

Chapter 1135

Let's get to know each other better! (5)

Thunk!

Baek Cheon, who resisted until the very end, got struck in his forehead.

Crack!

The wooden coin shattered into pieces, while Baek Cheon foamed at the mouth and fell backwards.

Clang!

Wisps of white steam rose from his reddening forehead.

Having completely overwhelmed Baek Cheon, who resisted until the very end, Tang Gunak lightly shook the hand that had thrown the coin.

“Indeed, Hwasan possesses remarkable perseverance.”

“Compared to them, aren't those from Tangga lacking in endurance?”

“...Is that so?”

Members of the Tang clan, who had been lying prostrated on the ground, trembled upon hearing that brief exchange. Even without raising their heads, it was evident how Tang Gunak was glaring down at them.

“Well, it's an unavoidable matter. While disciples of Hwasan were rolling around on those treacherous mountains, Tang clan's people lived comfortably in the fertile lands of Sichuan. Can they even be compared?”

“...So, it seems the Tang clan is seen as lacking venom due to their favorable environment?”

“Hahaha, that's incredibly amusing. Claiming the Tang clan lacks venom. Hahaha.”

“...”

“Haha...”

“...”

“Was that not a joke?”

Grind.

The sound of Tang Gunak grinding his teeth was distinctly heard. At that eerie noise, those who had been lying down trembled once more.

‘No, that lunatic...’

‘Why would someone diminish others to such an extent?’

The fallen people were ready to be vomiting blood, yet Chung Myung had never cared about such matters before, nor would he in the future.

“Oh, come to think of it, that might not be the case.”

“...What do you mean by that?”

Chung Myung supported the back of his head with his clasped hands, shaking his head.

“I’m thinking that it might not be due to their peaceful environment. The children raised by Namgung clan, who were surrounded with even more courtesy and respect than Tangga, certainly possess some perseverance.”

“... “

“Then why is it different for the Tang clan? I can’t figure it out. Is it an inherent flaw? Or perhaps a matter of upbringing... Ahem.”

Suddenly, Tang Gunak’s venomous gaze pierced through Tang Pae and Tang Jan. Already cautious, the two swiftly pressed their heads against the ground.

“... The reasons might not matter as long as the outcome changes.”

“Well, that’s true. But it’s not an easy thing to change.”

“Even if it’s not easy, it’s something that must be done. Somehow.”

Transparent tears welled up in Tang Pae’s eyes.

Today’s Tang Gunak was different from yesterday. While he had vigorously pushed them even yesterday, today he was recklessly jumping around with a notion of hold a knife to their throats.

Just thinking about Tang Gunak spitting fire from his eyes made them wet their pants, so why criticize such a person even further? Why!

That rotten Taoist bastard!

In the midst of this, Chung Myung glanced briefly at the sprawled bodies and spoke up.

“Fortunately, there seems to be plenty of time. It appears they still have a lot more to endure.”

“Can’t tell if that’s fortunate or unfortunate.”

Chung Myung chuckled at Tang Gunak’s words and shouted towards the fallen people.

“We’ll have the same training tomorrow. Make sure you prepare properly before coming out.”

“... “

“Well, even if you prepare, the outcome will probably be the same anyway. Hehehehe.”

Chung Myung turned and left the training grounds. After catching a glimpse of the sprawled bodies, the elders of Tangga and Maeng So followed behind him.

Tang Gunak, who remained in place and didn’t follow Chung Myung, furrowed his brow and spoke up.

“Young Lord.”

“... “

“Young Lord.”

“Yes, yes! Lord!”

Tang Pae lifted his head abruptly. In that moment, he met Tang Gunak’s chilling gaze. Tang Pae trembled. It was a gaze rarely seen recently, reminiscent of the look Tang Gunak had before meeting Chung Myung.

“Everyone should at least do the bare minimum.”

“I-I apologize...”

“Amongst you, has anyone shown themselves today to be worthy of the name ‘descendant of the Sichuan Tang Clan’?”

“... “

“Hwasan Geomhyeop might say it as a joke, but to me, it doesn’t sound like a mere joke. It seems like you don’t need to acquire anything by your own hands, since everything had been given to you, so there’s no rush, nor any need to be desperate.”

Tang Pae lowered his head in silence.

“As a punishment... today, everyone in the Tang clan will be fasting.”

“... Yes.”

There was no room for excuses since they hadn’t earned their meal.

Surveying everyone with a cold gaze, Tang Gunak soon departed from the training grounds. Simultaneously, Tang Pae, who had been struggling to hold himself up, collapsed and slammed his head against the ground.

After considerable amount of time had passed, Jo Geol groaned and struggled to rise.

“Ugh... no... Did everyone get caught?”

His voice was tinged with annoyance and exhaustion. Glancing briefly at the person lying beside him as though they were a corpse, Jo Geol spoke.

“Sahyeong.”

Still receiving no response, he extended his foot and prodded Yoon Jong’s side.

“Sahyeong, you alive? Sahyeong.”

Poke. Poke.

“Is he dead?”

“...Not dead, you bastard.”

“Ah, come on. I thought you kicked the bucket.”

“...Ugh.”

A groan escaped Yoon Jong’s lips.

If there had been even a bit of energy left, he would have mercilessly turned Jo Geol into a sorry mess. But right now, he was too exhausted to do anything, to the point where even if Sapaeryeon ran rampant he wouldn’t be able to move. It was difficult to even open his mouth due to the throbbing pain from the blows he received, especially the one from Chung Myung. Why does Jo Geol still have the strength to ridicule them, even after experiencing the same thing? He got hit twice as hard as anyone else.

“But isn’t this a bit excessive?”

“What?”

