

## Chapter 112

I wonder if I can do well? (2)

“Cough, cough...”

Baek Cheon’s body trembled uncontrollably. His hand, soaked in poison, had begun to twitch. Even if there wasn’t an influx of the poison running through his body, he would have still shivered, having no strength left at all.

“Cough!”

Struggling against the surging poison, Baek Cheon coughed dryly several times, lifting his head to gaze solemnly at the darkening sky.

Struggling to do so, he managed to hoist the sword he held overhead.

And with a voice fading away, he managed to utter,

“Won...”

Before he could finish his words, Baek Cheon’s body slumped forward.

“Won... it...”

Thud.

The last remaining warrior collapsed like a rotten tree trunk.

It was a scene that could be seen as both farcical and tragic.

Among those who had fought fiercely, seemingly trying to destroy the training grounds, now, there was no one left standing. Strewn across the ground, everyone, without discrimination between Hwasan and Tangga, either groaned in pain or frothed at the mouth, losing consciousness.

“Ugh...”

“You... bastards...”

“Kill...”

Intermingled with groans, intermittent curses surfaced. Whether this should be regarded as impressive or pitiful was a matter of perspective.

Chung Myung, standing quietly in a corner, turned his head discreetly.

“It seems to be over?”

“...”

“My Lord?”

“...”

“Excuse me?”

Tang Gunak’s eyebrows were trembling faintly. Even the corners of his eyes and lips were quivering slightly.

“Well...”

As the Lord of Tangga attempted to speak, his jaws involuntarily clenched.

“...It seems so.”

Despite trying to appear composed, there was an evident mix of emotions in his voice. It seemed deeply unsettling to have fought fiercely and to have ended up in defeat, despite trying hard to gain the victory.

“Hmm. Seems like it wasn’t enough.”

“...Then, they’ll just die.”

“Perhaps that’s not something you should say.”

“...Seems like I’ve said enough.”

At this, Tang Gunak’s forehead furrowed noticeably. It appeared that had Chung Myung not intervened, he might have intended to express his frustration fiercely today as well.

‘Not really in a sound state, huh.’

Chung Myung shook his head and stepped forward. Standing before those who had fallen, he opened his mouth to speak.

“So, originally...”

He reflexively scratched the back of his head.

“I had planned to train the losing side until dawn.”

“Ugh...”

“Oh dear... Oh dear... I’m... dying...”

Watching the dismal sight of both winners and losers strewn about, Chung Myung lowered his head.

“...It seems like this isn’t the right situation, so let’s end the training for today. As agreed, Tangga should come tomorrow morning, and Hwasan should arrive tomorrow afternoon.”

“...”

“Are you listening?”

“...”

“Hey?”

There was no response. Chung Myung, shaking his head in frustration, turned away.

“...I wonder what’s going on over there.”

Exhaling deeply, he trudged towards the direction where Nokrim and Namgung were beating each other.

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«I’ll carry it!»

«No, let me do it!»

«I heard you’re not fully recovered yet...»

«I’m perfectly fine! Give it here!»

Ms. Chu swiftly snatched the tray as if stealing it.

«Oh, no, you really don’t have to push yourself like this. We can handle it.»

«No, it’s not free labor. I am getting paid for this work, so naturally, I should give my best.»

«If that’s the case...»

Ms. Chu flashed a satisfied smile and stepped inside.

Ever since Hyun Jong's visit, she had been working in Jangwon's kitchen. Still adapting, she focused more on menial tasks rather than cooking, doing her best in every aspect.

'I mustn't become a burden.'

She, too, understood she wasn't contributing significantly. But she refused to entertain the notion of sloppy work due to lack of contribution, even if she acknowledged her limitations silently.

Without gratitude, humans are no different from beasts.

She was not only provided a stay here but also employed by Hwasan to ensure her comfort. She couldn't afford an ounce of negligence.

For the sake of her growing child.

Work wasn't as taxing as anticipated, and those who knew her situation were considerate, leaving no inconvenience or discomfort.

There was just one problem.

