

## Chapter 1115

I wonder if I can do well? (5)

And so, the atmosphere within the Tang clan became deeply solemn. While one loss could potentially be excused as a mistake, there was no room for justification for a series of defeats.

As time passed, the shock of these losses only grew more profound. Initially, when they were defeated, they brushed it off as disorientation and pain, but the more they dwelled on it, the more bitter it became.

The atmosphere became grim after all those who could exert more strength in the Tang clan had been called upon young lord's orders. The way they handled the situation showed the severity with which they took these defeats.

However... within the premises where Cheonumaeng resided, it wasn't the Tang clan experiencing the most intense atmosphere but Namgung.

Namgung Dowi's cheeks continuously twitched with tension. Those from the Namgung Clan, upon catching sight of his face, promptly lowered their heads, perhaps in fear of meeting his gaze.

Whose son was Namgung Dowi? He was none other than the son of Namgung Hwang. Of course, while it's not always the case that a child inherits all traits from their parents, generally, isn't there some resemblance?

The members of the Namgung Clan were aware. Normally, Namgung Dowi was a rational figure, making it hard to draw comparisons with Namgung Hwang. But when his eyes changed, there was an extreme side of Namgung Dowi that surpassed Namgung Hwang in some aspects.

So, at times like these, it was wiser to bow one's head and stay silent. They certainly wouldn't want to be completely dismantled, both figuratively and literally.

'He's really furious.'

Well, that would make sense.

Namgung Dowi had sacrificed a great deal upon entering Cheonumaeng.

Pride in the family, self-respect, relinquishing the wealth accumulated by the family, and even the external reputation to some extent — Namgung Dowi had put aside a considerable amount. Yet, there was something he could never set aside.

«Not just anyone... but Sapa...»

Namgung Dowi's eye twitched. Everyone who saw his expression promptly bowed their heads.

«If my father in the afterlife were to witness this...»

Merely imagining it made their bodies involuntarily tremble. The image of Namgung Hwang, wielding his sword and charging towards them, flashed in their minds.

If the real Namgung Hwang had seen this, he would have sought to return to this world, even if it meant severing Yeomwang's neck [King Yeom, fire king]. Regardless of the feasibility of such an act.

Namgung Dowi was now trembling to his fingertips. The shock was severe.

«How did Namgung Cla...»

«Y-Young Lord! Please don't blame yourself! This isn't your fault!»

«Yes, Young Lord! This is all due to our inadequacies!»

«Forgive us...»

There was no room for a false front. This wasn't just Namgung Dowi's burden to bear.

Of course, Nokrim wasn't an ordinary evil faction, and among Nokrim, the Nokchae, a group comprised solely of elites, was not to be underestimated. Perhaps for Namgung clan, who had lost most of its power, it was still a daunting task to face them.

However, that's merely a realistic viewpoint. The members of Namgung clan were raised with the mantra that they should never yield to Sapa, even if it meant death. With such elevated pride, there was no way it won't be hurt.

«No, no. This is all my fault.»

«Young Lord, that's not true.»

«If it were my father leading you, would we face such ruthless defeat?»

Everyone fell silent at once.

«It's not just about discussing martial arts skills. Even if my father's skills were inferior to mine, if he had led Namgung, Nokrim wouldn't have won.»

It wasn't an affirmation that they couldn't answer. Saying so would either belittle Namgung Dowi or diminish Namgung Hwang. Neither response was appropriate, so silence was the only recourse.

«Yes. I'm lacking now. Namgung is lacking now. But...»

A glint began to appear in Namgung Dowi's eyes.

«We won't continue to endure this. I'll ensure that my juniors understand precisely what Namgung Clan stands for and restore Namgung's honor!»

«Yes, Young Lord!»

«We will make it happen!»

Seeing the cheering disciples, Namgung Dowi nodded firmly.

«But...»

«Yes?»

As Namgung Dowi's expression subtly shifted, his swordsmen flinched.

«It's not something that I alone can accomplish, isn't that right?»

Namgung Dowi's voice carried an odd assertiveness.

«Is that so?»

«Well... yes?»

«I'm not blaming any of you... but it seems like everyone's skills are a bit, just a tiny bit lacking.»

“...”

«If our skills are lacking, wouldn't we need to increase our training?»

«More training here?»

Even though they were already training to the point of exhaustion? This was considered insufficient?

«No, no,»

Namgung Dowi shook his head vigorously.

«I'm not saying you're lazy. It's just... considering that we can't even defeat those Sapa bastards, shouldn't we put in a bit more effort?»

“...”

«What do you think?»

«... Um.»

«Hmm?»

«Well...»

Namgung Dan awkwardly started to speak and then glanced back. Everyone had closed their eyes with faces expressing resignation.

'Damn it...'

Indeed, when it was Namgung Hwang's name being invoked, how could anyone rebel?

«Do as you wish.»

“Thank you!»

Namgung Dowi abruptly rose from his seat.

