

Chapter 111

I wonder if I can do well? (1)

Most tend to overlook it, but the concept of ‘normalcy’ is not absolute.

When someone is referred to as ‘normal,’ it implies that the person does not deviate significantly from the societal or cultural norms they belong to.

In other words, someone may be deemed ‘normal’ in one place but might be viewed as peculiar or strange if they were to live among completely different people.

And Namgung Dowi was vividly realizing this fact at the moment.

‘Am I wrong?’

Back in the old days, he might not have known, but now he didn’t pride himself on being firmly set in his thinking. However, what was happening right in front of him wasn’t easy for even someone like Namgung Dowi to accept.

No, this can’t be his fault, no matter how much he thinks about it.

Who in the world could imagine such a scene?

The disciple of Hwasan, riding on the son of the Tang clan’s leader, turning his chin with a punch, while the female swordsman of Hwasan ruthlessly snaps the arm of a Tang clan’s young lord.

Well, let’s say that’s possible, it could happen. If one’s mind is as broad as the sea, one might casually understand such things as ‘well, it’s possible.’

But seeing a Buddhist monk stamping on the face of a member of the Tang clan and a female swordsman from the Tang clan thrusting her sword into her own brothers, even those people might start to see things a bit differently.

Huh? It seems like someone’s missing...

«Step on him! Step on him!»

«Kill them!»

«Aaaaaah!»

Oh my, Yoon Jong Dojang. Why are you being stepped on there? Oh my, in this world. You’re being stepped on with such enthusiasm...

Namgung Dowi, who was watching the scene in front of him with eyes full of disbelief, soon closed his eyes tightly. He didn’t want to think anymore, especially after witnessing a white weasel wearing Hwasan’s black robe, jumping up and smacking the face of a Tang clan’s member.

‘How could the world become like this?’

The hegemony of Sichuan and Shaanxi were clashing on the Yangtze river.

It sounded grand and impressive just to hear about it, but in reality, it was just a street brawl... No, it was even worse than a street brawl. It was nothing different from back alley thugs fighting and brawling with each other.

Namgung clan, pushed to the corner of the practice field to avoid the gruesome fight, watched the brawl like people watching something rare.

«Indeed, the people from Hwasan have good stamina.»

«There was a perception that the Tang clan is weak in chaotic battles, but it seems it's not always the case. Once it becomes such a chaotic fight, it's not easy to avoid the poison powder.»

«Considering that, the people from Hwasan fight quite well, right?»

«They've been trained by people even more ruthless than the Tang clan's poison.»

«Oh, I see. I understand now.»

Don't understand! Why do you understand that!

As they delve deeper into this, Namgung clan has been growing increasingly strange. Those who once would have scowled at that sight, calling it disgraceful, are now genuinely admiring, even applauding.

But what could Namgung Dowi possibly say? It was Namgung Dowi himself who brought these people to Cheonumaeng, putting them in this situation.

«Ah, no. Can it really be like that?»

Despite the bitter assessment, the current Namgung clan is difficult to equate with these two factions. Anyone acquainted with Cheonumaeng would regard these two factions as its core. However, those two core factions are currently exchanging insults and beating each other. 'Wouldn't this only breed ill feelings?'

Understanding the significance of this training was utterly perplexing. But the greater issue was the lack of any way to stop Chung Myung or Tang Gunak. Hence, the only remaining option...

«Um, um...»

«Yes?»

«That... um...»

Namgung Dowi swallowed hard, eyeing Im Sobyong. Unlike Namgung Dowi, Im Sobyong, maintaining an air of 'There's nothing surprising that can happen in this damned place,' casually observed the situation, then subtly nodded in response.

«Why are they acting like that?»

Namgung Dowi's expression turned incredibly awkward.

He understood that as well. In Cheonumaeng, there existed no boundaries between factions or distinctions between orthodox and unorthodox sects. It simply meant that anyone who could trust each other wholeheartedly could step into the confines of Cheonumaeng.