“Well... to be honest. Chung Myung, the Lords, even the elders are all siding with him. How do we even stand a chance against them? This isn’t training — it’s disguised assault.”

“It’s nothing new to always be on the receiving end.”

“Huh? Now that I think about it...”

Jo Geol tilted his head. Meanwhile, Yoon Jong let out a deep sigh. He hadn't said it out loud, but he was thinking along the same lines.

In terms of numerical advantage, it would be natural for them to win, but as emphasized repeatedly, in Gangho, the difference in numbers doesn't hold much significance.

An adult might, at best, exert about ten times the strength of a six-year-old child. However, that doesn't imply that the adult is precisely ten times stronger than the child.

It's unlikely to happen, but if an adult genuinely attacked six-year-olds with all their might, it's not just ten times, it could be a hundred times the impact, isn't it natural?

The rift between a top master in Gangho and those below is far more significant.

While Hwasan, having Chung Myung, might be accustomed to such situations during training bouts, the problem is...

Yoon Jong glanced at the sprawled bodies. Those lying face down couldn't have their expressions seen, but those lying on their backs and staring at the sky could.

Yoon Jong came to a clear conclusion.

'They've all had enough.'

Wouldn't those faces look like someone who, having confidently written a flawless answer sheet in a past examination, only to discover that they forgot to put their name and were disqualified?

No, in fact, everyone seemed even worse off than that. Their faces were drained of spirit, as if drained of soul.

Yoon Jong understood their feelings perfectly.

'We were like that at first too.'

In Gangho, while there is an abundance of talent and overflowing competitiveness, it's surprisingly hard to find someone acknowledged as a top master. Just having a couple of recognized experts in a faction is enough to elevate that faction to a prestigious status.

Hence, those who use the name 'Gangho' may not have even seen the face of a true top master throughout their lives. Those affiliated with prominent sects might have slightly better prospects due to occasional encounters with the elders, but... even for them, it's not common for the extremely busy top masters to mingle with the children to improve their skills. At best, they might give a few talented children some occasional guidance for amusement, nothing more.

'Having seen those guys running with all their might...'

It would be even weirder if the spirit didn't leave them away after witnessing someone being hit by an expert at his peak right in front of their eyes.

"Ugh."

At that moment, Baek Cheon, who had fallen last, staggered and struggled to rise.

"Indeed, you recover swiftly, Sasuk."

"But you've endured blows that would leave anyone dead."

"That's true. I've taken my share of hits, but compared to Sasuk, it's nothing."

Baek Cheon's face twisted as he was listening to words that were hard to evaluate as a joke or as an insult.

"Damn it..."

He ground his teeth angrily.

"Just dealing with Chung Myung alone is driving me insane."

Facing Chung Myung, who could overpower Hwasan single-handedly, was no ordinary task. Yet, amidst that formidable presence, Maeng So, who attracted attention more than Chung Myung due to his large build, rampaged like a wild beast, while Tang Gunak's hidden weapons were flying among them. And the elders of each faction managed to fill in the barely found openings. It was an unimaginable situation.

Of course, even the ones undergoing training had increased in numbers...

"It's disruptive."

Baek Cheon deeply resonated with Yu Iseol's poignant words.

'It'd be better if they weren't here.'

He never imagined a scenario where the appearance of allies would become a hindrance. Yet, this absurdity was unfolding right here in this training grounds.

Their well-honed strategies, developed to face Chung Myung, were utterly useless. Others intervened in their strategic actions, and the chaotic atmosphere of other factions was spreading like a disease within Hwasan.

He almost felt it would have been better off without them, confronting Chung Myung, Maeng So and Tang Gunak without their interference.

'Was war always this complex?'

He had previously thought that simply establishing a stronger force would ensure victory. However, today's events fundamentally distorted his beliefs.

'This is why an excessive concentration of power in one place can turn against us.'

So, what should be done? If joining forces hinders each other and not joining forces leaves them unable to face a formidable enemy, then what's the solution?

"...That's why each faction has to move separately, and only a few people can provide support where needed, right?"

Baek Cheon nodded at Yoon Jong's words. He wasn't wrong. In such a situation, that was the best approach. But even then...

And that was the moment.

"This damn nonsense!"

One of the beast warriors suddenly stood up, then glared indignantly with his swollen face.

"Why do you keep meddling in front of us! The Lord of the Beast Palace is not someone you lot can deal with! Even the real blade won't be able to pierce the Lord's body, so what can a wooden sword do!"

Those words made Jo Geol widen his eyes.

"Are you saying that to us now?"

“Yes! You, Hwasan’s brats! You’re blocking our path with your pointless swordplay! Because of you, we can’t fight properly!”

Hwasan’s disciples were left speechless. Interference? Who in the world were they accusing of interfering?

“Well, but...”

However, there was no need to counter that statement. There was someone else who would get angry about those words.

“Muscle heads are babbling nonsense. If you hadn’t intervened and allowed us to unite with Hwasan, the situation would have been better.”

“What? Are you saying that because you use the same swords?”

“That’s the truth. You guys are of no help at all!”

The Ice Palace immediately took Hwasan’s side.

At that moment, Im Sobyong, who had been listening, snorted.

“Well, why don’t you two try dealing with it together?”

Upon which, Namgung Dowi intervened, sharpening his words.

“Don’t vent your anger at your allies. Why create room for division!”

“Oh my. The esteemed Namgung clan decides to speak to us, dirty Sapa bastards. What a sight!”

“What?”

Openly mocking each other, shifting blame, their animosity running deep, they were even pointing fingers at each other in such a situation.

Baek Cheon sighed deeply.

‘I’m not sure if this is right, Chung Myung.’

His gaze drifted away, where Chung Myung has gone.