toward the head butler, who was leaning painfully against the wall, and threw all the resentment she had accumulated over the years at him. “The only reason Tea worked for House Halsberg was to save money so Tea could take Master Caim with her somewhere far away!”

That was why she hadn’t followed after Caim a year ago when he had been driven out of the mansion—she’d needed to gather enough funds for her and Caim before they could leave the Halsberg territory. And because it was difficult for a beastfolk—and Caim himself, as a hated cursed child—to find work in the Jade Kingdom, she’d had no other choice but to swallow her tears as she watched Caim being thrown out of his home.

“Now that Master Caim isn’t around, I have no reason to stay any longer! So, here’s my thanks for everything up until now!” Tea raised her foot...and trampled hard on the head butler’s crotch. He yelled in pain, his face going pale, before fainting.

“Hmph! That’s what happens when you make fun of Master Caim! Anyway, I’ve lost enough time. Wait for me, Master Caim! Tea will soon be by your side again!” she declared, satisfied to have vented her anger, and finally left the mansion. “I really want to go and knock out all the other servants, but I don’t have the time for that... Oh well! At least they’ll have to do all of my work from here on out!”

Because of the head butler’s injury, the loss of Tea—whose limitless stamina had allowed her to accomplish a great deal—and the search party that was

deployed to find Arnette, a ton of work piled up, causing great turmoil among the remaining retainers of House Halsberg.

Thus, thanks to the tiger maid's actions, the people who had treated Caim poorly received their just deserts—even though she hadn't planned it that way. Sadly, Tea would never learn about all that had happened.



"Hey, have you heard? The cursed child's finally been expelled!"

"At long last, the lord has forsaken him! Ha ha, let's have a banquet tonight!"

The villagers all cheered when they heard that Caim had left the Halsberg domain, though they didn't know that he had done so on his own initiative. Instead, it was announced that Kevin had been the one to drive him out. The villagers' faces were twisted into ugly grins as they imagined the cursed child in exile.

"I was so anxious living near a monster like him!"

"I'm so relieved I won't have to look at his eerie marks anymore!"

"Yes, I'm glad he didn't infect the other children. He was so disgusting."

The villagers kept on bad-mouthing Caim. They had been the ones who'd abused him, but from their point of view, they were the victims—after all, they were the ones who'd had to deal with the presence of a cursed child. Humans were creatures who shunned and rejected anyone they saw as different—and that was even truer in an insular village like this one. They never even wondered if Caim was truly dangerous; they only persecuted him for their own peace of mind.

Suddenly, one of the villagers said, "By the way, I spotted a wolf near the forest's entrance this morning. It's been a while since I saw one of those."

The others tilted their heads thoughtfully.

"You're right," another villager replied. "It's been, what, a year? Since we've seen a wolf or a bear."

"Yeah, same for monsters. It's kinda weird, considering how often they used to show up."

Not a single beast or monster had approached the village for the past year. The reason for that was that Caim, cursed by the Poison Queen, had been living in the forest. Animals and monsters could detect the toxins his body emitted thanks to their sharp senses, so they'd hidden deep in the forest to avoid him out of fear.

"Supposedly, there was even a swarm of monsters a few days ago, but nothing serious happened."

"I'm sure our lord did something about it. Taking care of something like that should be a cinch for the Master Pugilist!"

"Indeed—our village will be fine as long as Lord Kevin governs us. No need to worry about a mere wolf."

The villagers smiled cheerfully, paying no mind to the wolf's sudden appearance. Their smiles, however, would be short-lived. The one who'd been protecting the village was no longer there, after all.

Caim might have exterminated the monsters, but it would only provide a brief respite until other monsters from somewhere else would come to repopulate the now vacant area. Moreover, Kevin—the village's lifeline—was likely beyond recovering from his poisoning, and most of the knights were away searching for Arnette, leaving only a small fighting force behind.

The villagers, who had unknowingly been under Caim's protection, now had no way to defend themselves. And so, a few months later, monsters would assault the village and plunge it into the depths of hell.

Chapter 4: Departure and New Meetings

Having quit his birthplace, Caim was now headed east along the main road. His objective was the country just east of the Jade Kingdom—the Garnet Empire. Caim hadn't particularly taken Faust's warning to heart, but what he really wanted was to find a new homeland and family, not fight people. This meant he would rather avoid the Holy Spirit Church, as they would oppose him for being a Demon Lord, and that only left him with one choice—go somewhere they didn't have much clout.

It's gonna be me all by my lonesome for a while... Well, maybe that's not a bad thing.

Caim gazed at the blue sky as he nonchalantly walked down the road. It was mostly clear, with only a few clouds slowly drifting by, and even though it was hardly an unusual sight, it still lightened his heart.

I don't think I've ever just relaxed and looked up at the sky even once... I've really been wasting my life.

Just changing his outlook had made the scenery look different. Before, Caim hadn't felt anything when looking at the sky, but now, he had enough freedom to enjoy its beautiful blue color.

Caim continued along the road with light steps—but suddenly, he noticed something strange ahead of him. “Huh? Is that...a broken carriage?”

The remains of a toppled carriage lay in the middle of the road. When Caim got near enough, he discovered the bloodied corpses of several men around it.

“They've been cut by something sharp, so it must have been bandits, not monsters... You were just unlucky,” Caim said with pity in his voice, then turned away to continue his journey. While he *did* sympathize with them, he couldn't exactly do anything for people who were already dead.

However, before he could make a step, he felt something stop him.

“Can you let go? I want to continue on my way.”

A man groaning in pain was grabbing Caim's ankle. Caim had thought they were all dead, but one had apparently survived.

"I'm sorry, but I can't save you," he told the man. "There's nothing I can do, unfortunate as that is."

He did have potions in the magic bag he had received from Faust, but they wouldn't be enough to heal the fatal wounds of the man. It would only prolong his suffering.

Caim apologized once more and was going to shake off the man's hand, but...

"...was..."

"Hm?"

"...taken... Please...save..." the man croaked, pointing at the forest. Then, as if he had accomplished his duty, his hand fell as he died.

"Give me a break. Why was I the one who had to hear a stranger's last words?" Caim said in exasperation, looking down at the dead man and shaking his head. The man's words had been fragmented, but Caim managed to understand that someone had been taken away in the forest and he had been asked to save them.

"Someone kidnapped by bandits, huh? I'd feel bad abandoning them, now that I know about it..."

It would be easy to ignore the whole situation, but it would leave such a bad taste in his mouth that he wouldn't be able to appreciate his dinner tonight. Caim wasn't a saint, of course—he wouldn't bother lifting a finger for a corpse. But at the same time, he wasn't so heartless that he'd leave a living person—someone he *could* save—to their fate.

"Oh well... I guess I'll just treat dealing with these bandits as a fun detour. It might even earn me some money, so it shouldn't be a complete waste of time."

Caim had once heard that anyone who defeated a gang of bandits had the right to take their fortune and property. With that in mind, he convinced himself that this wouldn't be a pointless venture and headed toward the forest, in the direction the man had pointed.

“It seems they went that way...”

Caim squinted as he observed the overgrown vegetation. Thanks to having lived in a forest for an entire year, he was used to the environment. The thieves had tried to hide their trail, but Caim easily found spots where the grass had been trampled, proving that people had passed through there.

Doesn't look like there's a lot of them. Some footprints are deeper than others too, which must be because they were carrying something heavy. Like a kidnapped woman, for example.

Caim followed the trail deeper into the forest. While he did come across a few small animals and insects, he didn't encounter any monsters or large beasts. That allowed him to smoothly pursue the people who had attacked the carriage without encountering any obstacles.

“Ah, must be the place.”

Caim arrived at a small clearing with a rocky mountainside blocking the way forward. He could see a large hole in the rock—likely the mouth of a cave—and a seated man guarding the entrance.

Well, it seems I've found them. I guess the person they kidnapped is inside? Caim wondered what he should do as he stayed hidden behind a tree. *The problem is that they might use that person as a hostage. If it were only the bandits, I could just release poison gas inside the cave and be done with it...*

If he tried that, however, their prisoner would also be poisoned. Caim could use toxins that only paralyzed people or put them to sleep, but he had only just inherited the Queen's power, and he wasn't confident he could successfully create something nonlethal.

I'm still so inexperienced... Not that complaining about that is gonna change anything.

Caim leaped out from behind the tree and cast a spell before the guard could react. “Poison Shot.”

A purple projectile struck the man's neck. He tried to call for help, but his

mouth only flapped open without making a sound as he clawed at his throat and fainted.

“Yup, I’ve got no problem holding back.”

The man was only unconscious, not dead. Caim wasn’t showing him mercy, though—he was only testing if he could control the virulence of his poison enough to make it nonlethal.

“Though...sure, he isn’t dead, but can I really call *that* holding back?”

The man’s body was spasming, and his entire neck had turned violet and swollen. True, he was alive, but he would likely be rendered permanently mute. The bandit hadn’t died immediately, but he might pass away in a few hours if he was left like this.

It’s easy to make a strong poison, but not one that won’t kill or do lasting damage... I need more training.

“Anyway, let’s go,” Caim muttered to himself as he entered the thieves’ hideout.

The cave was dark, but strengthening his eyes with mana—another application of the Toukishin Style—allowed him to see perfectly and advance without issue. As he observed his surroundings, he realized that he was inside a limestone cave, its ceiling covered in long stalactites that had formed over the years. Caim continued to walk carefully, mindful of the slippery ground, until he finally reached an open area.

“Hya ha ha ha! I can’t *wait* to get a taste of you!” A vulgar laugh resounded through the cavern.

Caim pressed his body against the pathway’s wall to hide himself and peered into the depths of the cave. There were ten men inside, all of whom looked like bandits. Some were clapping their hands and laughing merrily, while others were eating grilled meat or drinking wine.

In the midst of the thieves were two restrained women. One was in her late teens, with long blonde hair and an expensive-looking dress...though it had been torn, revealing her chest and thighs. The other woman was a little older, around twenty, and had short red hair. Likewise, her clothes were ripped, and

blood trickled from the few cuts she'd suffered here and there. The pair were sitting down against the limestone cave's wall, both with their arms chained over their heads.

"Ugh...no..."

"J-Just kill me..."

Their faces were both flushed and their eyes filled with tears as they trembled, rubbing their thighs together as though struggling to endure some kind of suffering. Clearly something was amiss with them.

"It's great that we can do whatever we want with beauties like that!"

"Yeah, let's enjoy ourselves before we kill them! Hya ha ha ha!"

"Please...stop..." the blonde one begged weakly. Tears ran down her cheeks as she pleaded with the men, but that only spurred on their sadistic desires.



As they watched the panting women, the bandits grew more and more excited.

“Looks like that drug is kicking in! Soon enough, you’re gonna be shaking your asses and begging us to screw you!” the eldest bandit commented with a vulgar laugh.

Caim frowned. He clearly understood what was happening. *So I was right in thinking those women aren’t in any normal condition. Those thieves must be real creeps to use a drug like that.*

“We *are* gonna kill you, but you’d better prepare yourselves to be violated at least a hundred times before that! Well now, you should be ready soon enough, so which one should I try out first?”

What a disgusting bunch. Guess I don’t need to hold back, so let’s finish them off quickly. Caim couldn’t bear watching anymore and decided to exterminate the bandits.

“Sorry to interrupt while you’re all enjoying yourselves, but as you can see, I’m a trespasser.”

“What?!”

“Who are you?!”

The bandits who were toying with the women turned around in a panic at Caim’s sudden appearance. Though Caim could have attacked them by surprise, he was outnumbered, and they would have noticed him after one strike anyway. In that case, he might as well go all out and face them head-on.

“As I’m a guest, I hope you will show me some hospitality!” Caim’s tone was light, but his eyes were deadly serious—he wasn’t going to go easy on the kind of scum who chained up, drugged, and tormented women.

“We’ve got an intruder! Kill him!”

The ten bandits all took up their weapons and attacked Caim—who grabbed the face of a thief who’d struck at him with a knife and used Purple Poison Magic.

“Snake Hand.”

The man began to scream in agony.

“Wh-What did you do to him?!”

Caim released the bandit, and the man fell back to the ground. His face was burned as if it had been splashed with a strong acid, so badly that it barely looked like a face any longer.

“I thought I might use you to practice holding myself back, but I’ve changed my mind. I’m not kind enough to show mercy to scum like you.”

One of the thieves squealed, “What the hell *are* you?!”

“How did you kill him like that?!” another asked.

“Just shut up and die.”

Caim lunged at the terrified bandits, his right hand striking like it was a poisonous snake. He quickly thrust at the thieves with his hand covered in toxins, and every time he so much as brushed against one of them, their flesh burned. A rancid smell flooded the air.

The thieves all began to scream in pain.

“Gaaah!”

“My arm?!”

Purple Poison Magic—Snake Hand was a spell that allowed Caim to pour acid directly on his opponent simply by touching them. That meant it could only be used at close range, but its efficiency was devastating—and it allowed him to dispatch his foes without affecting any bystanders, like the two captive women.

“My hand is like a venomous snake’s fangs...or maybe it’s more like the grim reaper’s blade? Either way, anyone I touch will die. Repent for your worthless lives while you suffer unimaginable pain.”

“Nooo!”

“H-Help!”

Caim dashed around the limestone cave, picking off the bandits one by one. Some tried to defend themselves with their weapons, but compared to the Master Pugilist that Caim had previously defeated, their movements were so

slow that they might as well have been stopped in time. It didn't even take a minute for Caim to deal with all the underlings.

Soon, only one large man—presumably their leader—was left standing.

“You little brat... I won't forgive you for what you did to my boys!”

“Oh, that's unexpected. Even trash like you cares about his comrades, huh?”

“Shut your mouth... Just when I was gonna have some fun, damn it!” The boss pointed his greatsword at Caim. “Did you know you were attacking the Crimson Demons?! Well, don't think I'm gonna let you go alive!”

“Of course, I'm not gonna let *you* go alive either. Scumbags who like to torment and toy with women should just die right here and now.”

“Hah! I hate brats like you—and your filthy sense of justice makes my blood boil!”

The man jumped at Caim, swinging his greatsword. As one might have expected from the leader of a bandit gang, he was far more nimble than his underlings. In fact, his movements were so polished it was hard to believe he was a mere thief.

He must have trained hard... This isn't just any old bandit. Probably a former mercenary or adventurer.

“Diiiie!” the bandit screamed.

“Well, merc or adventurer, you're nothing much.” Caim caught the overhead swing with one hand, much to the leader's shock.

“The hell?! You caught my sword bare-handed?!”

“It's not that hard—especially considering how slow your strike was.”

“Damn it! I'm not gonna lose against the likes of you! Never!” Fire burst out of the greatsword, taking Caim by surprise as it swallowed his body. “Magic sword Salamander! Burn this little bastard to the bone!”

The leader wasn't armed with an ordinary weapon after all—it was a magic sword, a blade bestowed with a special effect. In this case, it could produce fire. Flames engulfed Caim's entire body.

“Hya ha ha! Die, die, diie! I wiiii...”

“Jeez, you really have no class. And your voice is so grating.”

“...iiiiin... Huh?” The boss was astonished. Apparently, even using a powerful magic sword wasn’t enough to close the enormous gap in power between him and Caim. “Why?! Why aren’t you burning up?! Why is it doing nothing to you?!”

“Puny flames like these are ineffective against my body clad in condensed mana.”

Caim was using the Toukishin Style’s Mana Compression to cover him like armor. It protected him not only from weapons but also from fire—so even though he was surrounded by flames, not a single patch of his skin was burned.

“Melt—Snake Hand.”

“What?!”

Still clutching the sword, Caim created a strong acid in his palm and crushed the burning blade. Not even the high temperature could weaken the acid, and the sword’s flame vanished as its metal blade melted away.

“I see. I was fine this time, but now I know that even a weak opponent might be able to wound me with a special weapon or item. You’ve taught me something. Thanks.”

The boss shrieked in fear.

“This is my way of showing my gratitude, so enjoy it!” Caim imitated a tiger’s claws with the fingers of his left hand and coated them in poison. It wasn’t the Toukishin Style or Purple Poison Magic but an original technique only Caim could use. “Daemon Hand!”

Claws made of condensed mana that produced acid tore through the leader’s body. He didn’t even have the time to scream as his flesh dissolved in the blink of an eye, leaving behind nothing but bones.

“Yup, that went great. I’m able to fight fairly well.” Caim nodded confidently, seeing how easily he had exterminated the bandit group.

Caim possessed two forms of power. One was the Toukishin Style he had

stolen from his father, and the other was the Purple Poison Magic he had inherited after fusing with the Poison Queen. However, he was far from mastering either of them. He didn't hold a candle to his father in terms of pure martial arts skill, and of the techniques that used Mana Compression, he only knew the ones from its Basic Stance but not the Secret Stance. If Caim had fought Kevin only using the Toukishin Style, he would have lost.

On the other hand, the same went for Purple Poison Magic. In the past, the Queen could use it to ruin countries and kill tens of thousands of people, but that was impossible for Caim. His proficiency in magic was far inferior to hers.

But if I use them both together, I can overcome my inexperience. I may have a hard time against someone as strong as my old man, but I shouldn't have any problem against regular people, he thought, clenching his fist in satisfaction. He hadn't planned on subjugating a gang of bandits, but the battle had helped him test his strength.

"Aaah... Mmnh!"

"Oops. Sorry, I almost forgot about you." Caim finally remembered his main objective in coming here—he had been so absorbed by the battle that he had forgotten all about the chained women. "You all right? Are you even conscious?"

As soon as he approached the two women, they became agitated, thrashing their limbs and moaning.

"Mmmhhh! Haaah! Aaah!"

"J-Just kill me... Please...mmh...I beg you!"

"Well...this is worse than I thought."

The women struggled desperately, and their chests heaved, clearly revealed by their torn clothes. They couldn't move their arms freely because of the chains, but their legs violently flailed against the ground. There was no trace of reason in their eyes—they were on the verge of going mad from the pleasure assaulting their senses.

"What kind of drug did they give you to end up like this?" Caim had guessed it was an aphrodisiac based on what he'd overheard from the thieves, but it

looked far worse than that. If an aphrodisiac could also be called a love *potion*, then what they had been forced to drink was a love *poison*—a devilish poison that brought so much pleasure it could kill. “And of course, I don’t have an antidote...” He checked his magic bag but found nothing of the sort.

The next solution after an antidote is usually Healing Magic, but I can’t use it. I’d have to take them to the nearest town...but will they be able to hold out until then?

The women screamed.

“Well, I guess not. Neither their minds nor their bodies will last long enough to reach a town.” Caim shook his head at the thought.

They had to be healed here and now or they couldn’t be saved. In that case, he had to do *something*, no matter what it was.

“I’ve never done this before, and whether or not it works will be up to chance, so don’t hold it against me if you die.”

Caim used the only means at his disposal: creating poison with his mana. His reasoning was pretty simple—he would fight fire with fire, or poison with poison in this case. It was a rather drastic measure, but he would use his own toxins to neutralize the love poison affecting the women’s bodies.

“There’s a high chance it’ll fail, but...I have to try,” he muttered. “And...done. Should be enough. Here, drink it.” Caim used the knowledge he’d gained from the Queen to analyze the love poison affecting the two women and produced a pink poison in his palm, which he tried to make the blonde woman drink. But...

“Nooo!” Caim was unsuccessful—the woman flew into a rage, spilling the poison.

“Tch, damn it! I guess you leave me no choice... Don’t blame me—I’m doing this to save you!” he exclaimed with a click of his tongue, then created another dose of poison. However, this time it wasn’t in his palm—instead, it was inside his mouth, using his own saliva as an ingredient.

“Here I go.” He hesitated an instant before pressing his lips against the blonde woman’s. He firmly held her head to prevent her from struggling, then opened his lips to pour the toxin inside her mouth.

“Nnnnh?!” The woman jolted in surprise but didn’t resist. On the contrary—as if she had been waiting for this, she thrust her tongue into Caim’s mouth. The effect of the love poison must have caused her to seek pleasure without thinking.



Whoa... She's totally violating my mouth... It does make it easier, though. Caim shuddered a little—it was his first serious kiss, after all—but he didn't stop pouring the poison from his mouth into hers.

