

## Chapter 1005

Once again. (5)

You can't have everything. If there's something you must obtain, you must also be prepared to lose something. And this moment of choice often comes to everyone pursuing the advancement of their martial arts sect.

To secure the future of a martial sect, you must raise disciples. And the best at nurturing those disciples are usually the strongest individuals within that sect, regardless of what others may say. Of course, just being at a high level doesn't guarantee someone will be a good teacher, as the saying goes, 'Why can't you do that?' situations are prone to occur. However, generally speaking, someone at a higher level is likely to make a better teacher. It's similar to someone standing at the summit, being better positioned to show those below an easier path upwards.

The problem is time. Time is finite. Climbing to higher places demands a significant cost. Furthermore, Mount Muhak [a figure of speech, calling martial arts (무학(武學)) a mountain], as a mountain, gets steeper the higher you go. So, just maintaining one's level already consumes a tremendous amount of time and mental energy.

Climbing to the lofty heights of a challenging place where the air is thin typically involves individuals who have honed their skills for a long time. Even they, just before reaching the summit, won't casually extend a hand to a comrade who is about to fall. They know that any slight misstep could cause them to fall as well.

«Ughhh...»

His legs trembled uncontrollably. His pupils dilated on their own, and his mouth hung open as saliva dribbled out. But he couldn't afford to collapse.

«Try falling down,»

«Oh, just fall down. I'm begging you.»

Namgung Dan pushed strength into his trembling legs, but his stubborn body refused to obey. Despite his efforts to exert force, it swayed back and forth like a reed in a hurricane.

«Tsk tsk. Look at your legs. A so-called swordsman who can't even control his own body properly.»

While the criticism was accurate, Namgung Dan had his excuses.

'This crazy guy! How can he expect...'

«Oh? Are you going down? Going down?»

Namgung Dan desperately tried to lift his legs, and at the same time, the house-shaped boulder on his back tilted backwards.

«Tsk tsk,»

Chung Myung clicked his tongue, watching the pitiful sight.

«Anyway, these days, the youngsters have no endurance, no endurance at all. In my time, I would roll a boulder like this up the mountain as a playful warm-up!»

‘This guy is out of his mind!’

Sweat flowed down his face, stinging his eyes. If only he were carrying rocks alone, it might have been better. Unfortunately, his body was burdened with large iron weights, making the situation even more unbearable. Being told to carry rocks while not using any internal energy, all while enduring, was a recipe for an agonizing death.

«What? Willpower?»

Namgung Dan couldn’t muster a response.

«Anyway, younglings these days talk big, but their mental strength is like venom smeared on a blade when it really counts. Do they think it suddenly makes them stronger? Willpower is what you use at times like this, times when you think you’re about to pass out from the pain or suffocate from exhaustion. That’s when you use that bit of extra mental strength to endure.»

Namgung Dan grunted in response.

«So, stop talking and show us that mental strength...»

Before Chung Myung could finish his sentence, someone who had been struggling alongside Namgung Dan collapsed forward.

Foam spilled out of the fallen person’s mouth as the rocks on their side tumbled.

«Wow, he’s really relentless. Trainees!»

«Yes!»

«To the position!»

«Yes!»

The newly arrived Jo Geol and Yoon Jong grabbed the fallen trainee and dragged them away. Going to the medical hall? That was out of the question. Those who couldn’t endure the training were assigned to special reinforcement training for their willpower. They wouldn’t be getting any sleep tonight.

«Just talking about working hard with your mouth doesn’t mean anything. It’s not about talking big — it’s about enduring with your body, right?»

Namgung Dan didn’t respond. Actually, he had no strength left to respond.

It’s not to say that he agreed with Chung Myung’s words. In fact, he was closer to strongly opposing them. What good could this kind of training possibly do for their swordsmanship? However, after witnessing someone with the same thoughts as him throw away the rock on their back and then get kicked away by Chung Myung, flying all the way to the Yangtze River, Namgung Dan decided to forget about thinking like that.

«I’ve never seen anyone blabber about mental strength and live long. Three days and nights of non-stop fighting will make your hand holding the sword shake more than your feet. You and the crazy guy lecturing about mental strength are the same. We’re all the same when it comes to endurance. What counts is the endurance built up through consistent training.»

Namgung Dan fell silent, unable to argue.

«Refined swordsmanship? Profound inner strength? That's not something you guys should be discussing. You can't even jump, yet you're trying to fly. First, let's focus on just being able to swing the sword one more time.»

Namgung Dan nodded involuntarily. If he hadn't experienced the Maehwado incident, he might have dismissed Chung Myung's words as nonsense. But he felt it at Maehwado, that there was nothing wrong with what Chung Myung was saying now.

From the moment the battle had been going on for more than three days, there was no more swordsmanship or tactics. Once something was in sight, they instinctively thrust or attacked without even looking.

Perhaps this training was taking all of that into account.

“Oh, seeing these kids struggle feels like clearing a blocked stomach. Heh heh heh heh.”

“....”

It couldn't be true. That demon-like bastard wouldn't do that.

“Oh, stumbling again. Put in more effort.”

