

## Chapter 1002

Once again. (2)

Chung Myung opened his eyes and stared blankly at the ceiling.

As he shifted his gaze, he noticed the early morning sunlight streaming in through the window.

Chung Myung, who had been blankly staring at the window, suddenly grabbed his left shoulder feeling immense pain.

Throb! Throb!

He trembled in pain. It felt as if his arm had been severed, but when he checked his shoulder, there were no injuries. The scars that were carved there were just minor wounds, nothing that could cause such intense pain.

Chung Myung continued to silently examine his arm as if he was looking at a foreign object. Then, he slowly got up and approached the window. As he opened it, the crisp morning air flowed into the room.

He could hear the sounds of birds, the distant chirping of crickets, and the serene quietness that enveloped the wide courtyard, where no one was in sight. Somewhere in the distance, someone had already begun their training, and the faint sounds of cheers and weapon clashes could be heard.

‘It’s peaceful,’

Chung Myung thought to himself. Indeed, it was profoundly peaceful.

He raised his head slightly and gazed up at the blue sky, which was so incredibly clear that it was hard to describe. After a long moment of contemplation, Chung Myung’s lips slowly formed words.

«...Once again.»

The world was still peaceful.

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Namgung Dan looked around with a stern expression. Except for those who were still recovering and unable to move, all of Namgung’s people who could move were gathered here.

‘What’s the meaning of all this?’

Namgung Dan thought to himself.

It all began with a single statement from Namgung Dowi:

«Starting today, we will train together with Hwasan.»

‘I can’t make heads or tails of this,’

he said to himself. However, the hidden meaning behind those words was no different from saying that Hwasan would teach Namgung Clan. Otherwise, there would be no reason to train together with them.

The moment these words were heard, the expressions on the faces of those present quickly hardened. What kind of place was Namgung Clan? It is a place where one can become the best in the world with just that sword. It was a place where there was something to teach about the sword but nothing to learn.

Of course, everyone was aware that Namgung's current situation was dire. However, bowing one's head due to weakened power was different from seeking guidance from another sect.

'What on earth is the Young Lord thinking'

Namgung Dan glanced at Namgung Dowi, who was standing at the front. Nonetheless, the reason they all came out here and showed their sincerity in training was because the one who said those words was none other than Namgung Dowi.

Was it because he was the young lord, the future head of the family?

No. It was because Namgung Dowi had risked his life to save those present and had returned to this hellish Maehwado with his own two feet.

'I don't know,'

Namgung Dan thought. He wondered if Namgung Dowi, who officially held the position of Young Lord but was personally his own cousin, was acting too hastily.

'If this matter becomes known to the public, it will surely cause us being ridiculed.'

It was certain that the news of an ignorant youngster who had ascended to the position of family head and humbled Namgung's pride by bowing his head to Hwasan would become widely known.

He sighed involuntarily.

'There's no choice. I have to play along and resolve this quietly.'

This isn't about rebelling against Namgung Dowi. On the contrary, it's because they understand his position so well that they must do this.

At this moment, young family head carried a heavy burden on his shoulders. Such a person could misjudge the current situation. From the standpoint of the clan members, if the family head made a wrong decision, it was only natural to work with it and make it the right decision

Namgung Dan exchanged glances with his comrades around him. Without saying a word, they nodded in agreement. He hoped that Namgung Dowi wouldn't misunderstand their intentions and silently apologized in his heart.

At that moment, a group emerged from one side of courtyard so vast, it felt somewhat awkward to call it a training ground.

The moment they saw the figure leading the group, Namgung Dan involuntarily swallowed hard.

'Hwasan Geomhyeop!'

Tension made them straighten their backs. They felt an indescribable sense of oppression as the swordsmen of Hwasan approached, their sharp eyes fixed on them.

Hwasan Geomhyeop Chung Myung. Who in the current martial world wouldn't know his name? He had gone beyond being the symbol only of Hwasan but also of Cheonumaeng. And that name held a special meaning for Namgung Clan.

He had seen it with his own two eyes. He had seen Hwasan Geomhyeop cut off the Black Dragon King's arm, and he had seen him stand tall against Jang Ilso, the head of the Sapaeryeon, and the Abbot, the leader of Shaolin.

'Hwasan Geomhyeop directly?'

Namgung Dan's heart wavered as he watched Chung Myu and Ogeom walking to his left and right.

While anyone else might not have much to teach them, surely Hwasan Geomhyeop could offer valuable lessons. After all, the teachings of a master were that precious.

'No, I can't.'

But he quickly regained his composure. This was for Namgung Clan, who was "standing on a pole as tall as 100 feet". No matter how tempting the gains might be, he couldn't afford to go in the wrong direction.

Namgung Dan clenched his teeth and watched Hwasan Geomhyeop. Recalling the sight of Chung Myung at Maehwado, made his muscles taut throughout his body.

As Chung Myung, who was walking with a cold gaze, suddenly noticed Namgung Dowi standing at the front, broke into a big smile. Namgung Dan's heart wavered again.

«Ah-ohhh!»

Then, he spread out both arms and dashed forward.