«While we're at it, let's head straight for training!»

«Now? At this moment?»

«Is there a problem?»

«Well... the injuries sustained today are still...»

Upon hearing this, everyone subtly nodded their heads and timidly responded.

«My joints ache...»

«My arm is sore...»

As everyone avoided eye contact, Namgung Dowi stared at them for a moment before turning his head away. His face, as he looked out the window into the night sky, held a trace of sadness.

«My father must be watching...»

“...”

«Our ancestors who perished in the dark waters of the Yangtze River desperately hoping for the restoration of Namgung's honor...»

«Ah, for heaven's sake! Fine! What the hell, you guys! Let's go! To train!»

«Yes...»

«Ugh...»

Observing them departing like cattle led to the slaughterhouse, Namgung Dowi smiled contentedly.

«Sincerity truly works wonders.»

Thus, another person was falling from grace.

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«Ahahaha! Nokrim King! Did you see those expressions on the faces of Namgung clan?»

«They were boasting about their prestigious lineage! Haha!»

«Ah, feels like the ten-year-long congestion is finally being released!»

The morale of Nokrim soared to the skies.

Namgung clan had always been the archenemy of Nokrim. How many times had Nokrim suffered humiliation at the hands of those despicable Namgung's descendants?

While fundamentally the fault lay with Nokrim, the pleasure of seeing those from the orthodox factions embarrassed was undeniable.

Just by flattening the noses of the orthodox factions, Nokrim could feel elated without a drop of alcohol. For them, it couldn't get any better than to trample on the descendants of the Namgung clan, who were the very essence of the orthodox sects.

«They're nothing!»

«I said if I fought properly, I could crush them all!»

«Huhu. With this level of skill it could have been worth trying to go against that Namgung Hwang, if he were alive, right?»

As they were about to drift into fantasies beyond reality, a crisp sound of a fan folding came from somewhere.

For a moment, Nokrim's bandits fell silent, then discreetly turned their gazes toward Im Sobyong, observing his expression. His face was noticeably rigid.

«Is it good?»

«...»

«Is it good, you guys?»

Beon Chung quietly stepped forward on behalf of Nokrim's bandits who were hesitant with an awkward expression on their faces.

«Why are you feeling so bad? We trampled those Namgung bastards so they couldn't even squeak.»

«Trampled them?»

Im Sobyong snorted.

«Are these faces now the faces of those who trampled or those who were trampled on?»

His remark made a few faces turn red. Though they were gleeful and excited, their faces told another story. Their faces were swollen and bruised from the fierce fight they had just been in.

«You brats. After barely scraping by in a brawl with those youngsters, acting like you've accomplished something significant.»

«But still, we won, didn't we?»

«What?»

As Im Sobyong's eyes darkened, Beon Chung's thick neck shrank instantly.

«Tsk tsk.»

Im Sobyong, discomfort written all over him, clicked his tongue.

«It could have easily gone the other way.»

The reason they won today was quite simple. Namgung's forces were less than half their former strength, and it was Im Sobyong who led Nokrim. In reverse, had it not been for Im Sobyong's leadership, they might have lost even against the weakened Namgung clan.

'This is a problem.'

Im Sobyong let out a distressed sigh.

Nokrim is never led by a lot of powerful people. Its power comes from overwhelming numbers. So, depending on one's perspective, there might not be any need to feel regretful about the results.

However, Im Sobyong knows better. That's just an excuse. And this is precisely why, despite being historically the oldest evil faction, Nokrim has never once been a leader of the Sapa.

"If things unfold as they have now, it'll be difficult for us to deal with Namgung Clan. That means we'll only be crushed by the factions united within Sapaeryeon."

"What do you mean? When our brothers from all corners of the Central Plains gather, there's no faction we can't face!"

"...Gather?"

Im Sobyong glared at Beon Chung as if questioning what nonsense was being spoken.

"So, have they ever gathered in one place?"

"...That's..."

"Quite literally, how could you gather those scattered across the whole Central Plains? Even just news of gathering would take over a month to spread."

Beon Chung fell silent. It was a valid point. While Nokrim held influence over Gangho, its wide dispersion made unified actions nearly impossible.

"And... even if the order is given, would they really abandon their mountain dens and rush to heed my command?"

"Of course they would! Because it's the decree of the Green Forest King!"

"Really?"

"...Well..."

"Really?"

"...Um... Well, if they abandon their mountain dens too readily, it could cause issues."

"Ah, I see."

Im Sobyong sighed deeply. Until entering Cheonumaeng, he had no capacity to sort out all this. His immediate struggle against Jang Ilso, who relentlessly targeted him and his weak body, consumed all his mental strength as he concealed himself and engaged in delaying tactics. No matter how exceptional his strategic prowess was, there were clear limitations. Now, having just resolved one issue with the entry into Cheonumaeng, other problems emerged like a landslide.

“Firstly... realistically speaking, Nokrim is never weak.”