The steps of Ms. Chu, holding the tray, slowed as she entered the dining hall. Reluctantly, as if approaching something unpleasant, she gingerly placed the dish on the table.

Glancing briefly at the seated figure, she noted the discomfort in his demeanor.

Unmatched in his handsomeness... Normally, just his presence would draw the attention of many, but Ms. Chu's fleeting gaze at his face wasn't due to his good looks.

His once handsome face was ruined to the extent that describing it as 'haggard' would be an understatement.

«Please, enjoy your meal.»

«Th-thank you...»

Yes, there was just one problem. This place called Hwasan seemed anything but ordinary.

«...The way people look...»

If she had seen this scene for the first time, she might have mistaken it for encountering a group of Jiangshi and fainted. Why wouldn't she? Everyone, each with a ghastly visage, was wrapped in bandages from head to toe, sitting in front of the table like lifeless bodies.

«You should... eat a bit...»

«Yes...»

Baek Cheon weakly nodded towards Ms. Chu and weakly lifted his chopsticks. Confirming this sight, she exited the dining room.

Baek Cheon spoke in a fading voice,

«Let's eat. We have to eat, everyone...»

«Yes... Sa...suk.»

«We... have to eat...»

The disciples of Hwasan struggled to reach for the rice bowls in front of them. Their movements were so sluggish that even an 80-year old would not be able to keep his tongue from clicking.

To be honest, it wasn't a situation where the rice couldn't be passed on.

But the disciples of Hwasan knew from experience. If they refused a meal now just because they didn't feel like eating, a greater agony awaited them tomorrow.

Eating not just to live, but to survive. That was an unspoken rule at Hwasan.

«Ouch, ouch...»

«My mouth's splitting open.»

«Ugh, it's so bitter...»

Groans escaped from the mouths of Hwasan's disciples as they chewed their food. Food touched the spots that had burst open, causing curses to escape involuntarily. But the pain felt in their mouths was nothing compared to what came next.

«Ugh, ugh...»

«Oh... I feel like throwing up.»

«Sasuk. My stomach's churning. I can't swallow...»

«Ugh... What poison is this?»

Hwasan's disciples grimaced in discomfort. Due to the poison, just catching a whiff of the food caused their stomachs to churn and an overwhelming sense of nausea.

«No. Cowardly scoundrels, wanting victory so badly. Poison in martial arts competition...»

That was precisely when it happened.

In a corner of the dining hall, originally a warehouse built to store goods transported along the Yangtze River, the members of Tangga who had been hesitating to eat, all turned their heads simultaneously. They reacted to the conversation of Hwasan's disciples.

«What? Cowardly?»

Realizing the words that slipped out, Baek Sang belatedly covered his mouth with his hand.

«Haha... Well...»

Yoon Jong awkwardly smiled, trying to remedy the situation.

«Oh, sorry. We got carried away...»

«You think we're cowards? If we really used poison cowardly, would anyone at Hwasan still be alive?»

«J-Jan-ah!»

Startled by Tang Pae's reprimand, Tang Jan, who had risen abruptly, sat back down awkwardly.

«Apologies, Hyeong-nim.»

«Be careful. No matter how correct the statement, one shouldn't offend others. After all, what's lost is lost, right?»

It was a very principled statement.

However, when the listener's feelings are twisted, even the most right words can sound offensive.

«Correct statement?»

Jo Geol squinted and glared at Tang Pae and Tang Jan.

«Oh, we didn't know this. We were celebrating victory, but it turns out we were repaying the mercy bestowed upon us by Tangga with our lives.»

«Well, it's not exactly...»

«If you feel so unjust, then use poison properly and win. Why lose and sulk like this?»

«What?»

«Hey! That's too much.»

«No, Sasuk! It's true, isn't it? Those jerks subtly disregard us at every turn!»

«...»

«If they're from a prestigious sect, fine! Namgung clan, from a real noble family, doesn't even behave like that. Since when did Sichuan Tang Clan become more prestigious than Namgung Clan?»

«What, you bastard?»

