

## Chapter 113

I wonder if I can do well? (3)

«Did it hit the mark properly?»

«Ughhh...»

«Ughh...»

Chung Myung glanced at the hundreds of people, their heads stuck in the ground, rocks hanging from their bodies. His piercing eyes scanned Cheonumaeng's people's backs mercilessly.

«After I showed a bit of consideration, letting you rest a bit, you can't hold back and start a brawl?»

«...»

«Are you protesting against me? I let you rest because you had no strength left, and now you're rebelling just because I gave you a break? Huh?»

At that moment, Jo Geol, who had been pounding his head on the ground, abruptly rose and raised his hand.

«What?»

«There seems to be a misunderstanding. We didn't fight because we had strength left.»

«Then?»

Jo Geol shrugged.

«We really didn't have any strength left, but because people were getting too angry, it somehow gave us strength.»

«Oh.»

«Isn't that strange? Haha.»

Chung Myung nodded as if understanding.

«I think I understand, Sahyeong.»

«Is that so?»

«Yeah. I feel exactly like that right now, you jerk!»

With a forceful kick, Chung Myung's foot soared and struck Jo Geol's face.

«Kwaan!»

As Jo Geol writhed on the ground, Chung Myung swiftly jumped onto his abdomen. In an instant, Chung Myung's upper body moved vigorously from side to side. It was a sight not seen for a long time.

«Die! Die! Please just die!»

«Ah! Agh! Help... me...»

«Die! You jerk! Die!»

Jo Geol, who had been battling Tangga during the day, receiving blows here and there in the dining hall during the evening, and was now getting beaten by Chung Myung, unfortunately found no sympathy from anyone present.

«He deserves the beating.»

«Frankly, he deserves to die.»

«Chung Myung Dojang who kept him alive until now is a true Taoist.»

In this chaotic and distorted moment, the four factions momentarily unified in their thoughts.

«Huuk! Huuk! Huuk! Huuk!»

Chung Myung, having risen from the brutal scene, glared fiercely at the others with bulging eyes.

Everyone quickly averted their gaze, not daring to meet his eyes. Engaging eye contact with him would have resulted in their similar fate.

«I... oh, right. I... I was a bit shortsighted.»

«...»

«Everyone here is so energetic and healthy. I worried needlessly.»

Everyone realized that the voice of a person could instill such terror in them. It was an extraordinarily different experience, yet at the same time, a terrifying one.

“It’s all my fault! All of it!”

“...”

“If I had known everyone here had such stamina and enthusiasm, I would have raised the intensity of training earlier. Huh? It’s my fault for not realizing that after everyone completed their training, they still had enough strength left for a brawl!”

“Wait, just a moment, Chung Myung!”

Baek Cheon panicked and looked up, but it was already too late.

“Everyone!”

Chung Myung stomped the ground, yelling,

“We shouldn’t repeat the same mistake. Ah, whatever. Let’s try this, you guys. Whether you die or I die! Let’s see... If we don’t sleep for three days and roll around—”

“If you do that, you’ll die!”

“I’m telling you to die, you jerk!”

With fury in his eyes, Chung Myung charged towards Baek Cheon this time.

The training grounds turned into chaos in an instant. Watching the scene from a distance, Hyun Jong buried his face in his hands, letting out a despairing sigh.

‘How...?’

How could there be no change whatsoever after becoming Cheonumaneg from Hwasan?

How...?

Oh, the Primeval Lord of Heaven\*...

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“Feels like I’m going to die.”

“I’m already dead.”

“Ugh, I think I hurt my back, Soso.”

«...There’s needle there, so get it and put it in properly...»

Moans of agony escaped from the mouths of Hwasan’s disciples sprawled across the floor. The soreness from the hits during the clash with the Tangga was painful, but the most excruciating part was the waist and knees, brutalized during Chung Myung’s outburst. No, how could rolling on the ground after fighting with a skilled martial artist be less painful than the hits received during Chung Myung’s frenzied beating? At this point, one might consider his beatings artistry.