His appearance was like a gullible... No, it resembled a cunning merchant welcoming the son of a wealthy family who had come to make a deal.

Chung Myung, who had run up to Namgung Dowi, firmly grabbed both of his hands.

«Did you sleep well last night?»

«Ha... Ha... Thanks to your concern, I slept well.»

«This pavilion is so miserable that it was embarrassing! If you wait a little, I'll have a palace-like lodging built for you!»

«Oh, no, you don't have to do that.»

«What are you saying! It's only natural!»

«No, really, it's fine.»

Namgung Dowi broke into a cold sweat.

«Kkue. Your kindness knows no bounds.»

Chung Myung held his hand tightly as if deeply moved. The swordsmen of Namgung clan who watched this scene opened their mouths in unison.

'Is this Hwasan Geomhyeop...?'

'Is that the person we knew?'

It couldn't be helped.

Among them, there were few who had witnessed the World Martial Arts Competition held by Shaolin with their own eyes.

No, even if you had seen it with your own eyes, Chung Myung's impression that followed completely overshadowed it.

Three years ago, Hwasan Geomhyeop clashed with Jang Ilso at the Black Dragon Fortress, and then he severed the arm of the Black Dragon King at Maehwado.

For those who remembered the cold and sharp swordsmanship, Chung Myung's constant bowing and smiling, while jokingly lowering his waist, were a shock and pure terror.

'Was he always like that?'

'There's no way.'

They vividly remembered him cutting off the Black Dragon King's arm and cruelly punishing him, but there was no way to reconcile the image of Chung Myung of that time with his image now.

«Euh-hee-hee-hee-hee!»

Chung Myung, with a face that glowed and glistened, shook Namgung Dowi's hand continuously.

«Dojang.»

Namgung Dowi bowed his head and spoke seriously.

«Please take care of me.»

As Namgung Dowi became more serious, Chung Myung grinned.

«Of course, of course!»

«Then.»

Namgung Dowi turned around and stood in his place. From now on, he was not Namgung's young lord but a single swordsman. Seeing this scene, Chung Myung nodded slightly and turned his head to look at everyone.

'....'

'No, what is it?'

Under Chung Myung's gaze, Namgung Clan's swordsmen began to sweat again. The liveliness he had shown just a moment ago had disappeared completely. Now, Chung Myung's face was dripping with annoyance.

«Tsk.»

Well... is it okay for a person to change so suddenly from moment to moment?

At that moment, Chung Myung lightly clicked his tongue and tilted his head left and right.

«Originally, I'm not someone who's particularly interested in other martial sects.»

«...»

«But still people need to have mutual respect, right? I'll give you as much as you can eat. Just do as you're told. If you do that, there shouldn't be any problems. Understand?»

At that moment, the gazes of Namgung Clan's swordsmen turned toward Namgung Dan.

Under their gaze he swallowed dry.

Currently, apart from Nanggung Dowi, he was the highest-ranked member of the Namgung family, being Namgung Myeong's son. So, it seemed that he should be the one to speak.

‘Alright.’

Namgung Dan gathered his resolve and spoke.

«Dojang, may I have a word?»

«Hmm?»

Chung Myung turned his gaze briefly toward Namgung Dan.

«While it's true that we are seeking teaching at Hwasan due to our circumstances, we believe that a minimum level of respect is necessary.»

«Hmm?»

Chung Myung tilted his head inquisitively. Namgung Dan gathered more courage and continued.

«We are not under Hwasan's jurisdiction. We bear the name of Namgung. Please show respect and courtesy to those from other clans.»

«...»

«In addition, we believe that the teachings we seek at Hwasan should be limited solely to the efficiency of wielding a sword. Namgung does not require teachings beyond that. Please consider this.»

It was a truly confident tone.

Namgung Dan clenched his fist slightly.

He had spoken all his words without trembling in front of Hwasan Geomhyeop. He had shown what Namgung's determination was.

Of course, he respected Chung Myung. Moreover, who wouldn't admire him as a young martial artist? However, it was essential to establish a relationship. Their pride as members of the Namgung family was at stake.

Others seemed to be satisfied with Namgung Dan's words, as they nodded in agreement.

But...

«Sasuk.»

«Hmm?»

«What's he saying?»

«He's asking for respect.»

«So, what does that mean?»

«Hmm.»

Chung Myung seemed to not understand, so he asked Baek Cheon, who stood beside him.

Baek Cheon briefly contemplated. He was searching for the most appropriate word to explain to someone with limited vocabulary.

«He's asking for respect. Because he's from the Namgung family.»

«Respect?»

«Yeah, respect.»

«Oh, I see now. That's what he meant. Respect.»

Chung Myung looked at Namgung Dan and chuckled.

«Well, I can certainly make that clear. So, you want respect?»

Chung Myung's laughter gradually took on an eerie tone.

«I was planning to provide some respect in proportion to what you did, but since you're so passionately asking for it, there's no reason for me not to do it wholeheartedly.»

«...»

«Now, shall we see if you have the skills worthy of receiving respect?»

A wicked smile formed at the corner of Chung Myung's mouth.