In that moment, Tang Pae couldn't contain his anger and abruptly rose from his seat. Sichuan Tang Clan had always been the second one of the Five Great Families. Inevitably, it held a subtle sense of inferiority towards the Namgung clan. But to have that sensitive spot directly prodded ignited his fury instantly.

«Did I say something wrong? Isn't it true? Namgung Cl...»

As Jo Geol was about to continue, he abruptly closed his mouth, feeling a chill in the air. He had intended to invoke the superiority of Namgung, but Namgung Dowi's demeanor was a bit off. His usually composed and tidy appearance was nowhere to be found — his eyes glinted with a murderous intent, as if targeting someone for death.

«Young Lord?..»

«Oh my... He might kill someone with that look.»

And right in front of Namgung Dowi, Im Sobyong sat on his chair almost spread out, fanning his face while resting his feet on the table.

«Does doing that turn a real fight into a victory?»

«This...»

«If you dislike it, then win. What did I do wrong? Nokrimi! Our Nokrim! Lowly bandits are now stronger than Namgung clan. Oh, what should I do?»

Thud thud thud!

The sound of Namgung Dowi loudly grinding his teeth reverberated throughout the entire dining hall.

Of course, Im Sobyong wasn't in a great condition either. Each wave of the fan revealed a bluish tint around his eyes.

Nevertheless, regardless of his condition, Im Sobyong exuded the demeanor of a triumphant victor.

«Oh, there's no need to feel so unjust, right? It's not that Namgung is weak, it's that Nokrim is strong. Uhahaha!»

«Uh... Uh...»

Blood vessels popped in Namgung Dowi's eyes.

«If we fought based on skill, I would have won!»

«What? Skills?»

«I was just unfamiliar with melee battles. It's merely experience...!»

«Sure, sure. Whether it is or not. Who cares?»

«Th-this...»

Seeing Namgung Dowi's trembling hand, Jo Geol involuntarily shrank back.

'If he keeps this up, someone might get killed.'

Normally, such people, when provoked, become even more menacing, but the Nokrim King seems fearless. He's really scratching where it itches... But how did things escalate to this extent over there?

At that moment, Im Sobyong turned his head towards Tangga and let out a snicker.

«Oh my, even the esteemed Sichuan Tang Clan seems to have had a blast while getting beat up. Looks like it's becoming quite the spectacle, huh?»

«That bandit?»

«Do you really want to lose?»

«Lose?»

Im Sobyong chuckled.

«Ah, do you have the skill for that? Said the one getting beaten by Hwasan.»

«Uh... Ahh!»

As Tang Jan seemed unable to contain himself and lunged toward the table, Tang Pae shouted,

«Calm down!»

«But Hyeong-nim!»

«Didn't you hear? The Lord and Hwasan Geomhyeop has vowed to punish anyone who draws their sword for personal reasons! Endure it!»

«Uh...»

While all displayed their enmity towards each other, none dared to rashly charge forward. At that moment, a calm voice echoed.

«But that means...»

«Huh?»

All eyes turned towards the speaker, Yu Iseol.

«...it means you just don't draw your sword.»

«...»

«...»

Ms. Chu quickened her pace, holding plates in both hands, swiftly pushed open the door of the dining hall.

«Here's more food...»

However, at that moment, someone swiftly flew past her, crashing into the wall beside.

«Ahhhh!»

«I have never liked you from the start, you jerk!»

«Who are you to say that?»

«You cursed bandit!»

«Who are you calling a bandit? I'll kill you!»

The meticulously prepared food scattered in all directions. Tables, chairs, people flew through the air, someone pummeling another with their fists. Amidst the chaotic mess where identities were indistinguishably entangled, people clawed and bit at each other in a frenzy. Ms. Chu could hardly muster the courage to evade the turmoil and simply stared blankly at the scene.

«Alliance or enmity! You jerks!»

«Since when did you stand against us?»

«You're acting like bandits! I'll kill you all!»

«Ahhh! Come at me!»

Watching the chaos unfold before her eyes, she involuntarily shut her eyes tightly.

'Can I... handle this?'

For the first time, Ms. Chu wondered that perhaps she had not been indebted but had been baited into this mess.