"Nnh...aahn!" The blonde woman kissed Caim frantically, their tongues twining around each other like mating serpents. Suddenly, she extended her long, slender legs and locked them behind Caim's back while pushing her breasts up against his chest.

Holy crap... How can a woman feel so good?! Caim's brain felt like it was beginning to melt as he freely enjoyed the softness of her body. At this rate, he felt like he was going to lose his reason too—but thankfully, the blonde woman suddenly grew weak. She let out one last moan and, as if all the strength she had shown when struggling earlier had been nothing but an illusion, she lost consciousness.

"What a shame... Uh, no, I mean, I'm glad it went well."

Caim examined her and found that her temperature was high, but her breath and pulse were back to normal. The worst had passed.

"She's fine for now. The problem is..."

"Aaaaaah! Kill meeeeeeeee!"

"...that I have to do it one more time. I feel like I'm gonna get addicted, and that's kinda scary..."

It felt like a joke to Caim—for him, the *Poison* King, to be intoxicated by something. He smiled wryly at the thought and pressed his lips against the red-haired woman's.

○ ○ ○

"Nooo!"

What is happening to me...? thought the beautiful blonde girl—Millicia—as her consciousness was dimmed by the effect the aphrodisiac was having on her body.

Millicia was of noble birth, and circumstances had made her depart the Garnet Empire to visit the Jade Kingdom. On her way to the royal capital with

her guards and servants, bandits had attacked them, and she'd been taken to their hideout. Her loyal guard, Lenka, had been kidnapped along with her, and they'd both been forced to drink a strange drug that made them feel aroused.

Millicia's body was burning up, itching and aching all over, and it made her feel like she was on the verge of losing her mind. It was as though she were on a small boat adrift in a storm, doing her best to stay sane. Unfortunately, after an hour, Millicia's reason was nearly obliterated as maddening pleasure continued to assault her. At this rate, she would never recover her sanity—and eventually, she would die like this.

“Nnnnh?!”

However, just as she was reaching the limits of her endurance, she suddenly tasted a sweet liquid in her mouth. A different heat from the one she'd felt earlier flooded her body.

I feel so warm...

If the drug forced on her by the bandits could be compared to a scorching blaze, then what she drank now was like the gentle flame of a hearth. All kinds of anguish washed away from her body, replaced by a sweet relief that melted her mind.

“Nnh...aahn!” Wanting to feel more, Millicia frantically pressed deeper into the other person's mouth, twining their tongues together. Doing something so naughty made her heart throb.

I wonder who this person is? I am certain he is kind and gentle... After all, he wouldn't kiss her so sweetly and tenderly if he wasn't. Her vision was too blurry to see who it was, but she was sure of one thing: the person before her would become very important to her. Her meeting with him wasn't a coincidence but fate guided by an angel or even God. That was what her intuition and faith that she had developed as a nun—something she'd become on behalf of her family—told her.

“Nnh...ah...aahn!” Millicia didn't want to be separated from this man and clung to his body, rubbing herself against him. She pressed her breasts against his chest and locked her legs behind his back, moaning in a loud and indecent voice that was quite improper for a lady. It was as if she were trying to mark

him as hers.

However, her body suddenly jolted, and with one last moan, she grew weak.

No... Please, don't leave me... Stay with me forever! Millicia desperately pleaded in her mind as she slowly lost consciousness.

○ ○ ○

“Eh...? I...”

“Where am I...?”

The two women awoke at the same time and pushed the blanket covering them to the side as they looked around, half asleep.

“Ah, are you finally up?”

They both quickly turned toward Caim’s voice the instant they heard it. He had just returned from dealing with the thieves’ corpses—naturally, he’d also finished off the guard he’d left unconscious outside the cave.

“Wh-Who are you?”

“Are you one of the bandits?!” The red-haired woman stood up and stepped in front of the blonde one to protect her, looking ready to attack Caim at any moment.

“Hey, calm down. I’m not your enemy.” Caim raised his hands to show that he wasn’t hostile. “I dealt with the bandits who kidnapped you. I just finished burying them in the forest, but I guess I can dig them up if you want proof.”

“You? By yourself?”

“I’m not just ‘you,’ I’m Caim. I *did* save you, so I hope you’ll at least show enough respect to call me by my name.” And yet, the red-haired woman continued to be wary of him. “By the way, how much do you remember? It seems you were forced to drink some kind of weird drug, but do you actually remember what happened to you?”

“Ah! Yes, we were forced to drink a strange liquid!” The blonde woman’s shoulders shook in realization. Then, still on the ground, she straightened her posture as she wrapped her body with the blanket and bowed. “We apologize

for being rude to you, our savior, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for rescuing us from these bandits. Forgive me for not saying so earlier, but my name is Millicia.”

“Milady! Please, do not bow to an unknown man like this!”

“You should show some gratitude too, Lenka. He saved us. If not for him...well, you can imagine what would have happened to us, no?”

Lenka winced and turned toward Caim. “Excuse me. And...thank you for saving us.”

Thanks to their conversation, he presumed that the blonde woman—Millicia—was of higher status than the red-haired one—Lenka.

So they don't remember what I did to them... Well, it would've been a bother if they'd asked me to take responsibility, so that's convenient. Caim sighed in relief—internally, so that they wouldn't notice.

“Going back to your question, no, I do not remember what happened to me after taking the drug. Were you the one who cured us?” Millicia asked.

“Yeah. As for proof that I took care of the bandits...I guess *that* should work.” Caim pointed to something on the ground.

“That's the magic sword the thieves' leader used!” Lenka exclaimed. “There's no doubt about it, milady! It's badly damaged, but yes, I'm certain that is indeed his fire magic sword. But how did it end up like this? It looks like it was melted by acid...”

“If you're all right now, it's more important that we leave. This isn't really somewhere we want to stay for too long.” Caim casually changed the subject, pointing toward the limestone cave's exit.

However, Millicia didn't answer immediately, squirming inside the blanket. Then after some hesitation, she said, “I agree with you, but the way we are clothed right now is a little...”

“Ah,” Caim said in realization. “Yeah, sorry about that. Should have been more thoughtful.”

The bandits had torn up the women's clothes, so they were practically naked

under the blanket. It would be extremely embarrassing for them to go outside dressed like that.

“I don’t have any women’s clothes, though... Ah, but the thieves might’ve stolen some. I haven’t looked at what they’ve got yet.” Caim had been busy, first dealing with their corpses and then with the current conversation. “I’m gonna check. Wanna come with me?”

Millicia nodded and stood up, but she was still unsteady on her feet. Lenka rushed to her aid.

“You should not force yourself to stand, milady.”

“I’m fine—and those bandits must have robbed the guards who protected me. I have to retrieve their belongings.”

“...Understood. Then I shall go with you.”

“I’m going first. You can take your time,” Caim assured the harmonious master-and-servant pair before proceeding deeper inside the limestone cave.

Once he was far enough away, Caim sighed and muttered to himself, “Milady, huh? I guess she must be highborn.”

It was easy to guess that Millicia was a noble lady—especially considering the quality of her torn dress. But...

Why didn’t she tell me her family name? She hadn’t given her household’s name when she introduced herself. That would have been normal for a commoner, but it was unusual for a woman of noble birth, which Millicia obviously was, to not give her family name and peerage. *Well, I guess I might not have noticed that if I hadn’t been born as an aristocrat myself, but still. Does she have a reason to hide her identity? Like, maybe she’s concealing her status and traveling in secret?* In that case, the whole situation sounded even more troublesome than he’d thought.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have acted on impulse? Though I guess I *did* receive a reward for it...” he said, remembering the deep kisses he had shared with them as he traced his lips with his fingers.

As expected, Caim found the bandits' belongings and spoils deep within the cave—weapons, armor, sacks of gold coins and jewels, expensive-looking trinkets, food, and other things all crammed together.

“They’ve been doing pretty well for themselves...but where would ordinary thieves even *get* this much money?”

Had they just finished a big job? Or perhaps they weren’t ordinary bandits at all—maybe they had an influential patron. Either way, they were far wealthier than random thieves should have been.

“Ah, thank goodness, I found our luggage.” After a little while, Millicia and Lenka arrived and were quite relieved to find their things.

“You can take what’s yours, and I’ll keep the rest as my reward for defeating the bandits. Is that okay with you?”

“Of course. It’s your right to do so.” Millicia nodded.

“Well then...I guess I’ll just put everything in here.” Starting with the sacks of coins, Caim shoved one thing after another inside his magic bag.

Lenka blinked in surprise at the sight of it. “For someone like you to have a magic bag that can hold so much... Are you a noble or a renowned adventurer?”

“No, I got it from a friend. I’m neither an aristocrat nor an adventurer. Is it really such a valuable item?”

“I’m no expert, but I once heard that a bag endowed with strong Spatial Magic can cost as much as a castle. If put on auction, it wouldn’t go for under ten thousand gold coins.”

“Seriously? I didn’t think she would give me something so valuable...” *Maybe she had some ulterior motive? I mean, it’s Faust, so that’s actually pretty likely.*

“Do you really have a friend who just *gives* you things like that? It’s practically a national treasure!”

“It’s rude to question our savior like that, Lenka. More importantly, we should change our clothes,” Millicia chided Lenka as she removed a dress and undergarments from a wooden box.

Having also found a set of clothes, Lenka glared at Caim. “My lady and I are

going to change. This should go without saying, but...don't peek."

"If I were enough of a scumbag to peek at girls while they're changing, your chastity would've been in danger *long* before this." He shrugged his shoulders—basically implying that he could have assaulted them whenever he'd wanted.

That made Lenka grimace, but she didn't reply. Instead, she simply headed back to where they'd been earlier, taking Millicia with her.

"She really doesn't trust me." He sighed. "Well, I guess that's only natural, considering they were just recently kidnapped by bandits."

Caim went back to filling his magic bag with the spoils, which included not only gold and silver coins but other valuables as well—including a large number of high-quality weapons. Combined with the leader's magic sword, it all pointed toward someone funding the gang.

"Not that I really care about the background of dead bandits, though, so it doesn't matter."

The deceased told no tales, so Caim wouldn't be able to get an answer anyway. Thinking about it was pointless.

And with that, Caim dropped that line of thought and focused on putting everything inside his magic bag.

"And that's it. I'm done. I wonder what the others are up to..."

"Sorry to have kept you waiting."

"I apologize for the delay—and I'm glad you didn't spy on us while we were changing."

Millicia and Lenka returned the moment he finished his task. The former was wearing a simple dress in light blue, the kind with a shorter hem to allow for ease of movement outdoors. The latter had donned lightweight metal armor, suggesting to Caim that she was a female knight who served as Millicia's guard.

"As if I would. Just trust me a little."

"Yes, you are being impolite to him, Lenka."

Lenka winced a little at her master's remonstrance. "Excuse me, that *was* rather rude," she said, looking down. "Still...for some reason, every time I look at you, my chest tightens and I feel strangely unsettled. We've only just met, and yet it feels as though we already have a deeper relationship than that..." she commented, brushing her fingers against her lips without thinking, not realizing that was where Caim had indulged himself while curing her.

"You too, Lenka? It's the same for me," Millicia agreed, blinking in surprise. "My heart races whenever I look at Caim, and I feel my cheeks flush. I wonder what is happening to my body..."

"I-I'm sure you're imagining things. It must be an aftereffect of the drug. We should head back to town quickly so you can rest... Yep, that's exactly what we should do!"

"...Perhaps you are right. We should gather our luggage and leave this cave."

Having successfully changed the subject, Caim let out a small sigh of relief, taking care not to be noticed. "But how will you transport all of this? Your carriage is broken. Well, I suppose I could let you use my magic bag if you want." Caim had only taken the bandits' spoils, not anything that had belonged to Millicia and Lenka, and what was left was a little too much to carry around.

"We will be fine. I have a storage item of my own." Millicia rummaged through their baggage until she retrieved a small, decorated wooden box. She then opened it, revealing a simple ring. "Just like your bag, this ring is endowed with Spatial Magic and can store our belongings—like this." Millicia extended the ring toward her luggage and it all vanished, as though the ring had drawn it inside itself. "Now, we may depart," she said with a smile, putting the ring on her right index finger.

"Yeah...let's go," Caim replied with a small frown. Just as Lenka had explained, items that could store a lot of things using Spatial Magic were rare, sometimes equal in value to national treasures. Wouldn't that mean that Millicia's ring was extremely valuable too?

Actually, I'm pretty sure her ring is even more valuable than my bag. After all, it's easier to transport, and the fact it's on your finger means you could use it to make a weapon instantly appear in your hand whenever you needed. Caim once

again started to wonder who Millicia really was. Perhaps she was so high status that it would surprise him. *But if that's the case, I need to be even more careful to not let her know that I stole a kiss from her. It would be a real pain if I were incriminated for lèse-majesté or something.*

"Is there a problem?" Millicia asked Caim, seeing he wasn't moving.

"No...maybe it's because I've been in this cave for a while and it's cold here, but I just felt a slight chill run down my spine."

"Is that so? Then excuse us—it's our fault for taking so long to make our preparations."

"It's nothing. Let's just go out already—I miss the sun," Caim replied, turning his back to the apologetic Millicia and briskly heading toward the cave's exit.

Once out of the bandits' hideout, Caim and the girls went back to the main road where they'd left the broken carriage. The scene was as pitiful as the last time Caim had seen it.

"Everyone... You all died trying to protect me..." Millicia fell to the ground, her voice trembling as she gazed sorrowfully upon the dead men lying around the carriage.

"Milady..." Lenka helped her master to stand back up, her face just as pale as Millicia's.

The men had been Millicia's guards. Unfortunately, they hadn't been strong enough to repel the bandits' assault, so they had been killed, allowing the thieves to kidnap Millicia and Lenka, the only woman among the guards.

"If you want to bury them, I can help. Should I?" Caim asked.

"No, I will store their bodies in my ring. They sacrificed their lives to defend me. The least I can do is take them back to their homeland so they might be mourned properly." Millicia bit her lower lip, enduring her grief as she stowed the guards' corpses away inside her ring. Finally, she did the same with the carriage's remains, then bowed to Caim. "Once again, thank you. Not only did you save us, but you've also given me the chance to properly mourn my retainers. I will forever be grateful to you for that."

“It’s no big deal. I even got the bandits’ treasure out of it,” Caim said, patting his magic bag and shrugging his shoulders. It wasn’t like he had had no money at all, but he *was* a wanderer with no employment and no connections, so the vast fortune he’d taken from the thieves was a boon in itself. The detour hadn’t been useless.

“And so...I want to show my gratitude, but...” Millicia started, her words a little evasive as she furrowed her beautiful brow. “Well, I am traveling for a reason, and though I do have clothes and food, I can’t say I have a lot of money on hand. I won’t be able to prepare a reward for you immediately...”

“You don’t need to thank me. I don’t mind.”

“No, you saved us—I have to do something. Also, well...” She trailed off and fidgeted with her fingers bashfully.

Caim cocked his head to the side until Lenka decided to step in. “I’m ashamed to ask this even though we haven’t offered you anything in return yet, but we would like to employ you as our guard.”

“You want me to guard you?”

“This is a disgraceful thing for a knight to admit, but I can’t protect my lady by myself. I apologize for all my rude comments until now, so please, would you lend us your strength?” Lenka bowed with a vexed expression. She understood that if they ran into any more trouble, she wouldn’t be able to defend Millicia alone. Admitting her weakness was frustrating, and she still didn’t completely trust Caim, but Lenka was willing to throw away all her pride on her master’s behalf.

“Hmm, well...I get your problem, but where are you even heading in the first place?”

“To the royal capital. We hope that you will accompany us until then,” Millicia answered. “Even if I cannot offer you anything for now, I promise I will give you the reward you deserve. So please, would you come with us?”

“The royal capital, huh?” Caim was slightly moved by her earnest plea, but he ended up shaking his head, though it made him feel a little sorry to do it. “I can’t. I’m going the opposite way.”

Caim was heading toward the Garnet Empire, which was east of their current position, while the royal capital was to the west. It wasn't like he was in such a hurry that he couldn't afford a detour, but he didn't want to waste too much time either.

And maybe my old man's already put me on the wanted list. I finally got the chance to do some leisurely travel, so I don't want to spend my time getting chased around. Caim would not be easily defeated by anyone sent after him, but he would rather not fight if it wasn't needed. He wanted to find a new homeland and make his own family, not spend all his time fighting like someone addicted to battle. *There's no guarantee that my old man will stay silent, after all. Even if my poison will keep him from moving for a while, he's still a count. As a noble, his accusations would easily make me a wanted man.* Worst-case scenario, Caim's father could end up turning the entire Jade Kingdom against him.

"So, yeah... Sorry, but I can't accompany you to the royal capital. I don't mind escorting you to the nearest town, but you'll need to find someone else there."

"But...! Where are you heading anyway?"

"To the Garnet Empire in the east. I've heard it's a great nation that rules over the eastern part of the continent," he revealed, having no reason to hide it.

Millicia gasped, and her eyes widened. "I see... If that's the case, then we shall change our objective."

"Huh?" Caim tilted his head to the side.

"Allow me to make a new request. Would you escort us to the imperial capital of the Garnet Empire instead? Naturally, you will be recompensed," Millicia said, her blue eyes filled with powerful determination.

Chapter 5: Fellow Travelers

And so, Caim agreed to escort Millicia and Lenka until they reached the imperial capital. He sympathized with the fact that they had no one to rely on now that their guards had been killed, and their destination was the same in any case.

Caim was in the lead, followed by Lenka, then Millicia on a horse they had found in the bandits' hideout. There was only one, so it had been given to Millicia.

"Milady...are you sure about this?" Lenka asked Millicia in a low voice to avoid Caim overhearing.

"We've already talked about it, Lenka. You need to let this go," Millicia answered from atop her horse.

"I shall repeat myself as many times as needed," Lenka said. "Returning to the empire is completely unreasonable. Why do you think that person helped you run away in the first place?"

"I shouldn't have fled. How can I be allowed to live peacefully after abandoning my duties like that? That must have been the reason the heavens punished me with those bandits," Millicia replied decisively to her knight's warning. "I'm certain that our meeting with Caim, who is heading toward the empire, is fate...providence, even. I'm being told to return and do what I must do. So I won't run away anymore. I'll face my role head-on, even if it means losing my life."

"Milady... Such magnanimous thoughts..." Lenka said in a tearful voice, overcome with emotion at her master's words. "If you have steeled your resolve, then I have nothing more to say. I will not repeat the same mistake—I swear to protect you for sure next time!"

"Thank you, Lenka. I hope you will continue to support me."

After listening to the entire conversation between the master-servant pair

behind him, Caim sighed. They thought their talk was private, but the five senses of a practitioner of the Toukishin Style like Caim were always keen, even without Mana Compression. If he seriously focused mana to his ears, he would be able to hear a needle drop hundreds of meters away, so there was no way he would fail to hear a conversation happening only a few meters behind him.

It really smells like trouble...and not just a little bit of trouble either. Maybe I shouldn't have agreed to travel with them. From their conversation, he didn't quite understand what Millicia's burden really was, but he was certain that it wasn't something he wanted to get involved with. *I chose to go to the empire to avoid trouble, and yet I've ended up involved in something anyway. Should I just abandon them here?* This heartless thought popped into Caim's mind, but he couldn't bring himself to act on it. Indeed, Caim had already started to grow attached to the pair. *Why do men treat their first woman—or is it “women,” in this case?—like they're special? And it doesn't help that they're so pretty...* He had noticed this in the cave, but going outside had confirmed that both Millicia and Lenka were impressive beauties.

Millicia was obviously a well-bred noble lady. Her blonde hair cascaded down her back like a waterfall, and her blue eyes glittered like gemstones. Her skin was pale and as smooth as the finest silk, and her face could be likened to a work of art crafted by God himself. She was a fantastically pretty girl, reminiscent of a goddess found in religious paintings.

On the other hand, Lenka was a woman as healthy and robust as a lioness. Her limbs had just the right amount of muscle, and her skin was a healthy tan. Though concealed by armor, her figure was outstanding—if she wore a provocative dress, she would undoubtedly be quite irresistible. While she lacked Millicia's transcendent beauty, her strong and spirited looks would certainly capture the attention of many.

