

Chapter 1196

How on earth did you survive this? (1)

“How is he feeling?”

“I know there probably won’t be any problems, but... still, is everything okay?”

“Is he feeling alright?”

Tang Soso turned her head with a sullen expression. Where her gaze landed Chung Myung was lying on the bed, groaning.

“Well... um...”

She hesitated slightly, then closed her eyes tightly before speaking.

“It’s melancholia.”

“Melancholia?”

“Yes, melancholia.”

Yoon Jong blinked.

“Uh... well... so...”

Glancing at Chung Myung, who was lying sick, he asked hesitantly.

“Is melancholia really a thing?”

“It is. Haven’t you heard stories of people suffering greatly and then dying after lingering in illness?”

“...I’ve heard of it.”

“That’s melancholia.”

Yoon Jong turned his head again to look at Chung Myung lying down. Hye Yeon, who sat carefully beside the groaning figure, gently soaked a towel in cold water, then placed it on Chung Myung’s forehead.

Just by seeing how delicately Hye Yeon cared for the patient, Yoon Jong felt he understood his exceptional Buddhist kindness. However, if there was one minor issue...

“Maha Prajnaparamita Hridaya Sutra, Guan Zhi Zai Bodhisattva Mantra Prajna Paramita...”

“Monk! Please don’t recite sutras while attending to the patient!”

“It’s like you’re reciting funeral rites!”

“There’s no delicacy! None at all!”

As Ogeom burst out angrily, Jo Geol, who had been stuttering trying to recite the sutras with the monk, was startled and fell behind Hye Yeon. Yoon Jong, eyeing Jo Geol, clicked his tongue and looked at Tang Soso.

“But, what is this melancholia?”

“It’s quite unusual.”

Tang Soso pouted.

“Normally, this illness affects the weak or elderly who are left with pent-up anger, but this young guy...”

“That’s not it.”

“It really isn’t. If he’s afflicted, it’s a serious matter.”

“Among the people I know, Chung Myung is the last person one would describe as weak, Sahyeong.”

“Is that so?”

Yoon Jong continued to click his tongue, observing Chung Myung, who groaned incessantly.

“Even if it’s possible for him to have melancholia, isn’t it a bit excessive for a martial artist like him to be groaning in agony over it?”

“Oh, no, Sahyeong. It’s not appropriate to speak like that.”

“Huh? Why?”

Jo Geol replied with a slightly troubled expression.

“If you think about it, isn’t this a serious matter? This guy didn’t even whimper when he was nearly hacked to death in the Northern Sea.”

“If he’s lying there with his head wrapped in a towel like that, it must be really painful.”

“...That makes sense.”

After hearing that conversation, Chung Myung lying in agony seemed a bit pitiful... Well, not really pitiful... Anyway!

“How bad must the melancholia have gotten...”

“That’s true...”

And the moment those words were spoken, their gazes naturally turned to one place.

Baek Cheon, leaning against the wall in the corner, had his head turned to the side, wearing a face that seemed to have lost everything in the world. It looked somewhat faded...

Sensing the attention, Baek Cheon slowly opened his cracked lips.

“I...”

His trembling lips barely managed to produce the dying voice.

“The reason I took over Acting Sect Leader’s position...”

“...Is it really necessary for him to be lying there groaning like that?”

“...”

“Huh?”

Well, Sasuk, who would know that.

“So, to him... Whether it’s Jang Ilso dragging him into trouble... or the emergence of Demonic Cult... More than having Jongnam run wild and Shaolin leading that dance in front, me being promoted to the Acting Leader’s position is what truly sets him off, isn’t it?”

“...Is that so?”

“If I fail, if I... What kind of glory am I trying to achieve...”

Baek Cheon’s voice began to dry up. Yoon Jong, who alternated his gaze between the absent-minded Baek Cheon and the ailing Chung Myung, involuntarily let out a deep sigh.

An endless fight without a winner, that’s what they call it.