“That’s obvious.”

“However, at the same time, it’s unbelievably feeble. Despite an abundance of strength, the usable strength in reality is ridiculously weak.”

“...”

“And even if we gather, just having numbers doesn’t help in localized battles. That’s why, apart from supplying through utilizing the numbers, there’s nothing else we can do in a war scenario.”

Im Sobyong muttered and glanced around at everyone.

“What do you think?”

“Huh?”

“If there’s a problem, it needs solving. Isn’t that right?”

“... Well, yes, but...”

“Fortunately, I know how to solve this. Knowing the solution and yet not implementing it would be an act deserving of being called the biggest fool in the world, don’t you agree?”

“I...”

Beon Chung quietly asked.

“Apologies, but may I ask what this solution is?”

Im Sobyong nodded as if surprised to be asked such questions.

“It’s simple. Firstly, it’s about strengthening the core power. If Nokchae becomes stronger, its influence will expand, and consequently, my influence over Nokrim will also strengthen.

Ultimately, this will make the entire Nokrim more agile, won’t it?”

Beon Chung looked puzzled as he questioned,

“But hasn’t that been what’s been happening until now? So, the Nokrim King...”

“No,”

Im Sobyong interjected, gesturing with his fingers from side to side.

“I thought it was happening, but it wasn’t. I, too, come from an evil sect’s background, so I assumed everyone would naturally pursue their own training.”

“...”

“But observing what Hwasan does made me realize it’s something extraordinary. It seems so simple, yet why haven’t we been doing it all this time?”

“W-Well, that’s our way of...”

“Oh, there’s no need to worry about that. What I decide becomes our way, right?”

“...”

“And in my view... Hwasan’s method seems a bit weak.”

“What?”

Nokrim’s bandits, momentarily startled, stared blankly at Im Sobyong. Their eyes were filled with disbelief at what seemed like utter nonsense.

“If you want it to be like a real battle, it should truly be treated as one. These orthodox sects bastards are so weak — they just act out of fear that someone may die.”

“...”

“If someone is truly prepared, they should be willing to accept sacrifices. Isn’t that right?”

“...”

“Haha. Did anyone expect that a clash between Hwasan Geomhyeop and my strategies would happen like this? Let me demonstrate it properly. I’ll show you what Sapa’s methods truly are.”

The faces of Nokrim’s bandits began to pale drastically.

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The next morning.

“Phew.”

Hyun Jong let out a deep sigh. Considering the situation he was in, it might be strange not to feel concerned, but even taking that into account, Hyun Jong’s expression today seemed particularly dark.

“This wasn’t supposed to happen...”

In truth, they hadn’t intended to settle along the Yangtze River. Originally, the plan was to rescue refugees and then return to Shaanxi afterwards. However, with the sudden appearance of the Demonic Cult, the situation became tangled, and they ended up being stationed here. Of course, Hyun Jong didn’t necessarily view this situation negatively. Anyway, since members of Cheonumaeng, including the Tang clan, were staying together, he saw it as an excellent opportunity to foster their friendship.

Yes, for friendship and bonding... friendship.

But...

“How on earth did it come to this...”

Instead of fostering friendship, isn’t it rather that the more they try, the deeper the rift seems to grow between them? From the standpoint of Hyun Jong, the head of Cheonumaeng, it felt like an unbearable situation that was starting to rot from within.

“Hmph.”

Hyun Jong shook his head vigorously, recalling the giggling and chuckling image of Chung Myung in his mind. Although that child wouldn’t provoke anything without any thought, surely, the ongoing situation wasn’t ideal.

“This won’t do.”

Before he spiraled further, Hyun Jong knew he needed to intervene at an appropriate point. Determined to personally witness today's training, he swiftly made his way towards the training ground.

In a situation where Chung Myung hadn't shown up yet, Hyun Jong intended to take his place first and observe throughout the training, hoping that would improve the situation even a little.

However, the hope Hyun Jong had was shattered into pieces the moment he arrived at the training grounds.

"Aaargh!"

"Hey, you Sapa scoundrel!"

"These dog-like poisonous jerks!"

"You are the real problem! You, Hwasan's demons!"

"..."

Hyun Jong stared blankly at the chaos on the training grounds.

Now, there were no allies or enemies.

Hwasan. Tangga. Namgung. Nokrim.

Different factions, each representing enough power to dominate the world, were recklessly entangled, engaging in a chaotic brawl.

"Uh..."

Hyun Jong's mouth involuntarily dropped open.

"Dieeeee!"

Hyun Jong shut his eyes tightly upon witnessing Tang Soso's picturesque jaw-shattering strike.

Is this the underworld? Is this it?

"Ah, so they've already started on their own."

"..."

Hyun Jong slowly turned his head to see Chung Myung strolling leisurely towards him.

"Without even being instructed. Well done. This is it! This is what teaching is all about! Rewards!"

"..."

It seems like Cheonumaeng is ruined, after all.