

## Chapter 1146

I've done everything I needed to, but you know. (1)

'Wait, what on earth is this elixir...?'

There were too many things that didn't make sense logically.

First of all, how were so many pills even created in the first place? But that's a problem that could be set aside for now. The more pressing issue was why were they being distributed among them in the first place.

'And that too, pills that the young lord of Tangga evaluated as being top-notch...'

Of course, they were a bit small.

Generally, pills were said to be at least the size of a chestnut, but the pills held in their hands at the moment were only the size of a bean.

But so what?

Whether it's a bean or a grain of rice, isn't it like a gale blowing the moment a top-quality elixir is revealed among martial artists? Those in Gangho stake their lives on martial arts. If there's even a slight way to elevate martial prowess, they spare no efforts, not even resorting to wielding a sword. That's why, if rumors of an elixir emerging spread from somewhere, they all rush to the place where the rumors came from, clutching their weapons, despite knowing that the chances of obtaining the elixir themselves are slim.

'But distributing such precious pills like this?'

Everyone looked at Chung Myung with puzzled expression.

That's because they were divided into small pieces. If it was enough to be distributed to so many people, wouldn't it have been enough to give each of Hwasan's disciples a properly-sized pill instead of a small one?

In what world would a Sect Leader, who is supposed to give elixir to his disciples, distribute them to others?

"Is, is this really an elixir?"

So, even though they knew, there was no way they couldn't doubt it.

"Co-could it be poison?"

"Why would they feed us poison?"

"Because these days we're becoming useless, maybe they're trying to control us by feeding us poison? If you don't want to deteriorate, work hard, right?"

As those who were about to argue against this absurdity turned to Chung Myung with a suspicious look. It was an unreasonable thing, but if it was that person, he could really do it...

"But the young lord of the Tang clan said it was definitely an elixir!"

Ah, that's right.

“Oh, no. It’s the Tang clan... They say those nobles even eat poison as if it was an elixir, right? Then, can’t poison also be considered an elixir?”

“What?”

Perhaps because they thought it made sense, the gazes of the disciples turned back to Tang Pae. He tried to defend himself as if feeling unjustly accused.

“No matter what, can’t I distinguish between poison and elixir! And the rumor that Tangga’s people eat poison like an elixir is all false!”

“...Is it really?”

“Then in a sword sect, do they eat swords instead of pills?”

“What about the Heavenly Poison Elixir [천독단(天毒團) — the one that Tang Gunak gave to Chung Myung]?”

“That’s a different issue! If you could increase your inner strength just by eating poison, we would’ve had more inner strength than Shaolin! We could have beaten Namgung!”

“No, why are we suddenly...”

The statement seemed to convince everyone as they all nodded in agreement.

“So, if this is really an elixir...”

While one question was resolved, a bigger one emerged. Due to their incredulity, they looked at Chung Myung for an explanation. He nonchalantly shrugged in response.

“If you’ve all received it, then eat.”

“...”

“Don’t make it a hassle by taking it separately. When the elders guide you, consume it all and practice your cultivation.”

“No...”

One of the disciples from the Beast Palace looked at Chung Myung with a perplexed expression and asked,

“C-Can we really eat this?”

“Would I distribute something you couldn’t eat?”

“It’s not that...”

Did anyone present here possess such great integrity that they wouldn’t eat an elixir presented to them? They, too, had initially thought that if a pill were right in front of them, regardless of the consequences, they would swallow it without hesitation.

But obtaining any treasure ultimately required a rightful price and process. Yet, here was the unimaginable pill just being handed to them.

As a result, they were all at a loss about what to do next.

If one were alone here, regardless of their integrity or hesitation, they might just swallow it. However, because there were so many others in the same situation, it was unclear who should step forward to consume the elixir first.

“Hey, eat it! Can’t you hear? Can’t even swallow what’s given to you?”

Those hesitating with the pill in their hands exchanged glances in response to the pressing urgency from the front. But as no one could decisively provide an answer, their gazes eventually turned towards the elders.

A momentary hollow laugh erupted from Maeng So's lips. Seeing his beast warriors squirming like restless puppies, unable to make a decisive move, left him dumbfounded. 'Is this all?'

It wasn't merely a reaction stemming from receiving an elixir. His disciples simply couldn't comprehend receiving something from the Central Plains' people without any apparent exchange.

Despite the past talks of collaboration and settling under the umbrella of Cheonumaeng, the underlying distrust within them remained unchanged.

Ironically, the responsibility to resolve this issue fell upon none other than Maeng So himself. He, who had been most enthusiastic about fostering relations with the Central Plains, should have been the first to act...

Maeng So glanced briefly at Chung Myung. His face was heavily distorted with irritation. 'That's just an expression.'

Now, Maeng So also understood Chung Myung a little. It meant that when this person felt awkward or anticipated criticism, he would sharpen his teeth at anyone.

"Ahem."

Maeng So cleared his throat briefly before speaking.

"That elixir..."

What should he say? Taking in those looking at him, Maeng So continued.

"It's the elixir prepared for you by Cheonumaeng."

Technically, it was correct to put it that way. It wasn't an outright lie.