And I kissed beauties like that... Ah, damn it! Why can't I just forget about that?! It's like I'm the one who's been affected by that drug!

“Incidentally, how old are you, Caim? You seem to be around the same age as me,” Millicia suddenly asked.

“Huh? Ah, are you talking to me?” Brought back to reality after getting lost in

thought, Caim reacted a little late. No matter how great his senses were, they were useless if he didn't actually listen to the conversation. "I'm...eighteen. I'm an adult."

To be more precise, the boy called Caim Halsberg had lived thirteen years, but he had fused with the Poison Queen, whose age was in the hundreds. The process had matured both his body and mind, so it wasn't accurate to say that he was still only thirteen.

"Then we're the same age! What a coincidence!" Millicia exclaimed, as though she were happy about it. "And Lenka is twenty, so we're all around the same age!"

"Yeah..."

"Considering our ages, it wouldn't be *too* strange if we were married and had children, don't you think? I suppose it only feels strange because we were still children ourselves not so long ago. Ah, I've been wanting to ask—the color of your hair and eyes is rather unusual, Caim. What hair and eye color do you think our babies would have?"

"What kind of question is that?! How am I supposed to respond?!" Caim said, unconsciously raising his voice.

"Ah!" Millicia hid her mouth with her hand. "I-I'm sorry. I have no idea why, but when I see you, I get really excited... Still, for me to ask something like that... What's happening to me?" she said, her face flushed.

Caim watched her silently, wondering if perhaps she had lied about not remembering the kiss. He turned his back to them, facing forward to hide his stiff expression, then suddenly felt a tingling sensation along his spine.

"Well, looks like our conversation is over. Enemies incoming," he declared.

"What?! Bandits again?!" Lenka laid her hand on the hilt of her sword and surveyed her surroundings. However, she saw nothing.

Caim, on the other hand, could clearly sense the hostility. "No, it's monsters this time. Look—they're coming." He pointed at the forest next to the highway.

A few seconds later, a two-meter-tall figure jumped out from among the

trees.

“An orc?!” Millicia shouted.

The monster was indeed an orc—a humanoid pig with a fat body. Along with goblins, they were one of the most common monsters.

“Oh, it’s just an orc,” Lenka said confidently as she drew her sword. “Orcs are Baron-class monsters. They’re not exactly weak, but I’m strong enough to defeat one by myself. This will be a great opportunity to redeem myself. Sir Caim, would you let me take care of it?”

“I don’t mind, but can you fight against *all* of them?”

“Eh?” Lenka blinked at Caim’s question, but she immediately understood its meaning as other orcs started to appear from the forest one after another. “What?! How are there so many?!”

When the last one had emerged, there were thirty of them, which wasn’t a number Lenka could face by herself. They seemed completely mad, their eyes gleaming with a fiery light as they rushed toward Caim and the girls like wild boars.

“What is happening?!” Millicia cried, shocked at the scene before her, and did her best to calm her panicking horse.

“Hmm...yeah, why *are* they like that? They seem pretty excited...” Caim said, stealing a knowing glance at the girls.

Orcs were well-known for kidnapping and raping females of other species. If they found a human or elf woman, they would capture her, bring her to their den, and violate her until she died. It wasn’t as if there weren’t female orcs, and they couldn’t even reproduce with other species to begin with. And yet, they exhibited this mysterious habit of almost always capturing women alive.

Which would mean they’re attacking us because they smelled the girls’ scent. Different as they were, Millicia and Lenka were both beautiful, so it wasn’t so strange that the orcs had lost all reason. Moreover, not even half a day ago, the girls had been forcefully aroused by an aphrodisiac. Even if they had cleaned themselves up, it might not have completely washed off their “female” smell.

“It’s just one thing after another. I guess when attractive women are around, trouble is never far behind.”

“How can you be so calm?! We need to run!” Millicia shouted.

“Nah, it’s no big deal. Just stay away so you don’t get caught up in it.” Caim lightly waved his hand as he stepped forward.

“No! Even for you, it’s impossible to defeat so many orcs! Just run!”

“I told you, it’s no big deal. Besides, your horse is so scared you wouldn’t be able to flee even if you wanted to.” Millicia’s horse was in such a great panic that it was likely to just throw her and bolt away on its own if she tried to escape. “If we can’t run away, then the only answer is to face them!”

“Ah! Caim!”

He ignored Millicia and dashed toward the orcs. They were far enough away that his fight with the monsters wouldn’t involve the girls.

“You’re only Baron class,” Caim said with a savage grin. “I’m gonna finish you off quickly so we can get back to our journey.” He wrapped his body with Mana Compression—the basis of the Toukishin Style, the supremely powerful martial art he had learned from his unpleasant father.

For a moment, Caim thought about using poison, but he immediately realized he couldn’t do that in front of his companions. On top of that, there was a risk that the wind would blow some toxins their way, so it was better to only use martial arts.

“Well, it’s not like I need to use my poison against small fry like you anyway!”

The nearest orc swung its log-sized club at Caim with a roar. Considering the orc’s two-meter height and the thickness of its arms, even a fully armored knight couldn’t survive the blow. And yet, Caim didn’t dodge—instead, he punched the club head-on. His fist, clad in condensed mana, destroyed the weapon and continued its course toward the orc’s body. The moment Caim made contact with the monster, the shock of the impact blasted a fist-sized hole through its torso.

“Come on—who’s next?! That fight against the bandits was too easy, so I

haven't had the chance to blow off steam. I hope you'll entertain me!"

The orcs roared.

"Ha ha ha! That's it! Bring it on!" Caim exclaimed with a daring smile on his face as several orcs rushed at him together. They must have realized they would end up dead like their ally if they attacked alone and had decided to crush Caim with numbers instead. Some were armed with clubs, others picked up stones to throw, and the rest used their fists.

"That's quite brave of you! But in the end, you're just rushing at me recklessly!" Caim took them down one after another—kicking their heads, punching their bodies, and breaking their limbs.

Some orcs pushed past him in order to get to the women in the back, but...

"As if I would let you do that!" Caim immediately killed them first.

Little by little, the number of orcs decreased, and it didn't even take five minutes for him to defeat them all. However, it still wasn't over.

"Goaaaaah!"

"Huh?"

A new monster emerged from the forest where the orcs had come from. It was around twice the size of a regular orc, its body padded with muscle instead of fat and covered with black fur. Its fiery red eyes gleamed eerily.

"Oh, here comes the leader! Finally, the real fun is starting!" Caim took one look at the monster and recognized it thanks to the Poison Queen's memories. "You're an orc general—that is, an orc that mutated and became a higher class!"

As Caim had said, an orc general was a mutated form of an ordinary orc. It was two classes higher, making it Count class, and even a party of veteran adventurers would need to risk their lives to kill one.

As soon as they spotted the massive monster, Millicia and Lenka called out to Caim from their vantage point a little ways away.

"Is that an orc general?!"

“Stop, Sir Caim! You need to run!”

“I’m fine—just don’t come any closer. It won’t be a problem,” Caim replied nonchalantly, waving his hand.

“Gui hi hi hi!” The orc general let out a strange, eerie laugh. He wasn’t even paying attention to Caim, focusing instead on Millicia and Lenka. His lust-filled eyes sent a clear message: “Those females are mine, and I’m gonna ravish them.”

“Hmph! You’re ogling them like a dirty old man. Don’t drool over women while we’re fighting, you pig!”

And yet, the orc general stayed fixated on the girls—it didn’t even see Caim as an enemy even though he had killed all of its underlings. The orc general was mocking Caim, implying he wasn’t even worth fighting.

“I hate it when a weaker opponent looks down on me,” Caim said. “Guess I’ll just have to kill you.”

And with that, Caim unleashed his bloodlust.

“Buoh?!” The orc general sensed the sharp intent to slaughter it and immediately turned toward Caim.

“What’s wrong? You look like you’ve been doused with cold water. Did you finally notice that *you* were the prey?”

The orc general snorted in rage.

“Yeah, that’s it—get angry. Muster all of your fury and come at me. I’ll take you on and crush you!”

The monster accepted Caim’s provocation and attacked him with a roar, armed with a massive hatchet-like sword that it had likely stolen from a traveler or adventurer. Naturally, it used no swordsmanship, instead primitively swinging its weapon and relying solely on the strength of its brawny arm. However, though such a strike might have felled even a first-class warrior, it was useless against a true master—or an abnormal monster like Caim.

“Toukishin Style—Seiryuu!” Caim stopped the orc’s blade with his mana-clad right arm. The clash made a metallic *clang* and scattered sparks, and the orc

general was shocked to see that Caim wasn't injured.

"It was a clumsy strike that relied entirely on your physical strength. You should at least infuse your blade with mana."

"Guoh!" At this, the monster panicked and tried to flee.

"You're too slow—and as if I would let you escape anyway!" Caim swung his right arm like a sword, slashing diagonally through the orc's blade, then bisecting the monster itself with a slash running from its lower-right abdomen all the way to its left shoulder. Its upper body slid to the ground, and its lower half followed a few seconds later.



Seiryuu—Azure Dragon—was one of the techniques of the Basic Stance, based around the principle of condensing mana around the arm and sharpening it like a sword. It also vibrated repeatedly like a high-frequency blade, making it extremely potent, its sharpness equal to the finest swords made by expert blacksmiths.

“Amazing... So *this* is how strong Caim is...” Millicia said.

“That’s impossible! How could he so easily defeat an orc general?! That’s a Count-class monster! Usually an entire order of knights has to be sent out to deal with them, and he did it alone!” Lenka exclaimed, shocked.

“Caim seems to be as strong as renowned S-rank adventurers like the Magic Sword Princess, the Storm King, or even the Master Pugilist. How can someone be so powerful yet completely unknown?”

Millicia and Lenka discussed Caim’s ability a short distance away. That was a first for him, but being praised by gorgeous women didn’t exactly feel bad. He turned their way with a proud expression, lightly swinging his arm. “Just like I said, it was no big deal. Let’s continue on our way.”

“Y-Yes... Ah, wait a minute. We need to collect its manacystal. An orc general should sell for quite a sum,” Millicia said.

“A manacystal... Ah, yeah, forgot all about that thing.” Recalling the word, Caim nodded and looked down at the orc general’s corpse.

Manacrystals were created when mana solidified inside the bodies of monsters—the stronger the monster, the bigger and purer the crystal. They were used as materials for weapons or ingredients in medicines, so they could be sold at a high price.

“The manacystal from a Count-class monster should be valuable enough to fund the construction of a house. And even if they’re not as good, we also have all the manacrystals from the ordinary orcs. If we sell everything, we should be able to live comfortably for a while,” Millicia explained.

“I see. Well, let’s gather them all, then.”

Caim created a blade on his arm using Seiryuu and dissected the orc general

to take its manacrystal. Then, he did the same for all the other orcs. He didn't do a particularly good job—it was quite obvious that this was his first time dismantling monsters.

“Uh...” Millicia looked away, feeling sick from watching Caim's crude work.

“Ah, sorry. Precise tasks like this aren't really my forte.”

“No, I should be the one apologizing for not being able to help. Not only did we let you fight alone, but we're making you do everything else too...”

“I don't mind. You hired me to be your guard, so I'm just doing my job. If you really want to thank me, then just give me a handsome reward down the line.”

“Yes, of course—I am certain you will find your recompense satisfying!” Millicia clasped her hands in front of her chest, her face serious as if she had just made an important decision.

“Hm?” Caim was puzzled by her oddly earnest behavior as he continued his work.



“Just who *is* this man?!” Lenka felt something as hot as lava welling up in her chest as she watched Caim battle the orcs.

Why am I so interested in him, a man? What kind of joke is this? She bit her lower lip in frustration, unable to calm her throbbing heart.

Lenka had been born in the eastern Garnet Empire. Being from a family of knights, she'd learned swordsmanship from a young age, and coupled with her talent, this had made her stronger than other people her age—even men, whom she'd crushed during practice matches. In her opinion, she had only lost against the bandits because they'd taken her by surprise and she'd been in a position where she had to protect Millicia—certainly not because she was weaker than they were.

In short, to Lenka, men were just blockheads with egos as big as their bodies, unworthy of her respect or interest.

And yet...why can't I look away from him as he fights? I'm acting like a lovestruck girl!

“Caim, you’re so amazing... As I thought, you must be my destiny!”

“Wh-What are you saying, milady?!” Lenka turned toward Millicia and saw that she was watching Caim with a dreamy expression, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening just like a maiden in love.

D-Don’t tell me I look like that?! Lenka reflexively touched her face with her hands. True, she had been feeling something for Caim since he had saved them in the cave, but she had thought that was merely irritation at owing her life to an unknown man. Was it perhaps something more? No way! That’s not possible! I’m sure it’s just an aftereffect of the drug. Yeah, that must be it—it’s just that my body isn’t back to normal yet!

As Lenka was trying to convince herself, a giant orc emerged from the forest—an orc general.

“Stop, Sir Caim! You need to run!” she shouted.

No matter how strong he was, there was no way Caim could defeat a Count-class monster...or at least, that was what Lenka thought until she saw him kill the creature easily, without using a weapon or even suffering any injury.

“Impossible!” Lenka had been certain Caim would lose, and yet he’d won almost effortlessly. His strength was overwhelming—greater than any other man she’d ever met.

What unbelievable power. When I look at him, I...I...

“I’m getting wet...” she said, unconsciously. Her lower abdomen felt unbearably hot just watching Caim, and a sweet numbness spread throughout her body as womanly nectar began to drip from between her legs.

I...I want that man to spank me...to put a collar on me and drag me around town...

“Wait! What am I *thinking*?! I sound like some kind of pervert.”

“What are you talking about, Lenka?” Millicia said, drawing Lenka out of her sweet fantasy. “Let’s go.”

“Y-Yes!” Lenka replied, then followed her master.

The day when she would awaken to her perverted fetish, though, was slowly

drawing closer.



Having overcome the attack by the orcs, the group finally arrived at their first destination.

“Is that the sea...? No, it’s a huge river!” Caim shouted like a child as he looked down at the scenery from his vantage point on a nearby hill.

In the distance, a vast canal—the Flumen River—cut through the landscape, separating the Jade Kingdom from the Garnet Empire. On its bank stood the border town of Otarria.

“It’s amazing! I’ve never seen a river that big and wide!” Caim exclaimed with sparkling eyes, throwing his arms to the sky. There was a river near where he used to live, but naturally, it couldn’t compare to the Flumen River in terms of scale.

Millicia chuckled. “You’re just like a young boy.”

“Seems you have an unexpectedly childish side,” Lenka said. “That changes my impression of you a little.”

The girls both smiled at Caim’s spontaneous enthusiasm.

“What? I can’t help it! This is the first time I’ve seen such a big river, after all!”

“We’re not chiding you. In fact, I find it quite charming—adorable, even,” Millicia said.

“I took you for a cold, ruthless man, but it seems I was wrong. I apologize for my prejudice,” Lenka added.

“Instead of apologizing, I’d rather you just forget about it... Ah, damn it!” Caim scratched his head to hide his embarrassment and ran down the hill as if trying to flee from the conversation. As he neared the town’s gate, he spotted a long queue and stopped in his tracks. “It seems like the guards are inspecting everyone who enters. Is that normal for a big town like this?”

“Criminals from the kingdom often try to flee to the empire, so they try to catch them at the city’s entrance,” Lenka explained.

The three of them walked to the end of the line, waiting for their turn to come. There were a lot of people, but the guards must have been used to their work because they inspected everyone smoothly. After only an hour of waiting, it was Caim and the girls' turn.

One of the soldiers looked at them and asked, "Why did you come to this town?"

"We're traveling. We want to take a boat to the empire," Caim said.

"Do you have identification? If you don't, it'll cost you a silver coin. Otherwise, it's half that."

"I don't have any," Caim answered honestly.

"Then you need to touch this jewel and say your name. That will allow us to know if you're a criminal or not."

Caim frowned, puzzled, as he looked at the transparent, fist-sized jewel that sat the table next to the guard. It looked like a crystal ball, and Caim wondered what it was.

"That's an angel's eye—a magic item used to determine if people are criminals or not," Millicia explained, seeing Caim's confusion. "If someone whose name is registered as a criminal touches it, the crystal will turn red. Naturally, the same also happens if you give a false name."

"So it can discern if you're lying, huh? Pretty interesting item."

"Incidentally, it was invented by a mage called Faust—even though she was a registered criminal herself. Quite an ironic story."

Caim froze for an instant at hearing the familiar name but decided to ignore it. "So I just need to touch the crystal and say my name, right?" he said, putting his hand on the jewel. "Caim. I don't have a family name."

It wasn't exactly a lie. After fusing with the Poison Queen, Caim Halsberg was no more—he had been reborn as an entirely new person. As proof, the crystal ball didn't react and stayed transparent.

"You're clear. You just need to pay the toll and you can go," the guard said.

"Here." Caim gave him a silver coin. "Good luck with your job," he added in

parting, then passed through the gate. As he did, Caim thought about the jewel's lack of reaction. That meant his name still wasn't registered as a criminal even though he had beaten his father, a count—though perhaps the information just hadn't reached this town yet.

"We have ours." Lenka showed the soldier what seemed to be identification papers, then gave him a silver coin to pay the toll for both her and Millicia before passing through the gate too.

"Now that we've safely entered the town, what do we do?" Caim asked.

"Considering the time, how about searching for an inn? Tomorrow, we can look for a boat to take us to the opposite shore of the river," Millicia answered.

Otarria was on the western side of the Flumen River, and crossing the water meant entering the empire's territory. There was also a town on the eastern side of the river, and boats went back and forth between there and Otarrria almost daily, carrying both goods and passengers.

"You have never been to the empire, right? Then we shall guide you once we reach the other side," Millicia suggested.

"Thanks. I look forward to visiting the Garnet Empire," Caim said, his eyes sparkling with anticipation as he thought about the sights awaiting him.

"Anyway, we should do as you said and search for an inn. We're renting separate rooms, right?"

"Eh? Actually, I wouldn't mind sleeping in the same room..." Millicia muttered.

"Of course we will! Right, milady?"

"Uh...yes. I will endure being in separate rooms." Millicia reluctantly nodded, looking disappointed.

Having decided to spend the night in Otarrria, Caim and the girls searched around for somewhere to stay. Being a trading town, it had a lot of inns, so they thought they would be able to find rooms easily. Unexpectedly, though, they had no success.

“Sorry, but we don’t have two rooms available. We’re full,” the innkeeper said.

Caim’s shoulders slumped. “I guess we’re out of luck here too...”

This was the tenth inn they’d checked, and they still hadn’t found rooms. Now, evening was approaching, and at that point it would likely be too late to find lodging.

“What should we do? At this rate, we will end up sleeping outdoors.”

“That would be fine by me, but there’s no way I would let my lady sleep in the streets.”

Millicia and Lenka were uneasy about the situation. Caim personally didn’t mind sleeping outdoors either, but he at least wanted the girls to be able to sleep in a bed.

“What a bind... If only there were an inn with vacant rooms somewhere in this town...” Caim complained, as he stood before the front desk.

A girl wearing an apron approached the innkeeper. “Can’t they use that room, Dad?”

“That room? Ah, yeah, I suppose that one is available.”

“Wait, you *do* have a free room?” Caim cocked his head, listening to the conversation between the innkeeper and his daughter.

“An adventurer paid for it in advance, but he took a request from the guild and hasn’t returned yet. He only put down enough money to keep the room until today, so it’s available now. But...” The innkeeper stroked his goatee, a little troubled. “It’s only one room. Two can probably squeeze themselves into the bed, but the last one will have to sleep on the floor.”

“I don’t mind. Millicia and Lenka can take the room. I’ll search somewhere else.” And if Caim didn’t find anything, he would be fine with rolling himself up in a blanket and sleeping in the streets.

When he looked back to ask for the girls’ opinion, though, he saw Millicia waving her hands in a gesture of denial.

“No, I can’t let you be the only one to sleep outdoors! Please, stay in our

room!”