Moreover, Nokrim had proven himself to be a proud member of the Alliance. The moment Im Sobyong, Nokrim King, joined the fight against the Demonic Cult at the risk of his life, no one could doubt his sincerity.

'I know... I'm aware of it... But surely...'

Even though he understood it in his mind, it wasn't easy to approach Im Sobyong and speak to him.

He had never once imagined a day when he, the member of Namgung clan, would casually speak to the leader of an opposing faction. To him, Nokrim King was nothing more or less than a scapegoat that should someday have his throat slit.

No, let's be honest here. What kind of people are Nokrim, to begin with? They're like leeches sucking the life out of innocent villagers and occupying healthy mountains...

«Young Lord.»

«Yes?»

«It seems like you're calling someone over and insulting them with your eyes?»

«I-I wouldn't do such a thing.»

Namgung Dowi was from a distinguished family. In Cheonumaeng, he was among the few who understood the bare minimum of manners. He calmed down and voiced what he intended to say.

«It's just... Shouldn't they calm down a little?»

«Why bother?»

«Yes?»

Im Sobyong shrugged his shoulders as if he found it bothersome.

«Chung Myung Dojang will handle it himself. Plus, Lord Tang is also present.»

«Oh, no. I know that, but... I'm just worried that it might unnecessarily breed ill feelings if they act like this.»

«Oh?»

At that moment, Im Sobyong gave Namgung Dowi a meaningful gaze.

«So, you possess insights that go beyond what Hwasan Geomhyeop and the Poison King have?»

«Huh?»

«So, you're the only one who knows something they don't, and you're currently explaining the plan? And, to avoid discomfort on their side, you're utilizing some bandit, like me, as a messenger?»

«Well, wait a moment...»

Namgung Dowi was noticeably flustered. Could this really be interpreted to such an extent?

«In other words, you find both of them quite imposing, but the bandit leader in front of you is ridiculously easy?»

«I-I didn't mean to imply that!»

«Tsk, tsk, so the bandit leader right in front of you is so dim-witted that he wouldn't catch on unless spoken to directly?»

«...»

Can a person be this twisted?

'Was he always like this?'

Certainly, when they used to travel together towards Gangnam, he was often grumbling, but Namgung Dowi had thought of him as remarkably sharp and resourceful...

This reaction definitely seemed strange even to the Nokrim bandits. One of the bandits, tilting his head, quietly asked Im Sobyong,

«Boss, why are you so agitated? It didn't seem like he said anything particularly offensive.»

«There's nothing he couldn't say.»

«Yes?»

«The problem isn't with the words spoken, but with the one who spoke them.»

The bandit who addressed Im Sobyong glanced briefly at Namgung Dowi.

«...Is there some sort of an issue?»

«An issue? There's no issue on that side. The issue lies with me!»

«No... what do you mean? You keep...»

«Why?»

At that moment, Im Sobyong's eyes glinted as he glared at the bandit.

«Why? I was born in a bandit's household, did everything to gain recognition, even tried to take a civil service exam, but in the end, I failed and ended up living as a bandit. And now I see a noble-born young master living a life of luxury and ease, and it twists my gut!»

«...»

«Haha! It's not even funny! I'm not jealous at all! Sure, no matter how much I chant the principles of righteousness, I'm just a bandit, and that guy, even if he kills someone on the street, as long as one glimpses his status and face, they casually go, 'Ah, the dead person probably deserved it.' Living an easy life! But I am not envious in the slightest! What's there for me to envy about him?»

«...Take a breath and calm down, please.»

The Nokrim bandits and even Namgung clan seemed oddly solemn.

Once Im Sobyong's words started pouring out, they didn't stop.

“Oh dear, I've made a mistake. It's my mistake. A noble person entrusts a task, and a lowly person from Sapa must somehow fulfill it! How can I just go and deliver it now?”