This elixir was the refinement of the ice crystals from the Northern Sea, the medicinal herbs of the Beast Palace, combined with the efforts of Hwasan Sect. To stretch it a bit, it was the crystallization of Namgung's financial resources, aiding commerce across the land, facilitated by the efforts of Nokrim. One might even credit the techniques of the Tang clan for their contribution.

No matter how great Hwasan was, Jasodan was something impossible to create by one's individual power alone.

"So, don't look at it with such eyes. You're just enjoying what you rightfully deserve."

This was probably the formal stance of Cheonumaeng, while Chung Myung sought to break down the barriers among those within the Alliance.

When one party passes something to another, eventually, a line is drawn between the giver and receiver. Chung Myung didn't want that distinction. Such small differences in perspective ultimately lead to divisions among the upper and lower positions.

Those within Cheonumaeng receive equal treatment regardless of their sect. Wasn't that the principle Chung Myung had established within the Alliance?

Therefore, as Maeng So, who had to uphold such a significant principle, this was the only answer he could give. However...

“However, at the same time...”

Maeng So paused for a moment, glanced at Chung Myung, and smiled faintly.

‘I’m not obliged to strictly follow your words. That’s how it is, isn’t it?’

It is Chung Myung who said that division does not exist in Cheonumaeng, then exploiting that contradiction wouldn’t necessarily be wrong.

“If you remove the nice packaging, this elixir is also something Hwasan Sect has made and shared with you.”

“No, that’s...”

Just as Chung Myung was about to say something, Maeng So quickly continued, blocking his words.

“There’s no need to refuse what’s offered. An elixir isn’t something small enough to decline after going on about principles and reasons. However, it’s also not proper for someone knowledgeable to simply accept what’s given without gratitude.”

Chung Myung stared at Maeng So with intense eyes, but Maeng So cleanly averted his gaze.

“So consume it, spend a few nights cultivating and hold gratitude towards Hwasan Sect, which selflessly offered it to you.”

Chung Myung’s eyes flared up.

“Ahem.”

Seeing the gaze that seemed ready to devour him whole, Maeng So subtly avoided the stare. This time, however, Tang Gunak stepped in to support Maeng So.

«Those from Tangga are no different.»

At these words, the members of the Tang clan all looked at Tang Gunak in silence.

«Some might say that someone with a bad character feeds others just to use them for personal gain, but everyone knows it’s not as simple as it sounds.»

«.....»

«No need for gratitude. Or rather, don’t try to deflect with such an easy phrase. The way to repay this debt is both difficult and straightforward. It’s to ensure that the sacrifice made has been deemed worthy. That’s all we ask for. Nothing more.»

«.....»

«However, in creating this sacrifice, remember to hold gratitude for Hwasan’s elders, who exhausted themselves and collapsed, as well as the Sect Leader of Hwasan. That is a separate matter from this.»

The members of the Tang clan nodded solemnly, feeling a weight in their hearts.

«Will it be like this?»

When Chung Myung asked with a clenched jaw, Tang Gunak just shrugged his shoulders.

«And what if it is? Should I say it’s nothing extraordinary?»

«It wasn’t actually that difficult.»

«You speak too lightly. The moment those words are said, we become idiots incapable of even accomplishing such an easy task. Why don't you understand that?»

«.....»

«To prevent us from becoming incompetent fools, we must speak our minds. Surely, it's not a call for excuses or blame, right?»

«Mmhm.....»

Chung Myung let out a groan.

«No, that's not what I meant...»

But then, casually turning his head, he flinched and took a step back in a moment of surprise. The people who moments ago were on the brink of death, with pale faces, now looked at him with bright, piercing eyes, making him uncomfortable beyond measure.

Flustered, Chung Myung faltered,

«I, um...»

«Good grief, seriously.»

At that moment, a savior emerged.

«Are you training a puppy here? Are you going to die in front of an elixir?»

People's attention shifted to where the voice burst forth. In no time, Im Sobyong, who had plopped down on the ground, now waved a fan and scowled disdainfully.

«Whether you show gratitude or repay favors, that's your own business. Now that the formalities are done and dusted, shall we start? Hmm? My legs were about to give out, and here we are still fussing about all this, right now?»

«Um...»

Undoubtedly a valid point.

«If you're not going to consume it, then leave. I will, so clear the way.»

Im Sobyong promptly stuffed the pill into his mouth and sat cross-legged without delay.

Isn't it always the hardest at the beginning?

As Im Sobyong broke the ice, others one by one sat cross-legged, stuffing elixir into their mouths.

«But, Chung Myung.»

When Jo Geol raised a question, seemingly puzzled, Chung Myung waved his hand as if not wanting to bother listening.

«Just eat like everyone else.»

«It's not that...»

«Just eat. There's nothing to fuss about. It's the same amount for everyone. It's not like having a bit more will make a difference.»

«No, that's not what I meant!»

«Hmm?»

Jo Geol, showing his pill, frowned.

«It feels like our share is a bit smaller than the others.»

«.....»

«Are you sure it's all the same?»

«.....»

«Stop trying to deceive us and speak straight. I'll give you a chance if you speak up now.»

Chung Myung, with a vein bulging on his forehead, rolled up his sleeves for the first time in a while.