“Milady, Sir Caim is a man!” Lenka interjected. “No matter the circumstances, you cannot sleep in the same room as him!”

“He might be a man, but more importantly, he saved our lives! We can’t let our savior sleep outdoors—that’s bad manners!” Millicia declared proudly.

Her argument made sense, but Caim had never slept in the same room as girls his age and wasn’t too keen on it. “You don’t need to worry about me. Besides, we were sleeping in tents before we got here.”

“No, it just won’t do! If you continue to refuse, then I will sleep outside so you can use the bed!”

“What kind of brute do you think I am? As if I could ever sleep comfortably in a bed while you’re outside.”

“Then the only answer is for us to all sleep in the same room. I’m fine with it, so what’s the problem?” Millicia cornered him with a smile that wouldn’t take no for an answer.

As Caim stayed silent, not knowing what to say, the middle-aged innkeeper tapped his shoulder. “Hey, lad—that woman’s really serious about this. Now it’s your turn to show your resolve and prove you’re a man!”

“I’m absolutely certain you’re misunderstanding the situation. We’re not in *that* sort of relationship.”

“Everyone starts out inexperienced. I was super nervous the first time I slept with the missus too. When push comes to shove, just let the woman do all the work while you’re counting the ceiling tiles!”

“Count the ceiling tiles...?” Caim said, puzzled by the incomprehensible advice.

In the end, he agreed, and it was decided that the three of them would sleep in the same room.

Caim, Millicia, and Lenka were guided to the vacant room. It was on the second floor of the inn, in the north corner where it wouldn’t have much

exposure to the sun.

“Here it is!” The innkeeper’s daughter led them into the room.

Inside, there was a bed, a plain table, and a dresser all crowded together. It was spacious enough for a single person, but it was rather cramped for three.

“Dinner is included in your lodging fees. The dining hall is next to the reception desk, but it closes at midnight, so please make sure to come before that. Ah, if you want alcohol, we charge an extra for that though, so don’t forget your wallet,” she explained, handing a blanket to Caim. “Well then, see you later!” And with that, she left.

An awkward silence filled the room.

Well, we can’t stay quiet like this forever. First, we need to decide who sleeps where. Realizing they weren’t going to make any progress like this, Caim cleared his throat and said, “I think we can agree that Millicia should use the bed. As for you, Lenka, you should be able to sleep with her if you squeeze together.”

“N-No, I’ll sleep on the floor too. I don’t deserve to share a bed with my lady.”

“I can’t be the only one to use the bed—I would feel guilty! Since you saved us, you should be the one to take the bed, Caim!”

“I told you, I’m not a brute! I couldn’t possibly sleep in the bed while you ladies sleep on the floor,” Caim retorted. “Also, you’re the ones who’ve hired me. As a man *and* as your guard, I can’t let you sleep on the floor, Millicia! If you feel guilty about being the only one to use the bed, then have Lenka sleep with you!”

“I will sleep on the floor! I can’t do something as presumptuous as sleeping with my lady!” Lenka firmly refused.

Millicia’s beautiful brow furrowed and she pursed her rose-colored lips. “So you want to sleep next to Caim, Lenka? You want to lie next to him on the floor?”

“What?! Of course not! Why would you think that?!”

“Because that’s what sleeping on the floor means. Look at the size of the room—if you both lie on the floor, you will inevitably be right next to each

other.”

As they’d noted earlier, it was a one-person room, and not a particularly spacious one at that. Though it wasn’t so small that they’d have to be glued to each other, they *would* be close enough that if one of them were to turn over in their sleep, they would likely end up on top of the other.

“Ugh...” Lenka winced.

“Ah, well, yeah, that would be troublesome,” Caim commented. He wouldn’t know what to do if the first thing he saw when waking up in the morning was Lenka’s face. It would probably make them feel awkward for the whole rest of the day.

“But...” Lenka grumbled, conflicted.

“Let’s sleep together in the bed, Lenka. If you refuse, then I suppose the three of us can sleep on the floor together instead. I don’t mind, but that would mean we would really be crowded together.”

After some hesitation, Lenka gave in. “Understood. I shall take a corner of the bed.”

With this, it was decided the bed would be used by Millicia and Lenka while Caim would sleep on the floor.

Having decided on their sleeping arrangements, Caim and the girls descended into the dining hall. The place was filled with guests from the inn eating their meals, and in a corner there was a group making merry as they drank.

“Ah, found a place.” Caim pointed at a table close to the wall. Millicia and Lenka sat next to each other and Caim sat on the opposite side.

The innkeeper’s daughter immediately came over to them. “Welcome, dear guests! We have both water and ale—which one would you like? We do charge extra for ale, though.”

“Water, please,” Millicia said.

“The same as my lady.” Lenka followed suit.

“I think I’ll try the ale,” Caim said.

“Two waters, one ale. The water is free, but the ale will be three copper coins.”

“Here.”

The girl took the money from Caim and went away, but she quickly returned with three wooden mugs. “Your meal is being prepared. Please be patient.” Then she moved on to another table. The way she scurried around the room like a small animal, working cheerfully, put the onlookers in a pleasant mood.

Millicia took a sip of water and let out a little sigh. “Finally, we can rest. I’m tired from the long trip.” She looked at Caim. “Do you have a taste for alcohol?”

“Well...kinda,” he answered vaguely as he stared at the foamy liquid in his mug. He had never drunk alcohol before and had only asked for it out of curiosity. However, the ale smelled peculiar, so he had to work up a little bit of courage to actually taste it.

I’m immune to all kinds of toxins thanks to becoming the Poison King, so I don’t think the alcohol will actually work on me, but...oh well. I won’t know if I don’t try.

Caim made up his mind and downed the mug of ale in one gulp. His first taste of alcohol spread through his mouth, and the bittersweet aroma of wheat permeated his nose. The sharp but still pleasant flavor was difficult to describe, but one thing was clear.

“Yup, it’s not bad,” Caim said. He couldn’t assert that it was actually *good*, as he didn’t fully understand the taste, but swallowing the drink had felt invigorating and quite good. Even though his throat was still wet from the first drink, he already wanted another, and he was starting to feel strangely lighthearted.

“Sorry, I’d like another drink. Actually, make it three...no, five more.”

“Yes, just a moment!”

Caim called out to the girl who was busy at another table, and it didn’t take long for her to bring the mugs of ale to their table. Caim drank them one by one as if they were water.

“Wow...that’s amazing...”

“Your alcohol tolerance is quite high, Sir Caim.”

“Seems so. This is the first time I’ve ever had it, so I only just learned that myself.”

“It’s your first time? No way...” Lenka said, astonished. But it was the truth.

“Um...are you planning to continue drinking? Should I order more?” Millicia asked.

“Yeah, please. I’ll pay you back later.”

“No, I don’t mind. I have enough money for our travel expenses and meals, so I can pay for you. Please, drink to your heart’s content.” Millicia smiled sweetly, and maybe it was because of the alcohol, but Caim thought he could see angel wings behind her.

Getting drunk feels weird. Besides, shouldn’t poison be ineffective on me? Caim wondered as he continued to drink without stopping.

As the proverb “alcohol is the best of all medicines” implied, the right amount of alcohol helped to reduce stress and aided relaxation. Naturally, drinking too much would be bad for the liver, among many other negative effects it had on the body, but in Caim’s case, none of that would ever happen. As he was the Poison King, the moment the alcohol began to affect his body like a poison rather than a medicine, it was immediately neutralized. So no matter how much he drank, Caim would never get more than slightly tipsy, feeling good and experiencing only the benefits of alcohol.

“Ha ha, I feel great. Starting this journey was a great idea. The world is so beautiful!”

“C-Caim seems to be truly enjoying himself...” Millicia said, watching Caim drink ale as if it were the tastiest thing ever. “That makes me want to try too.” She looked at the other mugs of ale on the table. “I’ve had wine a few times but never anything made from wheat. He makes it look so delicious, so maybe I should give it a try...”

“We are sleeping in the same room as Sir Caim tonight, milady. Something

might happen if you become inebriated, so please do not drink!” Lenka chided her master.

Millicia pouted. “It should be fine if it’s just a little, no? And I wouldn’t exactly *mind* if Caim did something to me.”

“I would! If some man from who knows where were to defile you, milady, I could not bear it!” Lenka protested.

Caim raised an eyebrow at how stubborn she was being. “Hey, just let her drink. Also, it kinda hurts that you think I’m the type of scum who would take advantage of a woman who can’t resist.”

“It’s not about you personally, Sir Caim! It’s about staying on guard when in the presence of a man!”

“Hmm, being a noble lady sounds tiresome.” Caim felt like his sister, Arnette, had been pretty unrestrained, but maybe it was different for *truly* well-bred ladies. It was sad that they couldn’t drink alcohol freely. “There’s nothing wrong with having discipline, but you should at least relax a little while we’re resting at the inn. You can’t keep your guard up *all* the time.”

“Exactly. You worry too much, Lenka!” Seizing an opportunity, Millicia snatched Caim’s half-finished mug.

“Ah!” Though Lenka noticed, she wasn’t fast enough to stop her master from finishing the mug.

Once she was done, Millicia took a breath and said, “The taste is quite different from wine. And...my body is really warming up. Is that because ale contains more alcohol than wine?”

“Hey, that was mine. I already drank from it,” Caim said.

“What’s the problem? If there isn’t enough, we can just order more.”

“Well, you’re the one who’s paying, so if you don’t mind, I don’t either.” As he grabbed another mug of ale, Caim wondered why she’d taken one he’d already drunk from rather than one he hadn’t touched yet.

“How indecent, milady...”

“Would you like some, Lenka? Despite how it looks, it’s quite refreshing and

delicious.”

“No. *I* am a diligent guard.” Lenka sulked, continuing to drink her water. The way she had emphasized the fact that *she* was diligent might have been a dig at Caim for drinking so much.

After a while, the innkeeper’s daughter finally brought them their meal, setting the plates on the table full of empty mugs.

“Hey, check out that guy...”

“Man, he drinks like a fish...”

Other patrons started commenting, their voices filled with awe and admiration as they witnessed Caim drink what amounted to nearly an entire keg of ale—an unprecedented feat of heavy drinking.

“Hey hey, seems like someone is having fun here!” someone shouted.

Unfortunately, because of how much he stood out, Caim had attracted the attention of some unsavory characters. Three men who had been drinking at another table came their way.

“You’ve got beauties like *that* around and all you think about is drinking? What a waste!”

“Ha ha ha! You can’t complain if we steal them from you while you’re plastered!”

“Who are you?” Lenka scowled at the ill-bred men.

A man with a shaved head, the burliest of the three, slammed the table and said, “You cheeky brat, having two women wait on you! You’re too young for alcohol—go back to your mama’s milk! Gah ha ha!”

Caim didn’t reply, shooting them a disdainful side glare. He had been in a good mood, and they had spoiled it.

However, the men didn’t notice—they only let out a vulgar laugh.

“Hey, girls, leave this drunkard and come to our table! We’ll show you a good time!”

“Yeah! And you can come rest in our room after that...but I can’t guarantee

you'll actually get any sleep! Ha ha ha!"

"We're gonna send you straight to heaven! Can't promise you'll make it back, though!"

"You scum..." Lenka immediately understood the men's intentions—they had been drawn by Millicia and her beauty and were now shamelessly hitting on the both of them. And considering how flushed their faces were, the men must have been quite drunk. "Sorry, but my lady and I aren't careless enough to accept your invitation. Get out of our sight," she said.

"Wow, you're quite the tough one, aren't you? I love making women like you cry!"

"You lowlife!"

"You're irritating. Get lost," Caim snapped at them before Lenka could rise in fury. "Don't bother me while I'm in such a good mood drinking. Actually...just die. I wish your bald heads would just explode into bits—then we could use them as manure, which would finally make scum like you useful for something. That, or you could go smear yourselves in cattle shit. Either way, never show your faces again." Normally, Caim would have been more amiable, but he was a little tipsy, so he lashed out at them mercilessly.

The men gaped for a few seconds, stunned by the insults, but once they fully understood everything Caim had said, they became furious.

"You brat... Who do you think I am?! *Everyone* knows me in the empire. I'm a first-class adventurer—Zahalm the Dragon Slayer!" He took a step forward and flexed his muscles to show off his strength.

However, Millicia and Lenka, who were both from the empire, exchanged puzzled looks.

"I have never heard of an adventurer called Zahalm... What about you, Lenka?"

"I do not know him either. Dragon Slayer seems like quite an exaggerated title. Is he truly famous?"

"Did you hear that, Zahalm the self-professed Dragon Slayer?" Caim mocked

the man, outright bursting into laughter as he said the last part.

“Y-You little...!” Still in a pose that showed off his muscles, blue veins bulged on Zahalm’s head. He was trembling with rage and on the verge of lashing out, but Caim decided to add even more fuel to the fire.

“So, if I understood things correctly, you guys are adventurers from the empire, but you came to the Jade Kingdom because you couldn’t make it out there, or something like that? And now, you, the ‘Dragon Slayer’”—Caim stifled a laugh—“are acting all cocky and trying to pick up women in the dining hall of an inn. It’s so lame I might shed a tear.”

Zahalm winced at the mockery. “You damn brat!” His face was flushed, and it wasn’t because of the alcohol. “I won’t let that one go! I’m gonna kill you!”

Unleashing all of his fury, he threw a punch at Caim. It was a decently fast strike, and the man’s large frame gave it some weight. He even used mana to strengthen himself, proving that he wasn’t a novice adventurer.

When Zahalm’s fist made contact with Caim’s head, the sound of bones cracking resonated. The onlookers gasped in shock—they all thought the sound was coming from Caim’s skull breaking.

Zahalm grinned triumphantly. “Hmph! You small fry... Aaaaaaaargh?!” He began to speak but then suddenly grimaced from the intense pain in his hand and fell to his knees, writhing on the floor.

His underlings rushed to him.

“What’s wrong, Zahalm?!”

“Why are you screaming like that...? Wait, your fingers!”

They saw Zahalm’s hand, his fingers broken and bent at unnatural angles.

“Whyyyy?! Why did my hand break?!” Zahalm cried.

“Hah! Looks like *you’re* the small fry. I didn’t even need to do anything!” Caim sneered at him, crossing his legs.

“Um...what did you do?” Millicia gingerly asked.

“Nothing. As you saw, all I did was stay in my seat.”

And, in fact, Caim hadn't really done anything. Practitioners of the Toukishin Style could use Mana Compression to create a defense as hard as steel, and Caim had done just that to harden his head. This meant that Zahalm had basically punched a steel plate with his bare hand, so of course he would break his fist.

"For someone like you, just my pinky finger will be enough." Caim approached the man and thrust his pinky at Zahalm, who was still holding his broken hand in agony. Naturally, Caim's finger was strengthened by Mana Compression, and it pierced the man's left breast as easily as an ice pick. "Do you feel that? My finger is touching your heart."

Zahalm squealed in fear.

"If I push my pinky just one more centimeter, your heart will burst. So, care to teach me how it feels to have your life in the hands of a brat?" Normally, Caim wouldn't be tormenting the man like this, but the alcohol and his irritation toward the man for bothering the girls made him unusually aggressive.

"P-Please, I'm sorry! I was in the wrong! Forgive me!"

"Sure, I'll let it slide."

"Huh?" Zahalm gasped in disbelief, surprised that Caim easily listened to his plea.

Caim withdrew his pinky from Zahalm's chest. There was almost no blood, and it left only a barely visible wound. Zahalm felt no pain—it was almost as if everything had just been a dream.

"You were drunk, so I'll overlook it...but only this once. If you bother my companions again, then be prepared for the consequences. Got it?"

"Y-Yeah! Sorry, I promise I won't do it again!" Zahalm declared and fled along with his underlings.

After seeing off the small fry, Caim got back to drinking his ale.

"You saved me yet again! I'm so touched!" Millicia beamed, clasping her hands in front of her chest.

"I won't thank you. I could have handled those thugs myself," Lenka asserted,

pursing her lips and folding her arms.

Caim shrugged, as if to say it hadn't been a big deal, then put his mug on the table. "I don't need your thanks. They made drinking unpleasant, so I took care of them. That's all. More importantly, do you mind if I order more ale?"

"Of course not. Drink as much as you want. I'll pay for everything!" Millicia called the innkeeper's daughter over and ordered more drinks—and also took the opportunity to sneak a sip from Caim's half-empty mug.

By the time they finished their meal, Caim had performed the incredible feat of emptying more than twenty mugs.



"Phew, that was great. No wonder so many people ruin their lives drowning in drink if it tastes that good. It's to die for," Caim said happily.

"You truly have a high alcohol tolerance. That's another wonderful thing about you," Millicia commented, pleased for some reason.

"I'm amazed... You clearly drank more than your stomach should be able to hold," Lenka added, astounded.

Having finished their meal, the three of them went back to their room on the second floor.

Caim lay on the floor and covered himself with a blanket. "Well, I'm gonna sleep."

"Ah, please wait a moment. I would like to discuss our plans for tomorrow. I'm thinking that once we have purchased tickets for the ferry, we should tour the town until our departure. Are you fine with this?" Millicia asked.

"Yeah, sure," Caim agreed, still lying on the floor. "By the way, are tickets that easy to get?"

"The tickets can be bought immediately, but when we can use them depends on how many reservations were taken before us," Lenka answered in place of her master. "In fact, there's a good chance that it'll be a few days before we can cross the river. Until then, we'll stay in this inn."

"I don't mind. It's my first time here, so I want to see the sights, and it's not

like I'm in a hurry."

It would likely be some time before his father—Kevin Halsberg—indicted him and his name made it to the criminal list of Otarra. Until then, Caim figured he was fine, so he stopped thinking about it and instead asked a question he'd been wondering about for a while. "Say, Millicia...isn't your face a little flushed?"

"Eh? Is it?" Millicia patted her face with her hands. The lamp in the room illuminated her pink-flushed cheeks—it was particularly obvious because of how pale her skin usually was, and right now, it had a far redder shade than it had before their dinner. "Speaking of, I've been feeling warm for a while... Did I get drunk?"

"You just took a few sips from my mugs, no? I don't think that's enough to get drunk. Are you bad with alcohol?"

"I...don't think so. I won't go as far as to say that I have a high tolerance for it, but I have drunk enough during parties to know." She fanned herself with her hand—Caim's comment had made her more aware of the heat spreading inside her body.

Lenka opened a window to get fresh air in. "Maybe ale is not for you, milady. You are used to fine wines, so your body may reject such a common drink."

"Very nice of you to call it that in front of someone who enjoyed it," Caim quipped. "The ale didn't make me feel unpleasant, and I don't think there was anything that would harm the body in it." Of course, ale made from wheat wasn't as refined as the high-quality wine nobles were fond of, but it was by no means terrible, and Caim was ready to defend its taste. "You just got a bit drunk because it's not the kind of drink you're used to. If you're not feeling well, you should go to sleep."

"Hmm... Yes, I shall do as you say," Millicia replied and started undressing, revealing her full, round breasts covered by a white lace bra.

"Whaaa—?!" Caim cried in surprise.

"Milady?!" Lenka hurriedly picked up the dress that had fallen to the floor and rushed to cover her master's bare skin.

“Is there a problem, Lenka?”

“Of course there is! What are you thinking, undressing in front of a man?!”

“A man...? It’s just Caim, so it should be fine.” Millicia smiled, her cheeks still flushed from the alcohol. “I don’t mind if Caim sees my body—or rather, I *want* him to see it. I trust him, after all.”

“What does trust have to do with it?! You are not making any sense!”

“You should change into your nightdress too, Lenka. Let me help you.”

“What?! S-Stop, milady!”

Millicia grabbed at Lenka’s clothes, trying to undress her. To anyone watching, the scene would have looked like a drunkard sexually harassing a woman.

“I’m just thanking you for always taking care of me—so stop resisting and let me undress you.”

“P-Please stop pulling! N-Not my panties!”

“Uh...” Caim grimaced uncomfortably at the ridiculous scene happening before his eyes. “Sorry to interrupt you while you’re enjoying yourselves, but should I leave?”

Lenka gasped, remembering Caim’s presence, then turned his way angrily. “Get out, you scoundrel!”