Maybe at this point, if Namgung Dowi had quickly apologized, it might have ended rather awkwardly and been resolved. Of course, Namgung Dowi had the intention and was actually about to apologize.

But life doesn't often unfold as planned, does it? It tends to spread from small sparks to big flames in the blink of an eye.

“Y-you're taking this way too personally.”

At the voice from behind, Namgung Dowi jumped and turned around.

Standing behind him, a member of Namgung clan, with a slightly displeased expression, addressed Im Sobyong.

“It's not all twisted like that.”

“H-Hold on...”

Namgung Dowi hurriedly tried to stop the swordsman's words. Despite appearances, Im Sobyong was the King of Nokrim. It wasn't so easy for just anyone to speak so casually to him.

However, before his words were finished, someone else intercepted them.

“Twisted?”

“...!”

Namgung Dowi's head this time turned abruptly in the opposite direction. A grim-looking Nokrim bandit, standing behind Im Sobyong, spat on the ground.

«Oh my, seems like someone who's never faced hardships in life, looking down on everyone. Who dares to speak to the Nokrim King like that?»

«What? Just because these bandits can talk, they think they're something?»

«Bandits? Yes, I am a bandit. So what about you? Still thinking you're members of the old Namgung clan? If it wasn't for Hwasan, fellows like you would've already met a sword's edge.»

«Oh, really? Who? You? Surely you guys couldn't do such a thing, right? You need to know your place, you bandits.»

«Who doesn't know their place?»

Namgung clan's swordsmen subtly gripped their sword handles, ready to move. In response, the Nokrim bandits menacingly brandished the swords at their hips.

«Consider yourselves fortunate. If this weren't Cheonumaeng, you would all be dead.»

«What nonsense! If Chung Myun Dojang wasn't using you like servants, we would've personally taken care of you.»

«What? Servants? Those who abandoned their own families and fled!»

«Fled? Bandits like you are spewing such nonsense from your loud mouths?»

The atmosphere grew extremely tense.

Amidst the chaos, confused Namgung Dowi hurriedly tried to intervene.

«Oh, wonderful. What an atmosphere.»

«C-Chung Myung Dojang!»

Chung Myung suddenly appeared, approaching them slowly. He glanced over Namgung clan and Nokrim, holding their swords, his expression turning stern. Namgung Dowi attempted to calm the storm.

«Let me try to mediate...»

«This is perfect timing.»

«Huh?»

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders.

“If you'd already set the mood without the need for explanations, it would have been better. You all were bored just watching that spectacle, anyway.”

“...”

“But there's one thing that bothers me.”

“W-What is it...?”

“Even though you’re called Namgung clan, and you’re known as Nokrim, if you’re unhappy, shouldn’t you resort to wielding a sword or using your fists? Why resort to mere words?”

“Yes?”

Chung Myung gestured with a tilt of his chin, dismissing the issue.

“Do you see it over there? The fight going on?”

“... Yes.”

“It’s no different. Whoever stands at the end today rests tomorrow. The loser side will roll until dawn.”

“...”

“Start as you wish. The victor will come and report.”

“W-Wait! Chung Myung Dojang? Chung Myung Dojang!”

Chung Myung finished speaking and departed without turning back.

Namgung Dowi, staring blankly at his back, turned around with a pale face. The Nokrim bandits, brandishing their swords, approached Namgung clan smiling wide, who, in turn, gazed at them disdainfully.

“Ah, didn’t want things to go this way. Truly.”

“It’s gotten out of hand unintentionally.”

“Can’t help it. No ill feelings at all, though.”

Better to curse, better to...

“Did you all hear that? Let’s show these noble gentlemen today how terrifying Gangho can be!”

“Show these bandits what happens when they come down from the mountains!”

At that moment, the pent-up frustrations between Namgung and Nokrim, usually not on the best terms, erupted as they charged at each other.