“...Who provoked Chung Myung?”

“It looked like Baek Ah? I saw him running towards the door shortly after the fight.”

“That filthy weasel... betraying his Sahyeongs...”

“Ugh...”

While Tang Soso was shaking from anger, Baek Cheon struggled to rise and finally sat in a chair.

“Feels like I’m dying...”

Baek Cheon, known for impeccably maintaining his attire, was now a mess, covered in sweat and dirt. He didn’t even have the energy to consider cleaning himself up.

Jo Geol grumbled,

“Ugh. Those jerks from the Tang family are picking fights for no reason...”

“Just shut your mouth, you brat!”

“Ugh!”

Yoon Jong ruthlessly kicked Jo Geol. Could it be that what should have been easily overlooked had escalated due to that troublemaking mouth of his?

“With that temper of yours, you could easily...”

When Yoon Jong rolled his eyes, Baek Cheon intervened.

“Stop it, Yoon Jong. It’s not just Geol’s mistake... no, that guy’s mistake. Yes, that guy is completely at fault, the instigator of everything, but not the only one at fault.”

“...There’s a contradiction in your words, Sasuk.”

“Hmm.”

Baek Cheon sighed deeply and composed himself.

“It’s our fault for getting angry.”

“...Actually, didn’t you say something over there that could provoke anger?”

“True.”

It’s as much about what you let slide as it is about what makes people mad.

Baek Cheon, who had cooled down, looked around with a slightly different attitude.

“That’s exactly what I mean.”

His gaze turned towards Tang Soso.

“Soso-ya.”

“Yes, Sasuk.”

“What do you think? About the words spoken by Tangga.”

“What words?”

“Well... the statement suggesting that if they used poison properly, none of us would have survived.”

“Oh, that?!”

Soso nodded calmly.

“Yes. Hyeong-nim indeed crossed the line. Such words shouldn’t be said. In the future, don’t mind me and just beat them to your heart’s content.”

“Oh, no, that’s not what I meant.”

“Yes?”

Baek Cheon sweated nervously, seeing Soso’s questioning look as if asking what mistake did she make.

“I was asking what would have happened if they had truly utilized poison effectively.”

“Oh... was that what you meant?”

Soso slightly furrowed her brow.

“Well, if we look closely, neither Sasuks nor Sahyeongs were entirely faultless. The essence of the Hwasan’s swordsmanship... It’s hard for me to say, but it’s in the ‘Salgeom’ [살검(殺劍) — killing sword]. However, it cannot be used in a spar.”

“That’s true.”

“However, in that situation, the Tang clan would have used all sorts of lethal poisons [절독(絶毒) — jeoldog] and forbidden hidden weapons [금용암기(禁用暗器)\*\* — geum-yong-amgi]...”

Soso pondered, grabbing her chin.

“Hmm, this is a bit difficult...”

As she hesitated to answer, Baek Cheon nodded as if understanding.

“Tangga would have won.”

“Oh, no, it’s not exactly that.”

“No, I had the same thought.”

At this, Jo Geol got angry.

“What nonsense is this, Sasuk! We would lose? That’s impossible.”

“Listen to me until the end.”

“Yes?”

Baek Cheon sighed before continuing.

“If we were to face Tang clan for the first time, we would be defeated. We’re not familiar with poison or hidden weapons. Haven’t we never faced those who fight like them?”

“Well, that’s true but...”

“We know Tangga to a certain extent. Maybe even quite well. But that’s them as a comrade, not as an enemy.”

“...”

“Even though we, thanks to Jasodan, can endure poison to some extent, many fell in the initial surprise attacks. This implies that we could fall victim to what we cannot anticipate.”

Jo Geol, who was the first to be struck by the poisoned needle amongst Ogeom, quietly closed his mouth. There was no room for excuses.

“If we were to suddenly encounter Tangga as an enemy on the battlefield, do you really think we could have demonstrated our skills properly? Perhaps we would have suffered even greater losses.”

“Mmm...”