“...Okay,” Caim replied and left the room. Through the door, he could hear shrill voices and the rustling of clothes. “Jeez, what a noisy night,” Caim sighed as he leaned against the hallway’s wall.

Once Millicia and Lenka had finished changing into their nightdresses, Caim returned to the room and everyone went to sleep. The girls took the bed, while Caim was on the floor with a blanket.

“As if I could possibly sleep in a situation like this anyway,” he muttered as he listened to the girls’ soft breathing. It wasn’t as though he was particularly conscious of their presence, but Caim couldn’t help wondering why even the way women breathed felt so coquettish. Moreover, if he ever wanted to, he could easily steal a glance and admire the sleeping beauties in their thin

nightgowns. He was never going to get to sleep like this. “Damn...why is my heart beating so fast?!” he wondered to himself.

They had been traveling together for a few days, but until now, they had been sleeping in different tents. This was the first time they would spend the night together in the same space. Caim stirred uncomfortably, but the sound he made didn’t wake the girls as they slept soundly—they must have been tired from the long trip. Considering that even Lenka, who was usually so on guard against Caim, had fallen asleep less than ten minutes after they had put out the lights, she must have been really exhausted.

Well, it’s no wonder. They’re both women, and one of them’s a noble. Of course they wouldn’t be able to sleep peacefully for a while after bandits killed their companions and kidnapped them.

Thinking about it, Caim realized that circumstances had taken quite the strange turn. Until just a few days ago, Caim had been in despair over his life as a cursed child, and now he was traveling with beautiful women—one of them most likely an aristocratic lady from the empire. Back when he was living in his dilapidated forest hut, he never would have imagined such a thing could happen to him.

“Get out, worldly thoughts,” Caim muttered. “It’s rude to think about my traveling companions like that.” Steeling his nerves, Caim turned his back on the girls and tried to make his way to dreamland, closing his eyes and counting orcs in his head. However, just as he was finally on the verge of falling asleep after a dozen minutes or so...

“Huh?” Caim felt something that abruptly cut short his trip to dreamland, and he opened his eyes.

“Ah, I woke you up. Sorry.”

“Huh?” Caim let out, dumbfounded by the unexpected sight.

“Your sleeping face is so cute, Caim. It should be illegal to be so adorable when you’re already so strong and cool,” the woman said with a chuckle. The moonlight illuminated her blonde hair and blue eyes—it was Millicia, his fellow traveler.

“Wha—?!”

Millicia giggled and smiled bewitchingly as she straddled Caim, her disheveled nightdress exposing her chest.

“What the...? Is this a dream?” Caim asked, unusually confused by how strange the situation was. However, he concluded from the soft sensation and the weight on his abdomen that this was indeed reality. “This isn’t a dream! What are you doing, Millicia?!” he shouted in panic at Millicia, who was straddling him half naked. “How the hell did we end up in this position?! Are you a pervert or something?!”

“I am *not*. It’s your fault that I’m doing this...”

“What?!”

“Please, take responsibility for making me so obsessed with you.”

Caim was confused. True, ever since he’d saved her from the bandits, Caim had felt Millicia was fond of him, judging by her behavior. Still, he didn’t think she was at the point where she would try to attack him in his sleep like this.

And her eyes...

Caim noticed that while Millicia’s eyes were glistening feverishly, they were also glazed over with maddened lust. He had seen these eyes before—they were the same as when he had found her in the cave after she had been forced to drink the aphrodisiac.

“Don’t tell me this is an aftereffect of that drug?! Are you getting withdrawal symptoms?!”

Certain drugs—like cannabis, for instance—could cause withdrawal symptoms after they weren’t taken for a certain period of time. She hadn’t shown any such symptoms until now, but maybe the aphrodisiac had created a strong dependence in her that was only now showing its effects.

“M-Milady?! What are you doing?!” Lenka screamed, having been awakened by Caim’s shout. After seeing Millicia straddling Caim with a bewitching smile, she shot a glare at him. “What did you do to her?! Don’t think you can get away after laying a hand on my lady!”

“No no no, you’re wrong! Look more closely—*I’m* the victim here!”

“My lady would *never* do something as obscene as assaulting a man, so you’re clearly the one at fault—it can only be you! It *has* to be you!”

“Whoa...that’s so cruel!” Caim complained. Why did it seem like the man was always assumed to be at fault in situations like this? He couldn’t help feeling that society was unfair, but he put the thought aside and asked for Lenka’s help instead. “I’ll explain everything, so first, get her off me! At this rate she’s gonna start grinding her hips on me at any moment now!”

Lenka groaned. “You’re right—my lady’s safety comes first! Your punishment can wait!”

“Ah?!” Millicia cried out as Lenka pinned her arms behind her back while trying to pull her away from Caim.

However, Millicia resisted, and Lenka had a hard time restraining her. “Milady! Please, you must pull yourself away from him! If you do not, you will surely be defiled!”

“Stop getting in my way! I must make Caim take responsibility!”

“What are you saying?! I cannot possibly let a man we have just met take your chastity!”

“If you’re going to act like a naughty knight who hinders her master and doesn’t follow orders, then I have to punish you!”

“Ngh?!”

At that moment, Millicia did something completely unexpected—she kissed Lenka.

“M-Mila— Nnh?!”

Wet sounds resonated as the two beauties intertwined their tongues, exchanging a deep kiss. The sight was truly incomprehensible to Caim. He didn’t know what was happening or why, but...he did find the scene very erotic.

“What the hell is with all this lewd stuff going on...? Am I dreaming...?” Caim’s expression stiffened as he watched the two women. At the same time, though, he was entranced, and he swallowed as he watched their shameless act.

For a moment, Caim suspected this chaotic situation was nothing more than a lewd dream—but he was wrong. In fact, it was only the beginning of the true chaos to come.

“Wh-What’s happening?!” Lenka said when she was finally released from the kiss. “I feel so warm... It’s weird... Aaah?!” She suddenly squealed coquettishly. Her eyes, which had been filled with fury, were slowly becoming glazed over with lust just like Millicia. “How could you do something so improper to us *both*? I’d rather you just kill me instead!”

“Why are you also acting so weird?! Is it contagious?!”

“Damn...it... There’s no way I’ll give in to such indecent emotions... I won’t lose... I”—Lenka wrapped her arms around herself in anguish, but after a few seconds, she stopped—“lost!”

“You *lost*?!” Caim retorted.

“Now that it’s come to this, you can do whatever you want to me! Go ahead and push me down roughly! But be sure to remember this: even if you use my body however you like, I won’t let you have my heart! So come on—violate me! Make me yield obediently!”

“What does ‘make me yield obediently’ even mean? That doesn’t make sense! And why are you acting like I’m the aggressor here?! Seriously, what the hell is happening?!”

Overcome by her lust, Lenka had heartily thrown off her nightdress and was now clad only in her underwear. Then, just like Millicia, she crawled over to Caim, her eyes fiercely gleaming like a carnivorous beast’s.

“This is *your* fault. I don’t know why—it just is! So take responsibility!” Lenka declared.

“Yes, this is all your fault, Caim. You’re *obligated* to do as you please with us,” Millicia added.

“What kind of logic is that?! Is this really all because of that drug’s aftereffects?!” Caim cried, panicked. The two gorgeous women were now practically naked, their soft breasts brushing against his skin. Goose bumps prickled along his back as he searched for a way to escape. He could easily

shake the women off with a little effort, but he didn't want to treat them too roughly.

Millicia chuckled. "You're so agitated, Caim. It's so cute."

She took Caim's hand and guided it to her chest. While her breasts were smaller than Lenka's, they were well shaped, and Caim was compelled to rub one of them, feeling its weight and the softness of her flesh. He also felt something hard pressing against his palm, which could only be her nipple.

"Don't think I'll let you get away after making me feel like this!" Lenka exclaimed, taking Caim's other arm and guiding it between her legs. His hand pressed up against the most precious place on a woman's body, and he felt something wet coat his fingertips.

So this is how women feel... How can they be so soft and luscious?! Caim felt his body being overtaken by an unknown heat, and fierce, unfamiliar feelings welled up inside him for the first time in his life. His throat went dry as his libido overwhelmed his mind, becoming unbearable. *I'm thirsty... I need water...*

"Caim..."

He then felt something soft on his lips—Millicia was kissing him. She invaded his mouth with her tongue, and his mind blanked at the sweet taste of her saliva.

Something snapped inside Caim at that moment. He stopped trying to fight it and embraced Millicia instead.

Caim was a natural-born warrior. While he was still young and didn't have much experience, his talent for martial arts exceeded his father's—Kevin Halsberg, the Master Pugilist. He was worthy of being called a child prodigy, and one day, his name would be known throughout the world as an unparalleled warrior.

"If that's what you want, then I *am* gonna embrace you. But you'd better not regret making me get serious, okay?"

He might have been caught by surprise, but an excellent combatant like Caim couldn't stay on the defensive against women. Having resolved to embrace

Millicia, he immediately shifted his posture and pushed her down onto the floor, making her cry out. Caim pulled off his shirt, baring his upper body, and reached for Millicia. He then tore off her nightdress, turning the fine cloth into rags that he flung to the side.

Millicia pouted. “That negligee was one of my favorites.”

“I don’t care. More importantly, I need to take *these* off too.”

“Nooo, you can’t! Aah,” Millicia protested adorably, but Caim ignored her and forcibly stripped away her underwear, earning a moan. In the blink of an eye, Millicia lay on the floor stark naked.

“Wh-What a miserable state, my lady...” Lenka muttered, astonished.

“Shut up, Lenka,” Caim said coldly. “You’re next, so for now, just watch your lady become a woman right before your eyes.”

Lenka gaped, her mouth hanging open as she searched for words—but in the end, she said nothing and simply sat back down, her almond-shaped eyes glistening. Apparently, the situation was exciting her.

Is she turned on by watching Millicia getting violated, or is it because I spoke so roughly to her? Whichever it is, that’s not a normal way to think, Caim thought disdainfully. First, though, he wanted to have a taste of Millicia’s body, so he reached for her shapely breasts, grasping them tightly as his fingers sank into her flesh.

“Aaanh!” Millicia let out a high-pitched moan. She didn’t resist—unsurprising, considering she had been the one asking for this all along.

“Wow...” Caim was surprised by how soft they felt. It wasn’t his first time touching a woman’s chest—after all, Millicia had just pressed his hand to her breast, and Tea would push hers on him at every opportunity—but this was the first time he had done it of his own volition. It was surprisingly pleasant to feel his fingers sinking into them only to be pushed back by their supple firmness.

This is a woman’s body... A woman’s breasts... No wonder some people ruin their lives over this. Whether in history, folklore, illustrated books, or ordinary gossip, tales of men who destroyed themselves through their relations with women were abundant. Until now, Caim—still young and inexperienced—had

thought these men were idiots and that he would never become like them. Now that he'd had his first taste of a woman's body, though, he started to revise his opinion—that was how good touching breasts felt.

Man, am I gonna be okay? We haven't even started for real, and yet I'm already...

"Aaah... Is there a problem?" Millicia asked, seeing that Caim was fondling her chest with a very serious expression.

"No, it's nothing." He shook his head and turned his focus back on the act.

"Aaah...mmmh!"

Caim stroked and rubbed her soft breasts, sometimes pinching her nipples or pulling them. He was playing her body like he would an instrument, creating a melody out of her sweet moans. As the proverb went, "If you've eaten poison, you might as well lick the plate clean." He had no intention of stopping. Even if this truly put him on the path of ruin, he was determined to have Millicia tonight.

"Mmm, *that* spot is..."

"What, is there a problem if I touch you *here*?"

"No, but— Aaaah!"

Caim continued to play with Millicia's breast with his left hand as he slowly slid his right hand downward. He caressed her abdomen, tickled her navel lightly, then continued down between her legs—her most important place.

"Ah! Caim...that's a naughty place to touch..."

"You had no problem straddling me, but *now* you're getting bashful?"

"B-But...when you touch me there, I start feeling tingly all over and can't calm down... Aah!"

Caim wrenched open her tight chasm with his finger, raking transparent nectar out of it. Millicia's reaction was far more pronounced than when he had rubbed her breasts, which only confirmed to him that *this* was truly a woman's most important part. Gradually, he increased the speed of his finger, pleasuring her even more.

“Aah, mmm...it’s the first time I’ve ever felt like this... My head feels so light and... Aaah, mmm—aaaaaaaaaah!”

“Hm?”

Millicia grabbed Caim’s arm as her body spasmed wildly, but it was over quickly, and she went still.

“So *that’s* what a climax is, huh? Not bad,” Caim said as satisfaction at making a woman orgasm for the first time swelled inside his chest. As a man, he felt very proud of himself.

Millicia, still in the afterglow, was breathing slowly.

“Well then, time to get to it.” Caim smiled savagely and licked his finger, which was still coated in Millicia’s nectar. He was done with foreplay—he’d spent enough time enjoying the appetizer. Now he wanted the main dish.

Caim put his hands on his pants to remove them, eager to finally have sex with Millicia, but...

“Um?” His arm was grabbed by someone.

“S-Sir Caim...” It was Lenka, who had been obediently watching until now.

Caim frowned, thinking that she wanted to stop him, but he was wrong.

“P-Please...do that to me too. I can’t wait anymore!” Lenka exclaimed, her teary eyes glazed over with lust.

He looked at her panties and saw they were soaking wet. “Did you pleasure yourself while watching us?”

Lenka cast her eyes down, ashamed. She’d gotten herself off to the sight of her master being toyed with. After something like that, she couldn’t call herself a virtuous knight anymore.

“I-I know that it’s wrong—truly, I know. But...I can’t hold back the obscene desires welling up inside me. Please, Sir Caim, completely ruin me! Punish this indecent and naughty knight!”

“You want me to punish you, huh? Well, I guess I wouldn’t mind,” Caim said with a glance at Millicia, still on the floor exhausted from her climax. Perhaps it

was better to let her rest a little. “Keeping me busy so your master can rest... I do admire your loyalty.”

“Ugh...” Lenka groaned awkwardly at his sarcasm. Still, she didn’t withdraw her demand and placed her hands on the nearby wall, turning her rear toward Caim.

He hummed as he watched her shaking her hips silently, understanding what she wanted from him. He approached her and swung his right hand without reserve.

Lenka squealed as the sound of Caim slapping her rang out. Her voice was extremely loud, and she had completely forgotten that they were at an inn, meaning there were probably people in the neighboring rooms.

“Bark more! I can tell you want it by that greedy look in your eyes!” Caim purposefully chose demeaning words as he spanked her ass repeatedly.

“Ah! Mmm! Ah! Oh! Aaah!” Lenka moaned like a dog in heat at each slap, her back arching from the pleasure and her tongue hanging out of her wide-open lips.



“Jeez, you must be a real pervert to enjoy being spanked like this! What a joke that a bitch like you claims to be a knight!”

“I’m shorry! I’m shorry for being shuch a shlutty bitch! Aaah! Nooo, it feels sho goood!”

“A she-dog like you shouldn’t speak. Bark!”

“W-Woof! Woof, woof... Aaah, woof, woooooof!”

As Caim continued to spank her rhythmically, he started getting into it. He actually enjoyed treating an older woman like an animal so much that he’d spoken a lot more harshly than he’d intended.

This is bad... I feel like I’m opening a door that shouldn’t be opened, Caim worried, wondering if maybe he was awakening to some kind of perverse fetish. But even if he had enough reason left in him to think such a thing, it wasn’t going to stop him. He turned his focus back to Lenka and gave her a noticeably stronger slap.

“Aah, aaawooooooooooooooooof!” Lenka suddenly cried, a mix of a moan and a bark, her back arching to its limit. Then she slid down the wall and collapsed to the floor.

“Um...did I go too far?” Caim grimaced as he watched Lenka. Her face had gone slack, her mouth wide open and drooling.

“No, she’s fine. She looks very happy, actually,” Millicia said, hugging Caim from behind.

“You’ve recovered already?” Caim asked as he felt her wonderful mounds squish against his back.

“Yes—and I would like you to make me a real woman right now, so let’s continue on the bed,” she pleaded sweetly.

“Yeah, let’s.” Caim agreed with a nod as he cradled the fallen Lenka in his arms. He tossed her onto the bed before removing Millicia from his back and doing the same to her, which earned a small cry from both women.

The single bed was too small for three people, but this wasn’t the time to complain. Caim quickly removed his pants and underwear, and once he was

naked, he jumped onto the bed where the two beauties were waiting for him, lying side by side.

“Caim... Aaah!” Millicia’s bewitching moan echoed throughout the room.

The wooden frame of the bed creaked a few times from his movements, and a little later Lenka’s coquettish voice was added to the mix.

Caim, Millicia, and Lenka—these three, who had been pure and never known the opposite sex until now, made love almost the entire night, until it was nearly dawn.



“All living beings, including humans, have the primitive desire to preserve themselves. It’s called the survival instinct,” said the black-haired woman who was wearing a white coat over a man’s suit—Doctor Faust.

She struck the blackboard behind her with the teacher’s pointer in her right hand and continued, “The most common of these instincts are avoiding your natural enemies, eating, and sleeping, but the way people frantically try to hide their mistakes is also a form of survival instinct. And, of course, so is reproduction.”

She raised the index finger of her left hand with an impish smile. “The act of reproduction refers to sex. You’re still young, so you might not fully understand, but living beings have the instinct to produce more of themselves in the form of children. They know they won’t live forever, so they want to at least leave behind an existence that has inherited a part of them. The act is often treated like a base desire driven entirely by lust, but it wasn’t that way originally—not that I’m saying I approve of sex crimes or adultery, of course.”

Caim stared at Faust silently as she stopped pointing with the stick in her hand and began to write words on the blackboard. He was sitting on a chair at a desk, just like a student awaiting his teacher’s instruction.

Why is Faust here? I should be in our inn room... Caim tilted his head to the side, not understanding where he was or what was happening.

Finished with her writing, Faust resumed speaking. “Every living being has

both survival and reproductive instincts. And, of course, the beings called Demon Lords are no different.”

Caim gasped at the last part.

A crescent smile like a mischievous cat’s spread across Faust’s face as she gestured toward her student with the pointer in her hand. “Currently, there are seven monsters classified as Demon Lords. None have created any children so far, but is that because they lack the ability to reproduce? The answer is no—they actually *can*!”

Caim listened silently.

“The reason Demon Lord-class monsters don’t reproduce is because they’re immortal and almost invincible, which means they don’t need to make copies of themselves! In other words, taking their immortality away from them might awaken their reproductive instinct!”

“Oh...I see?” Caim replied uncertainly, spurred on by Faust’s fervent speech.

Faust puffed out her chest and smiled at her confused student. “Now, the conclusion! The Poison Queen’s immortality was based on taking over the bodies of people who killed her—but by fusing with you, all of that was lost! Without immortality, the Poison Queen—or rather, you, the Poison King, have awakened to your reproductive instinct. Now, a question for you: how would a daemon who controls every kind of toxin attract the opposite sex?”

“Don’t tell me... Poison?” Caim said the answer that came to his mind instinctively.

Faust snapped her fingers. “Exactly! Your bodily fluids contain a poison—or perhaps you could call it a pheromone—that charms the opposite sex! And because it’s an unconscious act, like producing saliva or sweat, you can’t control it—meaning that you can’t remove those pheromones from your bodily fluids!”

Caim was speechless.

“You should already have an idea what’s happening, no? What did the girls ingest before losing their sanity?” she asked.

Caim thought back on what had happened. Millicia had been strangely

affectionate toward him from the start, and while Lenka had shown hostility at first, it had been obvious that she was unusually focused on him. And the both of them had swallowed his saliva to neutralize the effect of the drug the bandits had given them.

“Thinking about it, just before Millicia started acting weird, she drank some ale from my mug—a mug I touched with my lips, meaning the ale contained some of my saliva!” he exclaimed, realizing that was the reason Millicia had been acting like she was in heat and had tried to assault him during the night. As for Lenka, she must have come into contact with his pheromones when Millicia kissed her.

“Some medicines are very addictive, and it seems your pheromones are no different. If women repeatedly ingest them, they’ll lose control of their sexual desire and immediately be overcome with arousal.”