“Grrrr.”

He wanted to cry, but his eyes had dried up completely, and not even tears came out.

“....”

Namgung Myeong wiped cold sweat from his forehead as he watched the young swordsmen of Namgung Clan, who were groaning while carrying rocks the size of a house on their backs.

“Uh....”

Even Namgung Dowi, who was at the forefront, was staggering under the weight of a rock that was about twice the size of others, carrying it back and forth.

«What is this....»

Namgung Myeong muttered, looking at the scene in utter disbelief.

A voice mixed with laughter reached Namgung Myung's ear.

«It seems like you're quite surprised.»

«W-Well, yes. That's....»

Un Geom standing by Namgung Myeong's side tilted his head quietly.

«It may look like mere bullying, but that's the process even the disciples of Hwasan go through.»

«You mean that?»

«Yes,»

Un Geom added with a gentle smile.

«So, please just observe for now. The effect will be certain when that kid takes the lead.»

«No....»

Nevertheless, Namgung Myeong watched the training process with a face that still couldn't comprehend. Instead of saying more, Un Geom chuckled softly.

«You'll understand soon.»

And he would regret it. About the fact that he was too old.

Among those who survived in Maehwado now, the ones who were considerably older couldn't fit in there. In the first place, Chung Myung excluded all the moderately older ones. It wasn't just because it was difficult to teach older individuals, and it wasn't due to discomfort. It was because those whose bodies and minds had already hardened had limitations in their progress. Taking them along would be a favor to each other, but it wouldn't lead to a significant impact.

Therefore, it would have been better judged for the future of Namgung to focus on teaching those whose bodies and minds were still pliable.

'But then, it's not just this person.'

Un Geom also thought that if he had been born just a little later, if he could have been at least a white belt, he might have become stronger than he is now.

'It's really regrettable...'

«No, but this rascal!»

Bang!

At that moment, Chung Myung unceremoniously slapped Namgung Dan.

«I told you to straighten your back! Your back! Can't you understand words? Are you trying to challenge me right now? This useless bastard, now even Namgung's kids are rotting from the inside! Get up, you brat! You owe me double today!»

«...»

No, perhaps it's best for people to age gracefully, especially if you want to get along with that guy.

Muhak is the same.

In the world of the absolute experts, if you don't constantly strive and polish yourself, you can rust in an instant, and if you go in the wrong direction, you might even end up in a disastrous situation.

Therefore, almost every martial arts sect prioritizes their strongest members. They focus solely on honing their martial arts skills to bring honor to their sect, disregarding other aspects. As a result, those who are considered the top experts in a sect usually pass down their martial arts to only a select few disciples, often avoiding interaction with the lower-ranked disciples, all in the pursuit of the sect's success.

Most renowned martial sects are composed of a handful of absolute experts and exceptional disciples who support them, reaching the highest pinnacle of strength. However...

'These brats with promising talents.'

There was a person who has been completely excluded from such conventional practices. Chung Myung gritted his teeth.

Incomprehensible... Well, it's a bit awkward to call it incomprehensible when there's a Heavenly Demon involved.

Nevertheless, Chung Myung had reached a level that was almost godlike, reclaimed an astonishing amount of time, and not only perfected his martial arts but also found time to teach everything from the basics to advanced techniques to inexperienced young disciples. A martial saint who, in addition to honing his martial arts, personally wiped the runny noses of young disciples and taught them from scratch— an unfortunate individual.

In the past, Maehwa Geomjon didn't pay much attention to the lower ranks. In the eyes of the martial brotherhood, he didn't even acknowledge the presence of those far below his level, not to mention the disciples beneath him.

To put it more directly, Hwasan seen through Chung Myung's eyes was a sect filled with little more than wandering rocks, excluding the immensely great Chung Mun and the barely competent Chung Jin, along with a few Chung disciples who could be somewhat useful. Setting aside how much he regretted this perception later...

Anyway, when Chung Myung flew a hundred years into the future and saw Hwasan for the first time, how do you think he felt? All he could do was train these youngsters, who in the past wouldn't have even caught his eye, into swordsmen who could become second to none. So, what does this mean? It means that the training Hwasan's disciples have been doing until now was a system created solely with the determination that Chung Myung, who was the greatest swordsman of Hwasan and the greatest swordsman in the world before the war, and who had rebuilt his own martial arts from scratch through countless real battles in the war against the Demonic Cult, would raise disciples worthy of him.

Why waste time talking about its efficiency when the results speak for themselves?

When other grandmasters with similar enlightenment were creating new martial arts for the future of their sects, Chung Myung pondered how he could extract even a tiny bit more talent from these 'bottom-feeders'.

While other masters were displaying their immense power to the world, Chung Myung stayed up all night trying to figure out how to explain what he knew by instinct to these fools who didn't even understand how to use a sword.

That's why the training system he devised boasts incredible efficiency if one can endure it. In just a few years, he transformed the disciples of Hwasan, who couldn't even compete with third-rate swordsmen, into top-tier swordsmen capable of standing at the pinnacle of martial arts.

Yes, if they can endure it.

If they can endure.