

Chapter 1014

They got me today. (4)

«Do you have something you want to ask?»

«Yes.»

Namgung Dowi scratched his head lightly.

What suddenly came to mind was Chung Myung's words that they should not be forced.

Namgung Dowi, who knew what Namgung Hyuk was going to ask, did not want to manipulate their choice to his liking.

«It's not like I don't have anything to say, but this choice is entirely yours. I can't force you.»

However, Namgung Hyuk nodded, as if to say that wasn't the case.

«I understand that, Young Lord. However...»

«Yes?»

«Can't we have a conversation, at least?»

«A conversation?»

«Yes, a conversation.»

Namgung Hyuk briefly glanced at Namgung Dowi.

“Actually, up to now, I thought that I just have to follow if Lord commands. I considered it our mission.»

«...»

«But now that I've come this far... I think it would have been better if I had candidly asked and had a conversation about why Young Lord put us through this training in the first place.»

Namgung Dowi looked at Namgung Hyuk in amazement.

Then, with an awkward expression he scratched the back of his head.

«If Young Lord doesn't want to, there's nothing we can do, but if possible, I'd like to have a conversation together. Otherwise, I think I'll regret it.»

«...»

«Is it not possible?»

Namgung Dowi couldn't hide his surprise and waved his hand.

«Oh, is there any chance it's not possible?»

He nodded.

«Of course. Obviously, I want to make the request.»

Before his words were finished, Namgung's swordsmen began to gather around Namgung Dowi, getting closer. They seemed to share Namgung Hyuk's sentiments.

«Y-young lord, did you already know that they are this strong?»

«What do you think the secret is?»

«If we follow this training, can we really become as strong as them?»

Faced with the barrage of questions, flustered Namgung Dowi raised his hands.

«Wait, just a moment!»

«Yes?»

«Don't rush. The night is long.»

Everyone nodded in agreement, seemingly understanding, and gathered around Namgung Dowi.

Namgung Dowi looked at each of them again.

‘Has there ever been such an occasion?’

He had tried to persuade and lead them so far. However, as Namgung Hyuk said, he couldn't recall ever really having a ‘conversation’ with them.

Upfront, he led, and they followed with trust. That had always been Namgung's way.

That's why Namgung Dowi had strived to become a strong leader. A leader who could raise them all up and lead them without exception.

But...

‘I see.’

Perhaps there was no need to stick to that method.

They and him were still lacking. Perhaps those who are lacking should fill each other's gaps?

With a determined expression, he nodded and spoke.

«Hyuk.»

«Yes, Young Lord.»

«Go and call Dan too.»

«Yes.»

«And...»

Namgung Dowi smiled mysteriously. It was a peculiar expression, somewhat reminiscent of Chung Myung.

«Quietly slip out of the manor and...»

«Yes?»

«Get some alcohol.»

«...Alcohol?»

Namgung's warriors were startled, but Namgung Dowi calmly nodded.

«Yes, alcohol.»

«Why, all of a sudden, alcohol?»

«It seems like it will be necessary.»

He shrugged and smiled mischievously.

«I've tried it once, and with alcohol, words come out easily. Since we've come this far, let's open up and have a candid conversation today.»

«...»

«Is that not possible?»

Namgung Hyuk nodded earnestly.

«I will get a cart full of alcohol!»

«Good.

Namgung Hyuk selected a few people and led them outside. Namgung Dowi smiled gently. 'Take it easy. Perhaps... we have too many things left unsaid to each other.'

Perhaps it should have been like this from the beginning.

They have been plagued by too much pressure. Just as Namgung Dowi has been crushed by the weight of leading them, they, too, have felt the responsibility to become the pillars and support Namgung family themselves.

Perhaps what they truly need is not heavy words reminding each other of their duties but a conversation that lets go of everything and cares for each other.

After a short wait, Namgung Hyuk returned with the alcohol and placed the bottles in front of them. Namgung Dowi casually picked up one of the bottles in front of him.

«Let's have a drink.»

«...»

However, except for him, the others hesitated to pick up the bottles. They had clear doubts written on their faces, wondering if this was really okay.

Namgung Dowi, without waiting for them, raised the bottle in his hand and, as if to show them, drank it down in one go.

«Kku!»

Just like Chung Myung had done before, he wiped his mouth with his sleeve and grinned, looking at everyone.

«Should I drink alone?»

After watching for a while, one by one, they finally picked up their bottles and took a sip.

«Kku.»

«Ah, it's strong.»

Sipping the alcohol, they looked back and forth between the bottle he had drunk from and Namgung Dowi with newfound expressions.

And then...

«Gulp.»

«Ha ha ha!»

Inevitably, they all burst into laughter.

«This is the first time I've ever had a drink with the Young Lord.»

«Indeed. Young Lord isn't known to enjoy alcohol.»

«It feels strange.»

They started to speak cautiously, one by one. Stories they had tightly held back, stories they hadn't been able to share easily.

Among these gradually emerging words, Namgung Dowi smiled softly.

— Don't force them.

Perhaps the words meant not to force them to choose.

«Let's have a drink until the day breaks.»

«Yes, Young Leader!»

Namgung Dowi lifted his bottle with a smile.

Tonight seemed quite long for him as well.