“I’ve never seen a martial artist like him suffer from melancholia in all my life. He’s quite an intriguing fellow.”

“Well, that’s not entirely true.”

“Oh! That started me!”

“Please, appear before speaking, monk!”

Suddenly, Hye Yeon, who had set Chung Myung aside, approached with his shiny bald head. Everyone was taken aback, and with a slightly embarrassed expression, he said:

“...Amitabha, I apologize. I thought you were in the midst of an interesting conversation.”

“But did you say it’s not entirely true?”

Hye Yeon nodded and continued speaking.

“It’s not strange for a martial artist like him to have melancholia. In fact, if you phrase it differently, strong people are among the most prone to melancholia in the world.”

“Oh? I’ve never heard of a martial artist dying from melancholia in my life.”

“If you change the wording a bit, it’s a story you hear often. Isn’t there a term in Gangho referring to the buildup of anger causing physical ailments?”

“Huh? Oh, you mean Inner Demon [심마(心魔) same as in ch. 1153]?”

“That’s right.”

Hye Yeon smiled.

“And if you consider the phenomenon of Juhwaibma* in a broader sense, it can also refer to the mental impact that leads to it. So it’s not uncommon for people to develop melancholia due to psychological trauma.”

“Is that so?”

“In that case, there may be no group more prone to melancholia than martial arts experts. Unlike people of Gangho who guard against Inner Demons or Juhwaibma, ordinary people don’t guard against melancholia as they live their lives.”

“...That makes sense.”

“In a way, aren’t strongest the weakest?”

“The strongest are indeed among the most severely affected.”

After all, aren’t people of Gangho known for resorting to violence at the slightest provocation? They’re not the type to resolve things through words or seek arbitration — instead, they’re quick to resort to aggression. So it’s no wonder they’re prone to mental illness.

In particular, he’s known as one of the most hot-tempered and dirty among the powerful people of Gangho. Looking back, it’s even more astonishing that he hasn’t succumbed to Juhwaibma and lived unscathed until now...

“Wait, so are you saying Chung Myung has developed an Inner Demon?”

“Did he get Juhwaibma as Sasuk became an Acting Leader?”

“Are you even human?”

As Baek Cheon’s complexion paled again, Tang Soso interjected sharply.

“No. It’s just melancholia.”

“...”

“It’s neither Juhwaibma nor Inner Demons, just pure melancholia. If it were one of those, I would know.”

“True.”

“That’s right. There’s no way Soso wouldn’t know.”

“It has nothing to do with martial arts. Well, even an average person might develop Juhwaibma, but Chung Myung has such a strong character and resilience, he might not have been affected by it. Anyway, ultimately, he’s just lying there unable to cope with his own temperament.”

“...Is that fortunate?”

“Is it?”

Yoon Jong smiled contentedly as he looked at Chung Myung.

“The phrase ‘Every day is a new beginning’ comes to mind.”

“Isn’t that a good phrase?”

“It is. We know all too well how foul-tempered he is, and the fact that he becomes even more unpleasant with each passing day, how could that be anything but bad?”

“You’re just openly cursing him.”

“That crazy guy.”

At that moment, Yu Iseol entered the room, glanced around, then spotted Baek Cheon lying to the side and poked him with her finger.

“Sahyeong.”

“Sahyeong.”

“Uh, yeah?”

Baek Cheon, barely grasping onto his waning consciousness, raised his head to look at Yu Iseol.

“The Lords. They’re all gathered. We should go.”

“The council... meeting, we should go. Right. We should go...”

Baek Cheon, with his faded demeanor, struggled to his feet like a tardy animal.

“We should go. I’m an Acting Sect Leader... A young man like me shouldn’t be late. Don’t worry. I’ll go now.”

Tang Soso watched Baek Cheon shakily rise to his feet with a mixture of surprise and concern. Then, suddenly, a thought crossed her mind.

“Jo Geol Sahyeong.”

«Yeah?»

«The next Sect Leader should just be Sahyeong.»