“But...does that mean it’s *my* fault they became like that? Did I drive them mad with my poison?” Caim asked, bewildered. If so, that meant that Millicia and Lenka didn’t actually like him at all—all of this had only happened because his poison had warped their minds.

Faust shook her head. “No, your pheromones aren’t omnipotent. They don’t work on just anyone—they only attract people who are compatible with you. People suitable to have children with and form a family.”

“A family...”

“True, they were affected by your poison—but that doesn’t mean they aren’t fond of you. In fact, it’s only because part of them is receptive to you that your pheromones worked on them at all.”

Caim stayed silent.

“Anyway, that’s it for today’s lesson. I’m looking forward to our next meeting,” Faust said and snapped her fingers.

The next instant, Caim’s consciousness started to fade and he closed his eyes, unable to resist the intense drowsiness.

Chapter 6: Caught Up

“Ugh...was that a dream?”

Caim had just woken from a strange dream, but considering how clearly he remembered it, it was hard to believe that was all it was.

“Did Faust use some weird magic on me? I wouldn’t put it past her...”

Caim lightly slapped his cheeks and sat up. He should have slept on the floor last night, and yet he was currently on the bed. Moreover, he was completely naked, and the same was true for the two beauties sleeping on either side of him.

“I guess that wasn’t a dream either... What a pickle.”

He looked at Millicia and Lenka—the latter was mumbling her trademark “kill me,” but they were both nonetheless sleeping peacefully in the nude with satisfied smiles.

“Look at them, being so content after squeezing me dry...” Caim sighed as he thought back on the previous night. The two women had been like succubi, demanding more pleasure from him again and again.

Millicia and Lenka had been virgins before that, but so had Caim. Never in his wildest dreams would he have imagined that his first time would be with two gorgeous women—and that they would be the ones to seek *him* out for it.

“Well, now what? Maybe I should just leave...”

Millicia was obviously a noble lady. Now that he had taken her purity, there was no doubt he would be asked to take responsibility for it. Lenka was likely going to be furious at him for defiling her master. Caim wasn’t going to let himself get killed easily, but the prospect of being chased by an angry woman with a sword was frightening even to him.

I could easily run away now—but would that be the right choice? Caim thought as he watched the girls sleep.

It wasn't like he'd paid much mind to what Faust had told him, but he had traveled with them for a few days, and he had kissed *and* slept with them. Of course he would start having feelings for them. He wasn't so impassive and irresponsible that he could just go back to traveling by himself as if nothing had happened.

"Well, I guess I should just put the decision on hold for now. Maybe taking a stroll will help me to collect my thoughts."

Millicia and Lenka were sleeping soundly and would likely not wake up for a while, so he figured he would have some time. After putting on clean underwear and clothes, Caim exited the room, descended the stairs, and went to the inn's front counter, which was currently manned by the innkeeper's daughter.

She squealed when she saw him.

"I'm heading out for a stroll. My companions are still sleeping, so could you bring a bucket of water to our room?" Caim asked.

"Y-Yes, of course. That will be one copper coin."

Caim placed the requested amount on the counter.

The innkeeper's daughter glanced at him, her face flushed. "I-It seems you had quite a pleasant time last night."

She had apparently heard everything the girls had let out during the act.

"If it embarrasses you so much that your whole face goes red as a tomato, why even comment on it?" Caim replied, exasperated. He gave her some extra money to apologize for the noise in addition to what he owed for the water and left the inn.

Once he was out in town, Caim gazed at the cloudless blue sky, bathed in bright sunlight.

"What great weather. Pretty ironic, considering how I'm feeling," Caim said, lightly stretching his arms toward the blue sky as he strolled about.

While he should have been thinking about his responsibilities toward Millicia

and Lenka, Caim couldn't help but get excited about his first time visiting a big city. As he freely roamed the main street, a stall caught his eye.

"That looks tasty. Give me one," he said to the owner.

"Here. It's five copper coins."

Caim had bought a sliced bun with vegetables and a sausage inside, topped with red and yellow sauces. The scent of the spices titillated his nose and stimulated his appetite.

"Wow, this is really good!" Caim couldn't help but praise the taste after just one bite. The flavor of the still-hot sausage and the softness of the bread were one thing, but what Caim found most impressive was how exquisite the sauces tasted. The red one was nice, but this was his first time eating something spicy like the yellow sauce. Every bite left him wanting more.

"This is your first time eating a hot dog, lad? Those sauces are called ketchup and mustard. They're condiments mainly used in the empire."

Caim swallowed the last bite. "Traveling is great—I never thought I'd ever get to eat something so tasty!"

"Ha ha ha! It's rewarding to have someone be so moved by something I made. If you want another one, I'll lower the price to four copper coins."

"Deal. Give me three."

As he received the hot dogs in a paper bag, Caim had a sudden realization. *Wait...did I just buy Millicia and Lenka's shares without even thinking about it? I don't actually plan to run away, do I?* Caim's unconscious actions had made him realize that he'd already decided to stay with the two women. Even though there would be trouble waiting for him once he returned to the inn, he couldn't bring himself to shirk responsibility and flee.

"Oh well—there's no way around it, I guess. Suppose I'll try groveling," Caim muttered to himself, recalling the highest form of apology he knew from the Poison Queen's memories. He thought this would be a much better choice than fleeing without facing the girls properly, even if it meant sacrificing his pride and dignity.

I guess I'll go back to the inn, then... Wait—I'm in the city, so might as well buy something for them as an apology. If he gave the girls a present, Caim thought that perhaps they would have a better impression of him. In particular, he hoped that this would help him escape being stabbed by Lenka.

“Women like accessories, right? I hope I can find some around here that aren't too costly.”

It might have been a little underhanded of Caim to try currying favor with gifts, but he was determined to use any means necessary to lift their mood.

○ ○ ○

“How dare you do this to me, a noble?!”

“Um?” As he was looking for presents for the girls, Caim heard a man's angry voice. When he turned in its direction, he spied a man slightly older than him shouting in the middle of the road.

“I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!”

“You think that's enough to make up for you splashing water on my leg?! You filthy dog... I'll kill you!” The well-dressed man was screaming at a girl around ten years old who wore rags and kowtowed to him. Judging from the conversation and the toppled wooden bucket next to her, it seemed as though she'd spilled water from it on the man's leg, and he was some kind of aristocrat. Even though they were right in the middle of the street, everyone else simply walked around them, not wanting to get involved.

“What an unpleasant situation to encounter in the morning,” Caim sighed. “Is she a beastfolk?” He frowned, looking at the girl. She had fluffy animal ears on top of her head, and a tail extended from her rear. Her appearance suggested she was either a wolffolk or a dogfolk slave. Given how harshly they were discriminated against in the Jade Kingdom, it wasn't too unusual to see a beastfolk slave being persecuted.

It may not be unusual, but it doesn't feel good to watch. Caim clicked his tongue and headed toward the two. He wasn't obligated to save her, but he didn't like discrimination against the beastfolk—someone important to him was one of them, after all—so he couldn't abandon the girl to her fate.

“Hey, you. Isn’t that enough already?” Caim called to the man, who was still facing away from him.

“Who are you?” the man said.

“Just a passerby. Anyway, she may be a beastfolk, but she’s just a kid, so don’t make such a fuss. It’s immature.”

“From the way you’re dressed, I suppose you’re an adventurer,” the man snorted. “As if someone as base and vulgar as you could voice his opinion to *me*, a noble from the empire! Get out of my sight!”

The man was apparently an aristocrat from the empire. Caim didn’t know why he’d come to the kingdom’s side of the river, but he was causing a lot of trouble.

“Slaves are assets, you know?” Caim said. “Won’t it be a problem if you kill the property of someone from another country?”

“You’re *still* talking? Was what I said not enough for you to understand, you dunce?!” the nobleman yelled, drawing the sword at his hip and rushing at Caim.

Caim didn’t expect the man to be so quick-tempered that he would use a blade in the middle of the street. Were aristocrats really *that* rotten? “What a pain.” Caim sighed, casually avoiding the slash by rotating his body to the side. Then, he punched the man in the gut.

“Gah!”

“That should be enough for you, no? Just go to sleep,” Caim said as the nobleman fell to the ground, completely still. Caim had only lightly struck him in the stomach, so his life wasn’t in danger. “Jeez, I was having such a great morning until I encountered this noisy jerk... Anyway, are you all right?”

“Woof! Th-Thank you, sir!” The beastfolk girl jumped to her feet and bowed to Caim, her drooping animal ears following the movement of her head.

“It’s nothing. Shouldn’t you get back to your work? Your master is gonna scold you if you take too long.”

“Woof! Yes!” The girl hurriedly picked up the wooden bucket on the ground

and tottered away.

“A beastfolk slave, huh? How terrible...” Caim grimaced as he watched her from behind.

Children were often kidnapped from demi-human settlements and forcibly enslaved. It was a cruel thing to do, but it didn’t bother most humans in this country, as they didn’t consider demi-humans or beastfolk to be people. There was nothing Caim could do about the situation as he wasn’t royalty—or even a noble—but he couldn’t help feeling sad about it.

“I wonder if Tea would have ended up like that if Mother hadn’t taken her in,” Caim mused out loud.

“Grrraow! What are you talking about?”

“I was wondering if you would have ended up being exploited as a slave instead of becoming a maid if... Wait, what?” Caim naturally answered the familiar voice until he realized how strange it was for him to be hearing it. Turning around, he found a silver-haired woman in a maid uniform. “Tea?! What are you doing here?!”

The one who had suddenly appeared behind him was none other than the tigerfolk maid Caim had left behind in his homeland—Tea. He’d thought he would never see her again—and yet, here she was, standing in front of him with her arms folded.

“I’ve finally caught up to you, Master Caim,” Tea said with a smile. Strangely, though, her smile made Caim’s heart beat very fast, as if it were signaling he was in danger. “Now, explain why you left without me. Depending on what you say... Grrraaaaw!” Tea roared like a carnivorous beast. Her tone was so deep and booming, as if echoing from the bowels of earth, that even Caim, who’d fused with the Poison Queen, couldn’t help but shiver. “You’re going to explain *everything* to me. If you flee...well, you understand what will happen, right?”

“...Y-Yeah,” Caim replied, frozen stiff with unprecedented fear.

“Grrraooooow! You’re so selfish, Master Caim! You’re a brute! An atrocious fiend!” Tea exclaimed, baring her fangs at Caim, whom she had captured and

dragged to a nearby restaurant, sitting him down at a table in the corner. “You didn’t want to get Tea involved?! You thought that would render everything I’ve built up until now useless?! Don’t dismiss me like that! Tea owes everything to you and the mistress. There’s no way I’d abandon you just to keep the life I was living!”

“Sorry... Really, I was stupid. Forgive me.” In such a situation, all a man could do was earnestly apologize, so Caim did so without trying to make excuses.

“To begin with, why do you look like an adult? How come you grew so much in such a short time?!”

“That’s... Actually, how did you figure out who I was? I look completely different than I did before.” Tea had been treating him just as she always did, so Caim hadn’t noticed until just then, but he *did* currently look around eighteen years old, and his hair and eyes were a different color. How had she recognized that he was Caim Halsberg?

“It’s obvious! Your scent is the same, and you look just like the mistress did when she was young.”

“I look like Mother?”

“Yes. I suppose you wouldn’t know, since you only remember her when she was wasting away from illness, but you look just like she did in her younger days.”

“I...see...” Caim replied, feeling a little conflicted. He was happy to hear that he looked like his beloved mother but also embarrassed about it—it was a strange feeling.

“I got here by following your scent,” Tea went on, “which was easy because it hasn’t rained the past few days!” Tea proudly threw out her chest, which emphasized her bountiful breasts inside her pinafore. It was kind of a trivial thing to think about, but Caim couldn’t help wondering if she had stayed dressed like this all the way until finding him. A maid sniffing the ground to follow her master’s scent must have been really conspicuous.

“Tigerfolk have far better noses than humans!” she continued. “Of course, I’m no match for dogs and wolves, but pursuing my master’s familiar scent is a

piece of cake!”

“Your master, huh...? So you chose me over my father, Count Halsberg? You know that I can’t pay you, right? I’m not a noble, and I have no fortune.”

“I don’t care! Master Caim is Tea’s only master. That’s never changed since the moment you saved me! Ah, but of course, I love and respect the mistress too!” she quickly added.

Caim stayed silent. He *had* been wrong to leave Tea behind. He hadn’t wanted to involve her in his circumstances and had thought it would be better for her to stay in the Halsberg territory, but his kindness had been misplaced. Tea belonged at Caim’s side, and he was her only master.

“You’re gonna make me cry... It seems I underestimated your loyalty,” Caim said.

“I hope you’ll reflect on it! Tea will follow you anywhere—from the cradle to the grave, I’ll always be with you!”

“I think the way you’re using that expression is wrong...but I *am* really glad. Thank you,” Caim said honestly, expressing his gratitude. He had followed his mother’s will and gone on a journey to find a family of his own, but he had forgotten that he already had a member in his family. After all, she had thrown away her work and home—everything she had built—to chase after him. What else could she be but family?

It seems I really am an idiot. How could I go on a journey to find my family but leave behind a member of it right from the start? I really need to reflect on all of this.

“Incidentally, there is something Tea wants to ask you, Master Caim.”

“Yeah? You can ask whatever you want. I won’t hide anything from you anymore,” Caim replied with a generous nod. He was truly touched by Tea’s loyalty and was ready to answer whatever she asked honestly. However, the next instant, he stiffened, his face cramping up.

“I smell women—no, *female* scents coming from you. Who are they?”

Caim returned to the inn with Tea and left her in the dining hall before heading back to the room alone, planning to explain the situation to Millicia and Lenka.

“Do you have anything to say for yourself, Caim?” Millicia asked the instant he entered.

Caim immediately knelt politely on the floor in front of the girls, who loomed over him with their arms crossed. Naturally, they had gotten dressed and were no longer naked like they had been when he’d woken up this morning. Millicia was giving a chilling smile, and Lenka stood behind her, her face flushed.

“Uh...well...I went to buy our breakfast...”

“Why did you go alone? We were truly worried to find you gone when we woke up. We thought that perhaps you had abandoned us—that you were done with us now that we’d done *it*.”

“Ugh...” Caim groaned. In fact, he had half—really just a third—intended to run away from his responsibilities. But of course, he couldn’t admit that, so he stayed silent.

“That was the first time Lenka and I had ever been embraced by a gentleman. Think about how we must have felt after waking up from our first night with our lover only to find him gone. Do you enjoy upsetting us? Is that why you did it?”

“We’re...lovers?” Caim asked.

“Are we not? Would you embrace a woman who wasn’t your lover? Did you perhaps take us for prostitutes?”

“No! We’re lovers, so please, forgive me already!”

Caim surrendered to Millicia’s nonstop admonishments and prostrated himself on the floor. The instant he admitted to being their lover, a winning smile crossed Millicia’s face, but Caim couldn’t see it from his current position and thus did not realize he had just been tricked into making a commitment.

“Good. We are now your lovers, Caim. Are you all right with this as well, Lenka?”

“Of course,” Lenka answered her master, then turned toward Caim. “Take

responsibility for deflowering me.” She glared at him with upturned, teary eyes. Despite being older than he was, Lenka’s expression was so childlike that Caim couldn’t stop his heart from fluttering.

Now that it had come to this, he could no longer escape. His path was blocked on both sides.

“Fine. I’m a man, after all, so I’ll take responsibility. I’m a bit confused about what that entails, but I’ll try my best. Still, are you really all right with this? I’m just a traveler with no status, and Millicia is a noble, no?” Moreover, he was the only man for two women. Could they truly accept such an unbalanced relationship?

“It will not be a problem. My father also has several wives,” Millicia replied with a smile, tilting her head to the side as if implying that polygamy was completely natural.

“The empire is a meritocracy. Anyone can become a knight or a noble, provided they are strong enough. With your power, you could easily become a count—or an even higher rank than that. And it’s a matter of course for aristocrats to take multiple wives, so I don’t mind that either,” Lenka explained.

The Garnet Empire had more than ten times the national power of the Jade Kingdom. It was an absolute meritocracy that truly embodied the phrase “rich country, strong army,” and it had gotten that way by putting people in important positions based on their capabilities rather than their lineage or pedigree.

“I see... So you don’t have any objections to becoming my women?” To Caim, this was everything he could hope for—in fact, it felt too good to be true. He was a *very* lucky man to take two beauties like Millicia and Lenka as lovers.

“Ever since you saved me, I have felt like our meeting was fate. I am convinced that you are the one I must marry and spend my entire life with,” Millicia said.

“I feel very irritated by the situation, I really do, but...when I watched you fight, my heart couldn’t stop racing. I want you to *discipline* me— I mean, I’ll exceptionally recognize you as our husband!” Lenka exclaimed.

“I see... I’m so glad I feel like I might cry.” Caim felt like he’d heard an unsettling word in there somewhere, but he ignored it and simply accepted the girls’ love. However, he still had something he needed to report to them. “Ah, now that we’re all on the same page, there’s someone I want to introduce to you...”

“Eh?” Millicia and Lenka let out at the same time, blinking in surprise.

Thinking that it would be easier to just have them meet Tea instead of trying to explain—and that it’d allow him to deal with all of his problems all at once—Caim exited the room and went to call his maid, who was waiting on the floor below.

Three women silently stared at one another. The mood between them—and Caim, the only man in the room—was strained and awkward.

“Master Caim...who are they?” The first one to speak was a tigerfolk woman in a maid uniform—Tea. She was like family—kind of an older sister—to Caim, having taken care of him since his childhood.

“You will explain who this woman is, right, Caim?” The second wore a dress with a simple yet elegant design—Millicia. She was a noble lady from the empire and had just a few minutes ago confirmed that she was Caim’s lover. She was a pretty girl he had saved from bandits, which had made her fall for him.

“To think you laid your hands on someone other than my lady and me... They do say that great men are lustful, so I don’t know if I should praise you for it or be disgusted...” The third and last woman was a female knight wearing plain trousers for ease of movement—Lenka. Like Millicia, she had just become Caim’s lover, and she was a slightly older beauty who had drunk his poison and been charmed by his overwhelming might in battle.

The three of them formed a triangle with Caim at their center as they glared at one another. Caim’s back was drenched with sweat and he couldn’t move, restrained by the sharp gazes of the girls.

Why the hell does it feel like I’ve stepped into a war zone...? Did I do something wrong? Caim didn’t understand why they were all acting as if he’d

personally offended them, but he wasn't stupid enough to raise a complaint. Instead, he just awkwardly sat on the floor, waiting for the time to pass.

"Based on her clothing, this woman must be a maid, right? You claimed to be a commoner—was that a lie?" Millicia asked Caim after a long silence, glaring at him with half-closed eyes.

"...No," he answered gingerly. "I *am* a commoner. It's just that my parents and my little sister are aristocrats."

"It seems your circumstances are complicated... Oh well. We shall hear more later." Millicia sighed, languorously tilting her head to the side as she put a hand against her cheek. "I am Caim's lover. Who are you to him? Considering your attire, I suppose you are his servant?"

"Grrraow! His lover?!" Tea bared her fangs, flinching slightly at the word. Still, she stayed steadfast and replied, "Tea is his maid and his family! We've slept and bathed together! I'm no mere servant!"

"My, my... If we are talking about sleeping together, then we have done that as well."

"But only once, right?! I've done it many times!"

"In our case, though, it had a deeper meaning. After all, we went *all the way*!" Millicia declared triumphantly.

"Grrraoooow!" Tea growled in vexation. If Millicia had gained an advantage, then... Tea vigorously rolled up her skirt.

"Wha—?!" Caim shouted in surprise.

"Tea can make babies too! You're just a thieving cat who got lucky and took her turn before me, so don't act so superior!"

"You want to do it in the middle of the day?!" Millicia exclaimed, wincing a little. "In that case...Lenka, we must undress as well!"

"Eh?! I have to do it too, milady?!"

"Of course! We have to show this woman our bond—our love for Caim!" Millicia unbuttoned the collar of her dress in response to Tea.