«Tsk.»

Glug, glug, glug, glug.

Chung Myung took a short sip of alcohol. Then, he rotated the bottle and chuckled.

«That's why all this talk about prestigious clans and such...»

Below, the conversations of Namgung's swordsmen were faintly audible. Chung Myung shook his head.

Now, it seems he's finally understood what needs to be done. A deep sigh escaped from his lips.

“But still...”

In its own way, it's enjoyable. Thoughts of the past about Hwasan even come to mind.

“Right. Drink up, all of you. Don't die with the faces of those who've carried the burdens of the world when you're not even halfway there.”

Some moderate tension is helpful, but excessive pressure can eat people up.

“Kkuung. Anyway, these things require a lot of effort.”

Chung Myung, with his head swaying slightly, gazed at the moon in the sky and took another sip of his drink.

Chung Myung silently watched those in front of him. Yes, the numbers were satisfactory. He had half-expected that some might escape, but it seemed there were no missing individuals at first glance. It appeared that the drinking session from the previous day had worked its magic.

Ideally, Chung Myung would prefer a smaller group to teach, but from Namgung's perspective, having more disciples in training was an advantage.

So he had no complaints about the numbers, however...

«Uwook.»

«Do-don't throw up!»

«My, my stomach... It feels like it's tearing apart...»

«No, go over there and vomit!»

«Uweeeeek!»

Chung Myung's eyes lost their sparkle rapidly.

‘This is not exactly a flower garden.’

The reddened and paled faces, mixed without any order, looked quite colorful.

And that wasn't all. Even though there was some distance between him and the group, the overpowering scent of alcohol emanating from them made him want to plug his nose.

«.....Ya.»

«Yes?»

«...Just how much and what have you been drinking?»

«.....»

Chung Myung was left speechless.

‘No, I thought Namgung Hwang was the only one who didn’t know his limits.’

It was clear that they have been drinking as much as they could until just before their gathering. Since when had Namgung Clan’s customs changed so much?

«Even in my entire life.....»

«.....»

«No.....»

When Chung Myung couldn’t continue speaking, Namgung’s swordsmen exchanged glances among themselves, discreetly.

‘Didn’t we say to drink in moderation?’

‘No, did he think he’s invincible?’

‘What’s so precious about the remaining alcohol!’

‘If a man draws his sword, there should be a fight!’

‘It seems Young Lord is a bit too drunk. Hey! He’s falling! Someone catch him!’

Thud.

«Oh dear! Young Lord!»

«Pull yourself together!»

«Get him up quickly!»

«Uuuuu.....»

In the end, people rushed to Namgung Dowi, who had completely lost his mind. They tried their best to lift him, but it seemed easier to raise a broken puppet.

«I can drink more.....»

«Oh my, Young Lord. Please, regain your senses!»

«Someone, go get cold water! Quickly!»

Chung Myung pressed his throbbing temples with his index fingers. It was unbearable to watch those people.

‘They’re a mess. They’re a real mess.’

He let out a deep sigh.

Dealing with Hwasan was already too much to handle, and now these guys are causing chaos too, even these guys.

«Anyway... coming out here means you’re here for training, right?»

«Yes!»

A resounding response came.

«...In that state?»

«.....»

This time, a strange silence followed. Chung Myung continued, pressing on his throbbing temples.

«You think training is a joke, huh? Huh? A joke? You want to be trained in this mess?»

«We can do it!»

«Please, give us the order!»

«Now, we will really give our best without complaints!»

Looking at their expressions alone, there seemed to be no lack of determination to go out to the battlefield to save the country. But if you just looked at their bodies, they resembled freshly returned exhausted soldiers, and that's why.

But...

«Dojang.»

Namgung Dowi, who had been swaying, suddenly stood straight and opened his mouth.

«You just need to command.»

«.....»

In his eyes, there was a newfound confidence that had been absent until now. It was not the confidence that came with Namgung's Lord position, but the confidence of someone who understood their own place.

«So, we will do our best to follow your lead.»

«.....»

«So, don't worry... Ugh!»

«Is the cold water ready?»

«Yes, we're getting it right now!»

«.....»

Chung Myung let out a long sigh.

Well, something seems different from just yesterday when it was like grains of sand. It's probably because things that shouldn't have clumped together have gotten mixed up... like the alcohol's influence.

«Anyway...»

«Yes!»

«...Alright, I understand. Let's start running for now. See that mountain over there?»

«Yes!»

«Climb to the summit and come back.»

«Yes!»

«Run!»

«I'll go first!»

Namgung Clan's swordsmen began to run toward the mountain peak, shouting with enthusiasm as Chung Myung pointed to it.

Chung Myung watched them tumbling and rolling on the ground, but getting up with determination and starting running again. He muttered to himself.

«...They've got quite the perseverance. They've got perseverance.»

— Work hard and you'll prosper.

«No, it's really not my business!»

He raised his hand towards the sky but soon burst into laughter while watching Namgung Clan's swordsmen sprinting away.

«When did they become like this? Oh well... Hey, keep running!»

Warm sunlight descended behind Namgung Clan's swordsmen, who were running at full speed.

«Ugh, uweak!»

«Please don't vomit!»

Of course, well... It wasn't just warm, but...