«...What nonsense are you suddenly talking about?»

«The good position should be held by Sahyeong.»

It was when Jo Geol felt an inexplicable unease and was about to say something in response.

“Where... where are you going?”

Chung Myung, who had been lying down in distress, suddenly sat up straight and blinked rapidly.

“The council? The meeting?”

“Why is he acting like this again?”

“Soso, don’t you have any sleeping pills or something? Take one and sleep for about a month.”

“I have sleeping poison...”

“Give it to me. I need it for something.”

“...If used incorrectly, it could be lethal.”

“That might be better. Think about it.”

Chung Myung almost kicked away the blanket covering his body, then staggered as he tried to get up, feeling dizzy.

“I, I...”

“Why are you acting like this, you fool!”

Despite everyone’s objections, Chung Myung rolled his eyes.

“I’m... I’m going too!”

“No, you’re not in good health...”

“No, you can’t! That... that guy could only cause trouble! I’m the one who revived Hwasan! I can’t let that person mess things up!”

“Chung Myung... he is your Sasuk.”

“That’s right. We can’t let that Acting Leader Sasuk mess things up.”

It seems like you’re the one messing things up right now, Chung Myung. And it seems like things are going to get even worse if you continue like this.

“I... I need to go...”

As Chung Myung tried to move his feet, he grabbed the back of his head and staggered.

“Ouch. My head...”

“He, he’s falling.”

“Shouldn’t someone support him?”

“We should, but honestly, I don’t want to touch him.”

“Me neither.”

Although the people around him were trying to help, Chung Myung couldn’t see that right now.

“I... I’ll protect... I’ll protect Hwasan...”

As Baek Cheon walked out like jiangshi and Chung Myung followed like a sick man, Ogeom let out a collective sigh, watching them in a daze.

The state of the sect... It’s more like an evil sect at this point.

“First of all...”

Tang Gunak cleared his throat slightly before speaking.

If Hyun Jong had been present in this position as he had been until now, there would have been no need for him to say such things.

However, Hyun Jong chose not to attend in order to support Baek Cheon, leaving Tang Gunak, who is effectively acting as the vice leader of Cheonumaeng, to summarize the situation and speak.

“Although it may seem redundant to repeat what everyone already knows, Baek Cheon Dojang has taken over the position of Acting Sect Leader of Hwasan.”

“Yes, Lord.”

“While he may have transitioned into the role rather unexpectedly, it is customary for everyone to offer their congratulations.”

Everyone in the room nodded.

“Yes, well... since new young blood has joined the ranks of Cheonumaeng, it is appropriate for congratulations to be offered to the Acting Sect Leader for the future of Hwasan and Cheonumaeng... It is appropriate, but...”

Tang Gunak looked at Baek Cheon and Chung Myung sitting in front of him with a somewhat helpless expression.

“...Acting Leader.”

“Yes?”

“... Why on earth do you look like that?”

“...”

“Did you happen to encounter Demonic Cult during that brief moment?”

Baek Cheon opened his mouth with a somewhat faded face.

“I... I’m fine, please don’t worry about me.”

Baek Cheon was grumbling like a sick chicken, but Chung Myung’s condition was even more serious. He alternated between depression and anger, almost as if he had lost his mind. His condition seemed to sway with every breath.

‘Alliance Leader...’

Tang Gunak closed his eyes tightly, feeling a vague sense of unease.

‘How on earth did you survive this?’

It was a moment when the excruciating agony that those who handle Hwasan must inevitably experience descended upon Tang Gunak as well.

*주화입마(走火入魔) — translates to ‘losing oneself in obsession’ or ‘becoming possessed by evil spirits’. Term often used in martial arts novels. Most of those who fall into this state are experts. In their pursuit of higher martial achievements, they push themselves too hard and end up succumbing to obsession. Ultimately, it stems from humanity’s endless desires. When one falls into Juhwaibma, some may vomit blood and die, become mentally deranged, lose the ability to practice martial arts altogether, or become complete lunatics.