Lenka hesitated for a few seconds, but eventually she steeled her resolve and began to remove her pants.

“Wait! What the hell are you doing?! It’s still only the middle of the day!” Caim protested as the girls began getting naked.

“Who cares about that?! Now, let’s mate!” Tea urged him.

“I won’t let you! Caim is our lover!” Millicia interjected.

“Take responsibility, you scoundrel!” Lenka shouted at Caim.

“C-Calm down! Please, I beg you!”

“Grrraow! I won’t wait any longer! Prepare yourself, Master Caim!”

“I won’t lose! Courage is the lifeblood of imperial women!”

“Just kill me...but spank me first!”



The three cornered Caim against the wall. His face went pale with intense fear, and just as he was starting to prepare himself for the impending assault, an unexpected person came to his aid.

“U-Um... Excuse me for interrupting you...”

“Ah...” Caim let out as he turned toward the voice.

The innkeeper’s daughter was standing at the entrance of the room, peeking at them from behind the door, her freckled face red as a tomato.

“Uh...well... It’s checkout time. You need to pay more if you want to stay another night...”

After a long silence, Caim finally managed to respond, “Yeah, sorry.”

Their excitement dampened, the three half naked women immediately calmed down and began to put their clothes back on.

○ ○ ○

In the end, it was decided that Tea would go to the empire with them, and the four of them all left the inn and went to secure passage to the empire by boat. When they arrived at the harbor, they headed toward the section selling tickets, which was staffed by a young man.

“Four tickets? That will be two gold coins.”

“Yes—here you are.” Millicia paid for everyone.

Faced with such a beautiful young woman of seemingly high standing, the clerk added with a smile, “We are full today, but you should be able to depart tomorrow at noon. If you are late, we do not offer refunds, so please be careful.”

“Tomorrow? I thought we would have to wait longer than that,” Millicia commented. Usually, boats bound for the empire were fully booked, and it could sometimes take more than a week to obtain a spot on one. They were incredibly lucky to only have to wait a single day.

“There was a cancellation for tomorrow, so you can take their place.”

“I see. Thank you.” Millicia took the tickets and returned to where Caim and

the others were waiting. “It seems we shall be able to head for the empire tomorrow—a much faster departure than expected.”

“Great. I want to tour the town before that, though. Do you mind if I do that?” Caim asked.

“No, but...” Millicia paused for an instant, then continued. “Will Tea go with you?”

“Of course! Tea is Master Caim’s maid after all!” Tea proudly answered in Caim’s place.

“I would love to come too, but Lenka and I have to make preparations for the journey. How unfortunate that it will only be the two of you...” Millicia said with a pout.

“Will you be all right? I can help if you need someone to carry the luggage.”

“No, we’re already having you accompany us due to our circumstances, so I don’t want to take even more of your time. And, well...you must have a lot to talk about with Tea, no?”

“Do you *really* want to help out your enemy like that?” Tea threw a dubious glance at Millicia, who shrugged in response.

“I don’t think I would be able to monopolize someone as incredible as Caim. However, I do plan to be his first wife, so prepare yourself to lose on that front.”

“Hmph! Bring it on! Tea will be the one to win!”

It felt like sparks were flying as Tea and Millicia faced off against each other.

Lenka smiled wryly and waved her hand to shoo Caim away. “Just go already. When you’re around, my lady is a completely different person.”

“Sorry for the trouble. I’ll be leaving her to you.” After showing his appreciation to Lenka, Caim headed to the main street with Tea.

“Well, what to do now...?” Caim wondered. “This is my first time visiting a big city—the first time I’m going out in one, in fact. Is there anywhere you want to go, Tea?”

“There is, but it can wait. We should go where you want first.”

“Where I want to go...” Caim recalled the sightseeing areas he had heard about when he’d toured the different street stalls in the morning. “Well then...first, let’s go to the town’s viewing platform.”

Caim and Tea followed the flow of people as they walked along the main street. It had a gentle slope, going gradually uphill until it reached a place where it was possible to overlook the entire town.

“Wow, what an amazing view!”

“Grrraow! It’s splendid!”

The two raised their voices in admiration. From here, they had a complete view of the town, as well as the Flumen River running parallel to it. The sun’s reflection glittered on the surface of the water, making the river look like a giant box of jewels.

“It’s really worth seeing. I’m grateful to that man from the food stall for telling me about this place.”

“It’s like a dream for me to be able to see such wonderful scenery with you, Master Caim! When I lived in the mansion, I always hoped we could visit tons of places together!”

“Tea...” Caim was so touched by her loyalty that his shoulders trembled a little. However, what she said next hit him in a different way.

“When you suddenly left, I was so shocked I almost cried. I’m so glad we get to sightsee while we travel together!”

“Ugh...” Caim held his chest, pained by her barbed words. Then he put his head in his hands and squatted down before apologizing for what felt like the millionth time. “Please, cheer up already. I’m really sorry for what I did.”

“Grrraow, I’m not angry about *that* anymore. I understand you had your reasons, so I forgive you for leaving me behind.”

“I feel like you’re implying something here... If you want to say something, then say it.”

“Really? Then I will!” Tea leaned close to Caim’s face. “Tea *is* angry at you,

Master Caim!”

“Ugh...I know, that’s why I—”

“I don’t mean about leaving me behind! I’m talking about you mating with random females while you were away from Tea!”

“What?!” Caim exclaimed, then hastily looked around. The viewing platform was a popular spot—quite a few onlookers had reacted to the word “mating” and were now staring at Caim suspiciously. “Don’t talk about that kind of thing here, Tea! Pay attention to our surroundings!”

“It’s your fault, Master Caim! Tea is so furious you couldn’t resist the temptation of those damn females! I’m really sad and hurt!”

“Their circumstances are special, and... Aaah, jeez, what should I do, then?”

“I don’t just want an apology—I want to be compensated too! Let’s go where Tea wants to go!”

“That’s all...?”

“Yes. If you do that, I’ll forgive you. Now, let’s head out!” Tea linked arms with Caim and pulled him with her as she started walking. He didn’t resist, enjoying the sensation of his arm against her soft chest covered by her pinafore.

She’s... Well, thinking about it, her breasts have always been pretty big... Caim had often bathed with Tea when he was young. In her teens, she’d already had an ample chest, but her breasts had truly become like two giant mountains now that she had reached twenty. Caim couldn’t stop his heart from racing as he realized how much the maid he had known for years had grown.

“I-I don’t mind going wherever you want, if that’s what you wish—but where exactly are you taking me?” Caim asked.

Tea turned his way and shot him a mischievous smile. Her eyes took on a bewitching glint, like a carnivorous beast looking at its prey. “A love hotel, of course! You’re going to mate with Tea!”

“What?! How can you just say that in broad daylight?!” Caim cried. He’d thought that this discussion was over.

“A beastfolk woman will never let her prey escape! And now that the others

aren't here, I *have* to take the opportunity to mate with you!" she brazenly declared as if this were a point of pride to her. "I'm certain that you'll attract many more females, Master Caim, and I don't mind. It's natural for a superior male to have several females by his side. However, I won't give up the honor of being your first wife to anyone! Tea has been aiming for you from the day we met!"

"Do you realize how outrageous this is to say in public?! Also, wait...since you first met me? I was a *baby*!" Caim clutched at his head as the curious gazes of passing tourists and townspeople started to drift toward them. However, as Caim pondered what he should say, an angry voice rang out.

"Ah, it's him! I found him!"

"Huh?" Caim turned toward the voice, puzzled. Several men were ascending the viewing platform, heading straight for Caim and Tea. One of the men looked like an aristocrat, and the others were muscular and seemed like they were used to fighting. Caim recalled the nobleman—it was the same man who'd been abusing the beastfolk slave girl a few hours ago.

"You scoundrel! How dare you do that to me?! You think you can get away with committing an act of violence against an imperial noble?!"

Caim clicked his tongue. "Come on. I'm busy here, you damn nuisance."

"Kill that man! Make him pay for the crime of insulting me!" the nobleman ordered.

"Can we seriously kill him?"

"Don't worry—I'll bribe the militia and the judge. Make him suffer until he dies!"

"Got it." Having received permission from the nobleman, the brawny men took a step forward, flexing their exposed tanned and muscular arms as they took out knives and clubs. They looked at Caim and then Tea in turn with vulgar smiles on their faces.

"Pretty thoughtful of you to bring a woman along. We'll have a lot of fun once we're done with you!"

“We’ll kill the man, then enjoy the woman. After that, we’ll sell her to a brothel. She may be a beastfolk, but she should still fetch us quite the sum!”

“These damn scumbags...” Caim glared sharply at the men who were leering viciously at Tea. He clenched his fist and was just about to release his bloodlust when Tea stepped in front of him.

“Grrraaaw! You deserve death for interrupting my mating with Master Caim!” She bared her fangs, roaring like a starved beast. Her silver hair swayed, standing on end as if each strand were a living being.

“Uh, Tea...”

“Grrraaaaaaw!” Tea dashed forward before Caim could stop her, and she ran as though gliding across the ground toward the nearest thug. Then, she kicked him right in the groin.

The thug let out an unintelligible scream as he crouched down, clutching between his legs.

“We’re not done here! I’m gonna crush your bones!” Tea shouted, swinging her right hand at the squatting man. Her sharp nails tore his face, spraying bright-red blood everywhere as the thug collapsed onto his back.

“Y-You’re gonna pay for this, you bitch!”

“How dare you do that to him?! We’re gonna kill you!”

Enraged by what had just happened, the man’s comrades rushed at Tea, swinging their knives and clubs.

“How naive! As if such simple attacks could even hit me!” Tea twisted her body to avoid a blow, then quickly stepped aside to dodge another. Her otherworldly flexibility and nimble movements were truly worthy of a wild, feline beast.

There were many kinds of demi-humans and beastfolk, but among them, tigerfolk were said to be as belligerent and formidable in combat as lionfolk and dragonfolk. Even though she had worked as a maid, Tea had also spent time training with the soldiers and the knights of House Halsberg and was strong enough to not lose against them.

“Weep in joy, for I shall show you a glimpse of my *true* strength!” Tea put her hand inside her skirt and drew out a rod-shaped implement made of three poles connected by chains—a weapon from the East known as a three-section staff. “This is the weapon the late mistress bought for me, and the time has come to use it!”

When Caim’s mother—Sasha Halsberg—was still alive, she had encountered a foreign merchant selling the three-section staff. Tea had tried the strange weapon and curiously found it quite easy to use, so Sasha had bought it for her with a smile, asking Tea to protect Caim with it.

“Well then, here I come!” Tea skillfully twirled one section of the rod and bashed the ruffians with it. “Grrraw! Grrraaw! Grrraaaw!” Using the centrifugal force of her swings, she struck her opponents in the face, stomach, and groin so hard that they screamed in pain. The way she dealt one blow after another looked like a splendid dance, and the onlookers started to raise their voices in admiration.

“Wow, awesome!”

“You’re amazing, missy! Do that again!”

“Yeah, beat them!”

Discrimination against nonhumans was severe in the Jade Kingdom, but this town was right on the border with the empire. As a result, the people here were more accepting of other races. The sight of a beautiful woman beating up brawny men one after another was amazing enough to draw praise despite the barrier between the races.

Seeing that his men were losing, the nobleman groaned. “To think the guards I paid for would be defeated so easily... I’ll get you back for this someday! Don’t you forget it!” he shouted. The nobleman then tried to flee toward the viewing platform’s stairs, but Caim blocked his path.

“You should be ashamed for trying to escape while your underlings are still fighting. Oh well—I can’t let Tea do everything, so I’ll play with you a little.”

“Ugh... My father is an important official in the empire. Don’t think you’ll be able to get away with this!”

“I don’t care, you idiot.” Caim gathered purple mana into his right hand, producing a greatly virulent acid in his palm—and then grabbed the nobleman’s face with it.

“Gaaaaah?!”

“Your face is gonna be so horrible nobody will want to look at it—and while you’re in the hospital, you’ll have plenty of time to regret picking a fight with the wrong person.”

The nobleman collapsed, convulsing on the ground. His face was hideously burned and he was in a truly pitiful state, but he was still alive.

“Well, now...” Caim discreetly tried to leave the scene, but...

“I won’t let you go, Master Caim.” Tea grabbed him by the scruff of his neck. “Let’s go to a love hotel! Please, don’t resist!” She was holding Caim with one hand and wielding her three-section staff with the other, and he feared she might resort to violence if he refused.

“...Fine, do as you wish,” Caim sighed as Tea dragged him along.

The two of them found a love hotel and secured a room. Once inside, Tea threw Caim onto the bed with her beastfolk strength and immediately proceeded to straddle his waist.

“Heh heh heh, you can’t escape anymore, Master Caim. Now, prepare yourself!”

Caim silently looked at his maid as she licked her lips with a bewitching smile. Realizing he wouldn’t be able to resist in a situation like this, he just resigned himself to his fate.

Tea giggled as she undressed right before Caim’s eyes. Her slender fingers unfastened the buttons of her pinafore one by one, exposing her cleavage.

Tea had taken care of Caim since he was a baby and was like an older sister to him. He was used to being hugged by her, and they had even bathed together frequently when he was younger. *Still, this is the first time I’ve ever just stared at her naked body like this,* Caim thought. A few years earlier, looking at her

bare skin had started to feel wrong to Caim, so he'd stopped staring at her when she was nude. That meant the body in front of him right now was far more developed than the one he remembered.

Tea's breasts jiggled as they spilled from her pinafore. They were covered by a red bra, and despite their large size, they stayed perky in defiance of gravity, making the view from below quite the sight.

"W-Wow, they're big..." Caim couldn't help commenting after seeing Tea's mouthwatering breasts swaying. Looking up, he could see they were enormous—voluptuous ellipses at least two sizes bigger than what Caim had imagined from seeing Tea clothed. They were truly worthy of the name "bra busters."

"You can touch them, Master Caim."

He gasped.

"Ever since you picked me up in that back alley, this body has always been yours. Every part of me, from my flesh to every single drop of blood—even my soul exists to serve you." As if showing off, Tea slowly moved her hands to her back and unhooked the brassiere that held back her gigantic mounds. The next instant, her breasts bounced from the release, moving so animatedly they seemed almost like living beings. Now, her two mountains were in full view.

Perhaps Caim was mistaken, but he felt like her chest was even bigger now that it was liberated from her underwear, and he couldn't stop himself from groaning as he squirmed his hips. Before he even realized it, blood had rushed to a certain part of his anatomy—which was now cramped, because Tea was sitting on it.

"It seems you are getting quite worked up, Master Caim. That makes servicing you worthwhile," Tea said, noticing the hard lump. She shot him an elated grin as she ground her rear, still covered with her skirt, against his groin.

Caim moaned from the stimulation, grimacing as pleasure and pain assaulted him. *That damn tigress... She's getting cocky!* He couldn't let himself stay on the defensive—he had to counterattack.

Caim's eyes fixated on the enormous breasts swaying before him—despite their size, her areolae by contrast were rather small, and the erect nipples at

their center were surprisingly lovely. Caim knew that Tea was trying to tempt him, to stir him up...and yet, he plunged straight into the trap.

“Aaah?!” Tea moaned in surprise.

Caim had extended both his hands and grabbed her breasts from below, seizing the swaying lumps of flesh like a raptor diving for its prey, and was now vigorously massaging them.

“Mmmh, aaah... Please, Master Caim, don’t be so rough!”

“You were the one tempting me, so don’t complain. I know you’ve wanted me to do this from the very start,” Caim retorted as he squeezed her breasts, kneading them in circles, his fingers sinking into her flesh effortlessly. Her chest was so soft and yielding, freely changing shape each time Caim put strength into his fingers—so much that he was struck with admiration at how obscene a form this part of the human body could take.

“Aaah!” Having enjoyed her softness enough, Caim pushed his thumbs against Tea’s nipples and flicked the tips like he would a switch. “Ah, ah, aaah!” Every flick drew a short moan out of her.

Tea’s face was drenched in pleasure, and her expression had an indescribable lasciviousness to it. The illicit feeling of warping a familiar face like this was intoxicating to Caim, and he escalated his attacks by twisting her nipples.

“Aaaaaah?! It feels so good, Master Caim! Tea is going crazy!”

“Don’t worry—you’re always crazy.”

“Tea is so happy! You’ve become so strong, and you love me! I’ve always wanted to do this with you ever since I met youuuu!” she howled like a beast.

Caim was a little alarmed by the implication that she’d been lusting after him ever since he was a *baby*, but he was still deeply moved by how much Tea loved him. He wanted to respond to her feelings, so he forcefully sat up, making Tea cry out in surprise.

“Time to turn the tables.” Caim pushed Tea down on the bed, switching their positions, and then hunched over her and put his mouth on one of her giant breasts.

“Aah?!”

Caim sucked at her breast, licking the nipple and covering everything with his saliva. He licked, sucked, and nibbled to his heart’s content, alternating between the two mounds.

“Aaah, mmmh!”

“It’s kind of a pain to have to go from one to the other every time... So, instead...”

“Aaaaah?!” Caim squeezed Tea’s breasts, forcibly pressing her nipples together, then suckled on both of them at the same time. “Mmmmh!” Tea’s back arched, her hips rising off the bed.

Seeing all of this, Caim didn’t stop—instead, he mercilessly bit her nipples.

“Master Caim... Mmmmhaaaaaah!” Tea let out her loudest moan yet. She had climaxed. Tea’s body became limp as she lay down on the bed, panting hot breaths. “I-I give up... You were amazing, Master Caim.”

“Things only ended up like this because you got carried away. Did you really think you could dominate your master in bed?”

“I just wanted to service you...”

“Upsy-daisy.” Caim turned the exhausted Tea over on the bed, making her yelp in surprise. Then, he lifted her hips until her rear—still covered by the skirt of her uniform—was pointed toward the ceiling.

“Master Caim?”

“This is the best position for a tigress like you. I’ll take you from behind.”

“Ah...”

Caim put his hands inside her skirt and swiftly slid her panties down. They were the same red color as her bra and dripping wet, proving just how much she had enjoyed Caim’s touch.

“Now *you’re* the one who can’t escape—not that you’re gonna refuse me so late in the game, right?”

“Of course not. Please, enjoy me to your heart’s content.” Tea shook her butt

and used the tail curling from her back to raise up her skirt. With no underwear to hide anything anymore, she was now fully exposed.

“Well, if you put it *that* way...” Caim said, removing his pants and undergarments. “Here I come.”

“Yes— Aaaah?!”

He took Tea from behind just like how animals would mate, and the moans of a climaxing beast resonated ceaselessly inside the hotel room throughout the entire night.

Epilogue

In the end, Caim and Tea spent the whole night in the love hotel without sleeping. When they returned to the inn, Millicia and Lenka greeted them, displeased.

“You were quite late in returning. Yes, *very* late,” Millicia said.

“You must have been having a lot of fun. Even though we’re heading to the empire today...” Lenka added.

Apparently, the two had woken up early—or perhaps they had waited up the whole night for Caim to return, but he really hoped that wasn’t the case.

“Sorry you had to do all the preparations yesterday. Were there any problems?” Caim asked.

“Aside from the fact that my lady was displeased the entire time, no, there weren’t. We can depart right away,” Lenka answered. Millicia stayed silent, her arms crossed.

“Good. It would be even better if your lady cheered up, though.”

Millicia didn’t reply, turning toward Tea instead. “Did you make up with Caim?”

“I’m grateful for your concern. I had an absolutely wonderful night!” Tea exclaimed.

“I’m happy for you. Let’s support Caim together from here on out.”

“That goes without saying. Though I’m reluctant to do so, I shall accept you.”

“As his first wife, *I* am the one accepting *you*. It’s natural for a strong man to have several women by his side, so I don’t mind you being his mistress.”

“Hmph! We’ll see who becomes Master Caim’s first wife!”

Tea and Millicia nodded at each other and exchanged a firm handshake, looking like rivals forming a friendship after a fierce battle. Caim didn’t really

understand the significance of their conversation, but he was relieved that Millicia had cheered up.

“Well then—it’s a little early, but let’s go to the harbor,” Millicia said, standing up from the bed. “If we miss the boat, we’ll be in trouble.”

