

Chapter 1140

However, what else could be done? (5)

He was completely out of air. Labored breaths poured out almost as if he was on the verge of vomiting. Yoon Jong clenched his sword tightly, nearly breaking it in his grip.

‘He’s exhausted too. If I’m lucky enough, the sword might just land once!’

Fire shot from his eyes.

“Uraaah! Die!”

Exerting all his strength, swinging the sword fiercely, he charged forward. Yet, amidst all that effort, Yoon Jong secretly knew.

The chance he hoped for never seemed to materialize when he desperately needed it.

Paah!

Chung Myung’s sword, extending like a flash, effortlessly deflected Yoon Jong’s sword.

And then...

Tuwoooooong!

Consecutively, the hilt of the Dark Plumm Sword flew, ruthlessly embedding itself into Yoon Jong’s jaw.

“Ugh...”

Yoon Jong’s vision darkened as the sky seemed to collapse.

“Darn it...”

Thud.

Eventually, Yoon Jong, who had stood till the end, collapsed on the ground like a rotten straw stack. Chung Myung sheathed the Dark Plum Sword and briefly clicked his tongue.

«You are just needlessly grumbling.»

«...»

«What? Revenge? Re-ve-enge? These guys think Gangho is full of pushovers! Just catching one reckless charge and expect things to turn around? If you think it’ll be like that, why even bother training!»

Snorting, Chung Myung delivered a speech to the disheartened individuals.

«A hundred years away! You, youngsters!»

«...»

«Ugh, no progress at all.»

Turning sharply, Chung Myung and the two sect leaders, along with the elders, left the training grounds, observing the situation with stern faces.

As they turned the corner from the training grounds to the quieter side of the manor, they all collectively slumped to the ground, losing their dignified demeanor.

«Oh my...»

«I thought we were really going to lose.»

Even Maeng So and Tang Gunak found it hard to support themselves and leaned against the walls of the manor.

«It was dangerous.»

«Truly risky this time.»

Tang Gunak trembled as he spoke.

Externally, it might seem like a routine victory, but this time, it was genuinely challenging. With fewer numbers, had they conceded even a little momentum, they would have lost. If they had faltered, those collapsed on the ground would have been them.

In that sense, one could say they fought really well today...

“But, Hwasan Geomhyeop.”

“Yes?”

Seeing Chung Myung still responding energetically unlike the rest, Tang Gunak furrowed his brow slightly.

‘He really doesn’t seem to know when to stop.’

Sure, they might have the physical endurance, but constantly engaging in such battles would undoubtedly wear down a person’s mental fortitude. Where does one find the mental strength to maintain such composure after continuous fights?

“It’s just my thought... Perhaps today...”

“It might have been better to lose?”

“Hmm.”

Tang Gunak quietly nodded.

Of course, no warrior enjoys losing. Eventually, in any situation, everyone desires victory. So, whether it’s their disciples or the disciples of Cheonumaeng, Tang Gunak also didn’t intentionally want to lose. However...

‘Given the circumstances.’

They probably harbored big feelings today. Perhaps they held back from making a decisive decision amid the buried emotions from their battles. But as there was no change in the outcome, it might dampen their spirits.

Usually, in such cases, people tend to blame others. When things go well, everything seems joyous, but when they don’t, it’s human nature to point fingers at others.

«I agree. Even if we had to lose, we should acknowledge the significance of joining forces and fighting together,»

Maeng So replied, stroking his chin, reinforcing Tang Gunak’s statement.

Hearing this, Chung Myung chuckled.

«I understand what you’re saying.»

«Hmm?»

“I think you’re underestimating your own disciples too much. It might seem like I’m pushing them, but in reality, they don’t falter easily when it comes to stepping up.»

«What do you mean?»

«See for yourself.»

Chung Myung gestured with a nod towards the training grounds. Tang Gunak and Maeng So subtly moved toward the corner of the wall and peered out.

«From the start, the formation was wrong! They could withstand the Beast Palace!»

«Well, the Beast Palace effectively bought us time!»

«What's the use of buying time when it eventually collapses? To stop those monsters, we needed a thicker formation! It would have been better for either Hwasan or the Ice Palace to shift from attacking to defending!»

«But then, they could comfortably attack without any sense of urgency! That way, they'd just buy time, and ultimately, they couldn't win. Don't you know the best defense is offense?»

«That's just theoretical!»

The previously scattered people had gathered in the center and were engaged in a heated debate. Empty breath went out from Maeng So and Tang Gunak's mouths.

“Ugh, damn it. My jaw still hurts from the blows.”

“But perhaps because I've taken so many hits, now I can endure them a bit better.”

“... That doesn't sound like something to boast about.”

“Anyway!”

Jo Geol's eyes sparkled.

“Did you see Lord Tang out of breath today?”

“I did!”

“His breath was so heavy, it seemed like he'd collapse! Hahaha!”

Tang Gunak, fuming with anger, tensed his body, but Maeng So gently grabbed his shoulder, trying to calm him down.

“What about the Beast Palace Lord? Oh man! He's so big that just a shrug of his shoulders feels like an earthquake!”

This time, Tang Gunak quietly reached out and gently held Maeng So's wrist, who was shaking subtly.

“I didn't do anything particularly remarkable, but today was really worth a try.”

“At this rate, the day isn't far when we'll land a proper hit!”

“That's why let's regroup! First, let's figure out what to do with those useless Nokrim guys!”

“Well, hold on. What about Hwasan Geomhyeop? Isn't that the biggest issue?”

“Hwasan's guys will manage somehow. Let's not dwell on that.”

“Why are you passing that on to us? What do you want us to do about him!”

Listening to the intensifying conversation, Tang Gunak and Maeng So quietly moved back. As they turned around, their faces showed a mix of disbelief.