Jo Geol, losing words to argue back, made a pained sound.

“Then are we weaker than the Tang clan? Even though their elders didn’t participate?”

“It’s slightly different.”

“Yes?”

“While we might face defeat in the first encounter, in the second fight we could improve, and after ten fights, we would be certain in the winning. That is if Tangga doesn’t progress from start to finish.”

Yoon Jong nodded.

“I understand what you mean.”

Losing due to unfamiliarity. However, becoming familiar enables one to competently confront the opponent.

At that moment, Yu Iseol, who had been silently listening, suddenly extended her hand palm-upward in a puzzling gesture, catching everyone’s attention.

“Five times.”

“...”

“Five times should be enough.”

A smile formed at the corner of Baek Cheon’s mouth.

“If Samae says so, then five times it shall be.”

At those words, Tang Soso wore a complex and subtle expression. While it seemed like a boast to easily adapt to the poison and hidden techniques of the Sichuan Tang Clan, at the same time, it didn’t sound entirely incorrect.

“As everyone knows, Chung Myung... that rotten little demon... a useless lump even as firewood, a cursed devil crawling up from hell...”

“Please calm down, Sasuk.”

“Ah, yes. Anyway, whatever that demon told us to do as the training wasn’t meaningless. It’s not simply about fighting to determine our ranks. Clearly, it’s a message for us to experience the poison and hidden weapons of Tang clan.”

“...Simultaneously, it’s a melee.”

“Yes, a melee. And... it probably implies experiencing the clashes that arise when various factions are mixed in one place.”

Baek Cheon concluded with a meaningful tone.

“Soon, we will have to experience that in a more intense form.”

At his words, the expressions of Hwasan’s disciples, thinking instinctively of the faces of Sapaeryeon and Jang Ilso, became extremely serious. At that moment, Jo Geol spoke up.

“But, aren’t you being too optimistic? Given that demon’s nature, couldn’t he just twist his insides and torment us?”

“...”

“He wouldn’t have to bother giving instructions here and there — it would have been convenient for everyone just dying off.”

Everyone turned to look at him.

At that moment, Jo Geol reflexively made an indignant expression.

“Are you saying I’m wrong again?”

“...No. You’re convincing.”

“Very convincing indeed.”

“To be honest, my gut feeling is closer to that side.”

A collective sigh seemed to escape from everyone’s mouths.

Of course, it might be unthinkable in terms of common sense, but isn’t it even stranger to expect common sense from someone who charges at Jang Ilso and confronts the leader of Shaolin when feeling mistreated?

“A-anyway...”

Baek Cheon cleared his throat, trying to salvage the situation somehow.

“Since what we need to practice from now on is clear, we should start preparing for that side...”

“From now on?”

“Yes?”

Jo Geol twisted his face in disbelief.

“Are you saying we will continue this training in the future?”

“...”

“This crazy training?”

“...Agreed, it’s crazy, but don’t you need experience to deal with Sapaeryeon?”

“Sapaeryeon? Sa-pae-ryeon?”

Jo Geol spoke, clearly not comprehending.

“No, Sasuk. Continuing these antics might lead to internal conflict before even facing Sapaeryeon, wouldn’t it?”

“...”

“Just two days ago, Tangga were our comrades. But now?”

“Those venomous bastards.”

“Cowardly scoundrels.”

“The country fools of Sichuan.”

“I’ll kill them!”

Jo Geol snorted.

“Take a look at this. I guarantee that in a few more days, just locking eyes will lead to swords being drawn. And if that’s not enough, when the Nokrim King and the easily irritable Namgung’s Young Lord join in, the Yangtze river will turn crimson before we know it.”

“...”

“Cheonumaeng is done for now. There’s no hope or dream left.”

Huh, oddly enough, he’s speaking nothing but the truth today.

Quite an astonishing day...

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\*원시천존(元始天尊) — Yuanshi Tianzun — one of the highest deities of Taoism.

\*\*The explanation from the author: “Prohibited hidden weapons: a dangerous weapon which use is forbidden.”