“Yeah...”

“Hm? Is there a problem, Caim?”

Caim winced as Millicia peered at his face. For some reason, he was feeling *very* uneasy about how harmonious the girls seemed. Thinking about it, he’d slept with all of them, which kind of made them “sisters” in a certain sense. It was an unusual and priceless—yet still absurd—kind of relationship.

Why am I so scared right now? Am I really supposed to travel together with all of them...? Caim had become the Poison King after fusing with the Poison Queen and had defeated the Master Pugilist, his greatest enemy. He should no longer have anything to fear—yet for some reason, he couldn’t help being terrified by the girls who were his companions. No matter how strong they became, perhaps all men were destined to dance in the palm of a woman’s hand.

“Is there a problem, Caim?”

“We’re heading out, Master Caim.”

“What’s the matter? Let’s go.”

“Sorry, it’s nothing. I’m coming,” Caim finally replied, urged on by Millicia, Tea, and Lenka.

They all left the inn and headed toward the harbor to board the boat bound for the empire.

A man and three women—in a way, it was like a dream, the kind of situation any man would envy. And yet, Caim couldn’t help being extremely uneasy about their journey.

His anxiety would turn out to be more than justified—but for now, the future was only known to God.

Extra Story: The Maid's Intense Love and Bathing

Tea, a maid serving House Halsberg, was a tigerfolk. Among beastfolk and demi-humans, they were feared as much as dragonfolk and lionfolk for their warlike nature and incredible combat capabilities. Moreover, the tigerfolk born with white hair—white tigers—were special. They naturally possessed a large amount of mana and were treated almost like royalty by other tigerfolk.

So, how did a creature as special as Tea end up as an abandoned orphan in a human town? Unfortunately, even Tea herself could not remember.

However, one thing was certain: Caim Halsberg had saved Tea, and for that, he had her eternal loyalty—and her feelings bordered on madness.

“Does it itch anywhere, Master Caim?”

“Uh...”

Two people were currently inside the bathroom of the Halsberg mansion. One was Caim Halsberg, a boy with purple bruises spreading over his body. The other was Tea, his maid. Naturally, as they were in the bathroom, both were naked, and Tea was gently wiping Caim's back with a wet cloth while he sat on a bath stool.

Incidentally, Caim would also often bathe with his mother. Kevin didn't like that, but he couldn't refuse his wife.

“I don't feel itchy anywhere...though it kind of tickles,” Caim said, a little uncomfortable. He was currently twelve, in the beginning of puberty and at the age where one starts to become aware of the difference between the sexes. Given that, Caim couldn't help but be conscious of Tea's nudity and the two mounds swaying behind him. “I'm not a kid anymore. I can wash myself. You don't need to bathe with me...”

“What are you saying? It would be very dangerous if the hot water made you dizzy.”

“I wouldn’t get— Ah?!” Caim started to retort but was stopped by Tea embracing him from behind, pressing her soft breasts against his back. The sensation he felt from the two bulges indecently changing shape as they were squeezed against his back was so overwhelming that he unconsciously quivered.

“You have a weak constitution, Master Caim. The mistress is also too worried to let you bathe alone.”

“U-Um...y-your chest is...” Caim mumbled.

“Is there a problem with your chest?” Tea asked, currently washing that part of his body. Perhaps Caim had spoken too quietly for her to hear the “your” part.

It’s your chest that’s touching me—but I can’t possibly say that directly! Caim screamed internally, his face completely red. As a young boy who had just entered puberty, Caim was too embarrassed to tell her that having her breasts pushed against his back made him feel weird. To begin with, he didn’t even understand *why* he felt so embarrassed about it. The changes brought about by his age were bewildering.

“Uh...” Caim whined.

Tea chuckled. “What a strange sound you’re making,” she said, continuing to wash his body.

Unlike Caim, who couldn’t get his mind off her naked body, it didn’t *seem* like Tea had recognized Caim as a man—but the truth was completely different.

Master Caim finally sees me as a woman! The way he’s embarrassed by my chest is sooo cuuute! Tea mentally squealed in delight, her breathing growing rough. She knew that Caim had hit puberty, and she was pushing her body against his on purpose. She embraced him while naked, pressing her breasts and waist into him, because she enjoyed his reaction to the skin contact. *Master Caim, who was so small until recently, is now seeing me as a woman... It took so long.*

Tea had indeed recognized Caim as a man, but this was nothing new. It had started far before he entered puberty, back when they had first met. From that

moment, she had already decided that Caim would be her future mate. She had been a dying orphan, and he had saved her and allowed her to be employed as a maid. The gratitude and deep love she felt for him were indescribable.

In short, Tea had seen Caim as a man ever since he was a baby, and she had planned for their relationship to become sexual from the very beginning.

Master Caim is finally becoming a true male. Maybe I should just take him right here, right now? Tea had a truly terrifying thought, but immediately shook her head. Caim was only starting to become sexually aware. If she were too aggressive now, she might awaken a strange fetish in herself. *It's too soon. I need to be more patient... But thinking about the future, I should at least mark him.*

"T-Tea?! I can wash *there* myself!"

"No. It's a maid's job to wash her master."

"But *that's*— Hya?!" Caim let out a strange cry from having Tea gently caress his intimate parts.

"This place is very delicate, so I shall use my hands instead of a cloth. Don't worry, Master Caim, it'll be fine. Leave everything to me! I'll make you cu— I mean, I'll make you clean!" Tea declared and began to giggle, baring her fangs like a carnivorous beast, as she carefully washed Caim's newly awakened manhood while he moaned bashfully, his eyes full of tears.

Spurred on by her intense love for Caim, Tea continued to devote herself to him, but it would be more than a year before her wish could be fulfilled.

When Caim matured into the Poison King, he finally accepted the affection Tea had cultivated for over a decade. However, the way she squeezed him dry made him fear that her passion might end up transforming him into a withered husk.

Afterword

If it's your first time reading one of my books, nice to meet you! I'm LeonarD, the eternal *chuuni* author.

First, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who bought this book and the people involved in the publishing process. This work, *The Poison King*, was published thanks to winning a prize in the Shosetsuka ni Naro category of the third HJ Novel Contest.

Back when I was only a reader and spent my afternoons and nights reading light novels, losing myself in my fantasies, I never expected I'd one day be able to publish a book under Hobby Japan. It's truly a major achievement. In fact, while I'm deeply moved, a part of me also wonders if this isn't just another one of my fantasies. I can't help but tremble in fear at the possibility that this is all a dream I will wake up from someday.

Now, let's talk about this novel. What follows will contain spoilers, so please be careful if you still haven't read the book.

The story starts with our protagonist, Caim, who was born with a curse. The poor boy is full of resentment and sorrow, as he is persecuted because of his curse even though he hasn't done anything wrong. But all of that ends when he fuses with the source of everything, the Poison Queen, and awakens as an OP protagonist.

By defeating his father who tormented him unfairly, Caim breaks out of his shell and can now spread his wings and go out into the world. To tell you the truth, I worried about whether to kill his toxic father for a while—and the web version did receive comments wishing for his death—but I ended up deciding to keep him alive. I do not plan for him to reappear in the story, but as a father who failed to love his son and was left behind by the daughter he cared for, I wanted him to fall into despair and suffer a feeling of loss and helplessness. I

think that's a harsher punishment than death.

As for the sister, I wasn't sure about bringing her back, but considering how wonderful the illustration from Won-sensei was, I think I will. And, well, wouldn't it be a waste to discard such a valuable(?) character who wets herself?

After that, the protagonist goes on a journey and eventually joins the three main heroines. In the web version, I couldn't write the sex scenes because of the site's rules, but I added the lewdest things I could to the published version. And thanks to Won-sensei's wonderful illustrations, the heroines' charms were enhanced even further! I hope you enjoy the way they look—they're like flowers in full bloom.

By the way, this was my first time writing erotic scenes. It was quite difficult, but I feel like I evolved as an author thanks to that. Maybe I should extend the range of my works and write even more erotic fantasy novels!

Well then—with this, the first volume of *The Poison King* is over. However, the adventures of Caim and the heroines are only beginning. What awaits them in the empire? What is Millicia's secret? What kinds of enemies are going to stand in Caim's way? If possible, I hope to have the opportunity to write about these and many other things.

Until then, I shall pray to all the gods, Buddhas, and devils for us to meet again.

Leonard

Bonus Short Stories

The Three Girls' Shopping Trip

Since they had a little time before their boat would depart for the Garnet Empire, Caim and the girls decided to do some shopping.

“With this, we should have enough clothes. Is there anything else we need to buy?” Millicia asked, holding a paper bag in her arms.

“Sir Caim is purchasing water and food. And if we do not have enough, we can simply procure what we need once we are on the empire's side of the river,” Lenka answered.

In order to not stand out, Millicia and Lenka were currently wearing plain clothes—the former to hide her noble birth and the latter to conceal the fact that she was a knight. However, none of it could disguise their natural beauty, which attracted the eyes of many onlookers.

“You bought way too much underwear, Millicia—and they're all lewd. How indecent,” Tea chided. She was dressed in her usual maid uniform, also carrying a bag.

“Uh...I had no other choice but to buy plenty. After all, I don't know Caim's tastes.” Millicia pouted, tightly clutching a paper sack.

The three of them had been buying clothes—undergarments in particular—which was the reason they had separated from Caim. It was a rather delicate subject for women.

“It is truly heartbreaking to see you like this, milady... You were so pure and chaste, as lovely as a flower, and here you are now, purchasing such outrageous underwear...”

“You bought a new negligee too, Lenka! A very erotic one that's almost transparent, at that! Also, what do you plan to do with the whip you bought in the previous store?”

“W-Well...we will likely purchase a horse to travel within the empire, so I thought I should have one on hand to use for its training...”

“Then what about the candles? The ropes? Or the handcuffs and the collar?!”

“Eek! You saw me buy those?!”

“I saw everything—from start to finish!”

Tea sighed as she watched Millicia and Lenka argue in the middle of the street. “Good grief, are you forgetting that the both of you are ladies? It’s not all about being aggressive. Acting prim and proper can also work wonders.”

“Didn’t you also buy new underwear? What did you choose?”

“Heh heh, thanks for asking. Here, look!” Tea took something out of her bag and showed it to the other two.

“What is this...?” Millicia tilted her head to the side. Whatever it was, it had a lot of fabric and didn’t feel like an undergarment.

“It’s not just a big piece of cloth, right? It’s adorned with unusual flowers... What a vibrant design. Are you supposed to fasten it with that sash?” Lenka pointed.

“Exactly. It’s a yukata, a native dress from the East. A group of people living even farther to the east than the empire apparently wear them as underwear.” The shopkeeper from the clothing shop had said he’d bought it from a foreign peddler, and the vibrant flowers weaved into its fabric gave it an exotic look. Also, despite being modest and exposing minimal skin, there was something suggestive and captivating about the garment. Perhaps that was just one of the sacred mysteries of the East.

“Once we’ve reached the empire, let’s use what we’ve bought to see who’ll win Master Caim’s heart! Of course, it’s going to be me!” Tea declared.

“I won’t lose! With this G-string, victory will be mine!” Millicia protested.

“I don’t care about winning or losing. I just want him to spank me...” Lenka muttered, exposing her desire just as clearly as the other two.

The three of them didn’t realize that their improper girls’ talk made them really stand out as they walked down the main street—so much that they

attracted an unwanted pest.

“Hey there, ladies. You’re having quite a fun discussion!” A man more than two meters tall greeted them. He was muscled and sported several scars, making him look like a veteran mercenary or adventurer. “When good women like you are talking about underwear like this in the open, I can only think that you’re trying to attract male attention! You don’t look like prostitutes, but if you wanna have some fun, then I’m your man!” He gave a vulgar grin as he wriggled his fingers indecently.

The girls scowled at the lecher with cold eyes, glanced at each other, and shook their heads.

“How to say it... Well, gentlemen other than Caim truly are worthless.”

“Exactly. He has a large body, but he still looks pretty weak. He’s nothing compared to Master Caim, the ultimate male.”

“I don’t want to be spanked by a brute like that. As I thought, there’s only one man who can *discipline* me...”

Millicia, Tea, and Lenka expressed their disinterest in the man and turned their backs to him, walking away.

The man’s vulgar smile stiffened at being ignored. A moment passed before he realized that they were insulting him, and his face flushed with anger. “You bitches! How dare you ign— Bwah?!”

“Finally found you.” The burly man had been knocked aside, and in his place stood a young man. He was the three girls’ fated lover, the one to whom they had offered their maidenhood—Caim.

“Caim!”

“Huh? There was a weird guy here, so I kicked him. Was he an acquaintance of yours?” Caim asked Millicia without sparing a second glance at the man, who was now embedded in a wall.

“No, of course not! He was a complete stranger!”

“I see. Anyway, I’m done on my end. What about you?”

“We bought everything we needed.”

“Good. Well then, let’s go to the harbor,” Caim said, walking away.

Millicia and Tea took his left and right, while Lenka followed behind him. And surrounded by these beauties, Caim drew envious and jealous glares from all the men they passed by.

Welcome to the Arousing Sauna

Since there was some time before the departure of their boat toward the empire, Caim and the girls decided to visit a popular establishment in the town—the sauna.

“It’s far hotter than I expected. I can’t stop sweating,” Caim commented, sitting on a bench as he wiped the sweat from his brow.

“Saunas are very popular in the empire,” Millicia explained. “In fact, I often went to one myself.”

Caim, Millicia, Lenka, and Tea sat together inside a private room filled with hot steam. They were practically naked, only wearing thin bathing clothes, which gave the girls a suggestive look. The fabric of their clothes was drenched with sweat and stuck to their curves, emphasizing them.

Caim looked away from the tempting sight, instead focusing on the sauna stones at the center of the room. “Steam is produced by pouring water on those rocks, right? To be honest, I don’t get why people like being in such a hot room.”

“That’s because you haven’t experienced revitalization yet, Caim. Once you do, you will become addicted,” Millicia said.

“Indeed. I went to a sauna with my colleagues from the knight order quite a few times, and it was great,” Lenka added.

The way their bodies were flushed and drenched in sweat from the heat made them look quite lascivious.

“I heard about this ‘revitalization’ at the entrance. What does that mean?” Caim asked.

“Rather than listening to me explain it, you should experience it yourself.

First, you warm yourself in the sauna, then you take a cold bath, and finally, you go out for an air bath. By repeating this procedure three times, you should feel completely revived.”

“A cold bath? An air bath? And *three times*? Is that some kind of ascetic practice?” Caim was puzzled. Were saunas religious establishments? Because if not, what Millicia described sounded like torture. “It’s kinda hard to understand other cultures...but I guess that’s what makes traveling fun.”

Caim had just quit his homeland and started his journey, so while he understood that the pleasure of traveling was discovering other cultures, he couldn’t help but be perplexed by some things.

“Anyway, guess I should do as the locals do... Hm? You all right, Tea?” Caim noticed that his maid was swaying unsteadily on her seat.

“Yesh...” she replied.

“Hey! Get a hold of yourself!”

“Are you feeling dizzy from the heat?” Millicia hastily asked, seeing how red Tea’s face was.

Tea didn’t answer Millicia, instead falling against Caim and hugging him. “Master Caim... I feel so hot...and strange...”

“H-Hey, what’s happening?” Caim realized that Tea wasn’t merely feeling dizzy from the heat—her eyes had an unnatural glint to them, and her breathing was starting to get rough as she clung to him, squashing her huge breasts against his body. She even began to lick her lips like a carnivorous beast in front of its prey. “Don’t tell me you...”

“Aaah! My body is...!”

“Mmmh! Wh-Why am I starting to ache like this?!”

It wasn’t just Tea—Millicia and Lenka had started acting strange too. For a moment, Caim was confused by what was happening, but when he saw his own sweaty body, he came to a realization.

“Oh...” He remembered that he was the Poison King and that his bodily fluids contained his pheromones. He also recalled how Millicia and Lenka had gone

into heat from swallowing his saliva the last time.

“Master Caim! Please mate with Tea!”

“Just as I thought!” Caim exclaimed as Tea removed her bathing clothes, still clinging to him.

Millicia and Lenka undressed too, their eyes glazed over with lust.

“Please embrace me, Caim!”

“Just kill me! Or rather, spank me!”

“Aaah!” Caim shouted as the girls encircled him.

After that, the four of them had some intense exercise in the steam-filled room. When they finally exited the establishment, the three girls looked quite refreshed—but not from the revitalization promised by the sauna.

The Beastfolk Maid’s Search for Her Master

“Sniff, sniff...”

In broad daylight and right in the middle of the main road, a woman was doing something very strange. She was on all fours, her face near the ground and her butt pointed toward the sky. Her abnormal behavior made the merchants and travelers who passed by stare at her like she was a lunatic, but the woman didn’t care. She just continued what she was doing.

“There’s no doubt about it! This is Master Caim’s scent!” she exclaimed cheerfully. She had been sniffing the ground.

Her name was Tea, and she was a beastfolk woman who had been serving the household of Count Halsberg as a maid until a few days ago. She had tiger ears atop her white hair and a tail with black stripes extended from beneath her skirt—or rather, because of her posture, her skirt was rolled up, exposing her underwear. However, Tea didn’t pay attention to that.

“Master Caim walked down this road. That means he must be heading toward the eastern border... Is he planning to go to the empire?”

Tea’s objective was to catch up to Caim—her savior and only master—who

had fled from the Halsberg territory. Currently, she was on the main road, sniffing her way toward him thanks to her superior beastfolk nose. It wasn't difficult for her to distinguish his familiar scent from all the other smells.

"Good grief... Tea isn't going to easily forgive you for leaving her behind, Master Caim! You shall get a good scolding when I find you!" Tea stood up with an angry shout, then started running at great speed along the main road.

Tea didn't mind that Caim had left the count's household—in fact, she was glad of it. The fools living in that mansion weren't worthy of her master. However, she wasn't happy that he had left her behind.

"Tea isn't going to hold back anymore! When I find you, I'm going to push you down, strip you naked, and lick you all over! And when night comes...hee hee hee hee!" She giggled as she fantasized about what she was going to do to Caim.

Tea had loved Caim since he was a baby and had been planning to mate with him for a long time. Being separated from him had only increased the intensity of her love, and now she was openly expressing her reproductive urges—which were stronger than average to begin with, as she was a beastfolk.

"Um...another crossroads." Tea stopped in her tracks as she reached a fork in the road, the path branching in two directions. She once again crawled on the ground, searching for Caim's scent with her butt pointed skyward.

"Hey, woman! Are you trying to rile me up, showing your ass like that?" Suddenly, a boorish man appeared, a grin plastered across his face. He was unshaven and middle-aged, and based on the sword on his back and his rough outfit, he likely was a mercenary or an adventurer. "A woman who smells like a beast ain't so bad! I made the right call to venture off my usual path. What a great find!" The man smiled indecently as he approached Tea from behind and extended his hand, wanting to stroke her exposed rear end.

However, Tea immediately stood up. "Grrraow!" She pulled a three-section staff from under her skirt and struck the man in the jaw with it. "Grrraw! Grrraaw! Grrraaaw!" Then she followed with strikes to his head, shoulders, chest, stomach, and finally his crotch; the man screamed in pain at every blow before fainting.

“Who is this man? Why is he on the ground?” Tea tilted her head, puzzled. She had been so focused on searching for Caim’s scent that she’d attacked the man unconsciously, without even realizing he was there. “Anyway, I need to catch up to Master Caim! Let’s go!”

Tea once again started to run down the main road, leaving the man collapsed on the ground. It only took a few seconds for Tea to completely forget that he’d ever existed.



Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

[Newsletter](#)

And you can read the latest chapters (like Vol. 2 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

[J-Novel Club Membership](#)

Copyright

The Poison King: Now that I've Gained Ultimate Power, the Bewitching Beauties in My Harem Can't Get Enough of Me Volume 1

by LeonarD

Translated by Boris Lecourt Edited by Sarah Tilson

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © LeonarD

Illustrations by Won

Original Japanese edition published in 2023 by Hobby Japan This English edition is published by arrangement with Hobby Japan, Tokyo English translation © 2024 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: August 2024