“Right?”

“Sigh...”

Surprisingly, Maeng So seemed more shocked than Tang Gunak.

‘These guys...’

Before they knew it, beast warriors were naturally assimilating with them. Beast Palace was situated in such a remote area in Yunnan that they had little interaction with ordinary people. Due to their lifestyle, centered around wild animals, they often found it difficult to socialize with outsiders, which had been an ongoing issue for the Beast Palace.

Yet here they were, engaging in informal conversation with the Central Plains' people, seemingly without any tension, while half-slouched on the ground.

'It's beyond comprehension.'

It seemed like Chung Myung had worked some sort of magic.

"Parents don't know their own children well, and teachers strangely don't know their own students."

Tang Gunak and Maeng So nodded as they looked at smiling Chung Myung.

"Rather than worrying about them, maybe it's better to focus on their own issues. Getting embarrassed over petty things isn't worth it."

"There won't be such a thing."

"That's absurd!"

Chung Myung, giggling, turned away and stretched.

"Well, that's something you'll only know when you see it."

Watching Chung Myung stroll away, Maeng So and Tang Gunak shook their heads in disbelief.

«Oh dear. There isn't a place on my body that doesn't ache.»

"Geol-ah... You need to cover up your torso to go to the dining hall."

"Is it a problem between men?"

"But there is also Soso, right?"

"Hey. Soso is family."

Tang Soso smiled brightly at the remark.

"I have never had a brother like Sahyeong."

"..."

"If I had a brother like Sahyeong, I would have buried him with my own hands. Please consider yourself fortunate that Sahyeong was not born into the Tang family."

"...I am always thankful for that."

Sincerely.

At that moment, Baek Cheon stood up from his seat. Jo Geol raised an eyebrow and asked,

"Huh? Baek Cheon Sasuk, where are you going?"

Normally, Baek Cheon was the kind of person who would wait until everyone finished eating even if he finished his meal early. So, his sudden departure during the meal piqued curiosity.

"It's nothing. I have somewhere to visit briefly. Keep eating."

"Yes, Baek Cheon Sasuk."

Baek Cheon quietly exited the dining hall. The remaining people paid little attention and soon got engrossed in their own conversations.

Baek Cheon walked slowly along the river, his gaze focused on the flowing waters.

«Phew.»

A sigh escaped his lips. The reason for taking the time to come to the riverbank was due to the growing sense of frustration he'd been experiencing recently.

'How did he manage all of this?'

So far, Chung Myung had been leading Hwasan. But lately, Chung Myung hadn't been vocal about the internal affairs within the sect.

Certainly, Chung Myung might be occupied handling the overall affairs of Cheonumaeng, unable to focus specifically on Hwasan's internal matters. One might think so.

However, Baek Cheon knew better. Chung Myung was not someone who would neglect things this way. Even if faced with a shortage of time due to various responsibilities, Chung Myung was the kind of person who would act upon necessity, even if it meant cutting on sleep.

For someone like him to exhibit such disinterest...

'It's probably a form of pressure, indicating that we should handle it on our own.'

Baek Cheon exhaled deeply once more.

It wasn't that he felt burdened by leading Hwasan. Of course, he didn't presume to handle it like Chung Myung, but he also didn't have to shoulder as much responsibility as him.

Moreover, he wasn't leading Hwasan alone. Weren't there the Elders and Sasuks supporting him? Even Hye Yeon discreetly ensured that the workload directed at him wasn't overwhelming...

'It's embarrassing to keep whining constantly.'

So, assuming the role of the Head Disciple of Hwasan didn't particularly burden Baek Cheon. It was originally his responsibility, now merely returning to its rightful place after being temporarily entrusted to Chung Myung.

That wasn't the issue. There was something else that made Baek Cheon feel stifled.

He briefly grasped the hilt of his sword before releasing it weakly.

'It's stagnant.'

The problem lay precisely within himself.

During the three years of Bongmun, he had grown exponentially. However, despite enduring numerous trials afterward, he hadn't felt his skills progressing.

Initially, he wasn't overly concerned. It was a matter that time would resolve. But at some point, Baek Cheon realized:

'There's no time.'

Observing Chung Myung and Jang Ilso facing the Bishop, Baek Cheon painfully grasped the reality. The time for them to fight tooth and nail against each other would arrive sooner than expected.

And when that moment came, Baek Cheon would be left with nothing to do.

«Phew.»

Even with a long breath, the feeling of suffocation persisted.

Baek Cheon was strong. Objectively speaking, he was undoubtedly strong.

Neither Namgung Dowi, who received all of Namgung's training and knowledge, nor Tang Pae, who was confirmed as the next head of the Tang clan, were frankly not his opponents. Baek Cheon might even now be able to subdue Jin Geumryong within a few moves. That's how much he had grown into an unparalleled force within the same generation.

Yet, despite that level of prowess, the reason for his suffocation lay in the fact that with that level of skill, he wouldn't be particularly helpful in the colossal battles between these massive factions.

'What should I do?'

With insufficient skills and no time, he might end up watching other disciples die before his eyes.

And perhaps that time was closer than he thought.

It was these worries and anxieties that led Baek Cheon to this place. Perhaps, by gazing upon the vast river, his mind would find some ease.

But even as he stared at the flowing river, his mind found no respite. Rather, it became even more stifling.

He continued walking along the riverbank, sighing repeatedly. How long had he been walking like this?

«Hmm?»

Baek Cheon's steps abruptly halted. Tilting his head, he listened intently.

«What's this? That sound...»

His eyes sharpened.

«The clash of weapons?»

On such a night, in such a place?

Instantly quieting his steps, Baek Cheon swiftly ran towards the source of the weapons clash he heard.