

Chapter 1145

Did you bring it? (4)

«Is it all gone?»

«No, this... needs a little more sweeping...»

«Come out. It's time! Come out!»

«What? Already?»

The one sweeping between the pavilions swiftly stepped back when he spotted the rising sun. Just then, as their tense gazes looked onward, another bizarre sight unfolded.

Click! Click!

The doors of the pavilions, as silent as dead mice throughout the night, opened simultaneously. The sweepers swallowed dryly at the sight.

Gradually, people emerged through the open doors. They showed no signs of life. Rather than people, they seemed more like corpses or ghosts. They walked lifelessly.

«Oh my...»

The sweepers shivered at the sight. Although they witnessed this spectacle daily recently, they couldn't get used to it. How could anyone adapt to such a scene where it felt like corpses were walking around?

Slowly, the shuffling figures, who looked like half-boiled seaweed, flocked to the training grounds.

'It seems like the light of life faded out in them, it's giving me chills.'

It wasn't this extreme at first.

Strangely enough, in the beginning, those heading towards the training grounds were too lively, causing trouble by bickering, and in extreme cases, engaging in violent disputes and fights.

But lately, everyone moved towards the training grounds like half-conscious cattle dragged to the slaughterhouse. It's odd to willingly go there even though you hate it so much.

'How long will this keep going on?'

'I can't feel anything because my spine is numb.'

Certainly, those observing this scene would find it challenging, but it was an entirely different matter compared to the individuals who had become lifeless husks.

Their heads filled only with one thought while moving towards the training grounds...

'I feel like dying...'

'Just wish I could sleep for one more hour...'

'Can humans endure this? Really?'

Countless times, they heard about how during real wars, people could go ten days or even a month without proper sleep if things went wrong.

Yet, hardly anyone seriously pondered what those words meant until they experienced it firsthand.

‘At least we still manage to sleep...’

‘How can we keep this up?’

Now, there were no emotions left for one another, no anger left for the elders who were bullying them. The only remaining desire was the primal urge to somehow close their eyes and rest. That’s all that remained...

«I feel like dying, Young Lord...»

«...Feels worse than Maehwado, doesn’t it?»

«Don’t speak lightly. It’s disrespectful to those who died there.»

«...I’m sorry.»

Namgung clan, who had experienced something similar, had at least a trace of composure compared to others. That’s why it irritated others even more. If there had been no one to compare to, they might have vented their frustration outright, questioning why they engaged in such training. But seeing those damned Namgung bastards, albeit faintly, show signs of vitality, confirmed the efficacy of this training through their own eyes.

So, they ended up unjustly enduring the pain without the luxury of expressing their frustration openly. Moreover...

«Ugh, darn it. It would be better to just cleanly die.»

«...Don’t speak lightly. If Chung Myung heard, he might have really intended to do that.»

«Isn’t it better to just die? What’s this?»

«I’m doing as you wish, aren’t I?»

«Yes?»

«If you keep enduring this, you’ll eventually die.»

Surrounding people glanced helplessly at Hwasan, where Chung Myung had spent most of his time. Only one question lingered in their minds.

‘But why aren’t those guys getting tired?’

‘Are they even capable of getting tired?’

‘Do Hwasan’s guys chew ten thousand year old ginseng as snacks? They claim Hwasan is a famous mountain, so is all the vegetation there an elixir?’

‘But those guys only eat meat, right?’

‘Are Taoists allowed to do that?’

Of course, the impact felt by Tangga and Nokrim wasn’t negligible. However, the most inexplicable individuals in this situation were none other than the Beast Palace and the Ice Palace.

‘How did this happen...?’

Being the Beast or the Ice Palace didn’t mean they lacked a sense of reality. Outwardly, they might talk about being willing to face off against the distinguished clans of the Central Plains

due to pride. Yet, in reality, they were well aware that their influence wasn't strong enough to compete with Gupailbang or the Five Great Families.

However, this realization was limited to their «influence.»

What truly supported them was the pride they held in their stamina and mental strength, cultivated through struggling against the harsh and rugged nature.

But experiencing it firsthand taught them how useless that pride could be.

‘I thought at least... at least our mental strength wouldn't fall short...’

If Chung Myung had heard this, he might retort, ‘Mental strength is only useful during training — in battle, you use what you've trained! Do those who live a carefree life suddenly gain strength when threatened? Huh?’ But what might be obvious to some might not be apparent to others.

Someone struggled with exhaustion, and someone bore both tiredness and wounds. Someone else harbored subtle resentment, but deep down, everyone arrived at the training ground with faces devoid of vitality.

‘They're out here first.’

‘Let's rest for a moment, you damn bastards.’

‘How can that guy be so lively as time goes by? How?’

The moment they spotted Chung Myung already stationed at the training grounds, everyone's faces contorted with a grim look.

It was utterly perplexing. Logically speaking, those confronting them should be more worn out — perhaps even more than that — as they fought against them.

Indeed, the faces of Tang Gunak and Maeng So standing next to Chung Myung displayed clear signs of fatigue. Though they stood upright in front of the crowd, the weariness etched on their roughened skin and faces couldn't be concealed.

However...

‘Why is that guy so shiny?’

There was a gleam on Chung Myung's face. It felt as if he appeared even more refreshed than when they first began their training.

‘Is he a real demon?’

‘Is he absorbing energy?’

‘I'm scared he'll appear in my dreams, really...’

Life is a comedy when viewed from a distance and a tragedy when seen up close.

Those from the Cheonumaeng who used to laugh at Hwasan constantly dealing with Chung Myung's mischiefs were now paying a hefty price for that laughter.

‘Why are you all sitting like this today?’

‘What is he going to ask us to do this time... Please, let's just stick to what we were doing... Please....’

At that moment, everyone looked at Chung Myung and the elders with anxious eyes.

«Ahem.»

Chung Myung covered his mouth with his fist and coughed politely, without giving an answer.

The disciples of Hwasan recognized this as a typical gesture he made when he was about to start something grand. Anxiety clouded their faces.

«Everyone...»

Chung Myung scanned those gathered and then spoke up.

«No one has any spirit left.»

Upon hearing this, everyone looked at Chung Myung, some even burst into tears. Why does he act so carelessly and create such...?

«Tsk tsk tsk.»

However, Chung Myung didn't seem to care as he clicked his tongue openly.

«What did you do to lose your energy so quickly already, panting like this! When I was your age, huh?»

«You're the youngest one, you bastard!»

«Oh, right.»

In response to Jo Geol's angry shout, Chung Myung nodded his head.

«Anyway!»

He looked at everyone with a pitiful expression and continued speaking.

“Um... well, it's not that I feel sorry for you all panting like that because you're tired, but, so... anyway, if you all put in a bit more effort, the efficiency of your training will improve... and it's good when the efficiency of the training increases. Right? So, that's why...”

‘What's he saying?’

‘Where's that barking coming from?’

‘What's he trying to make us do this time?’

As the somewhat awkward speech continued, Tang Gunak finally couldn't bear it and let out a deep sigh before interrupting.

“Hwasan Geomhyeop.”

“Yes?”

“Hurry up. Even standing here is tiring.”

Chung Myung abruptly pursed his lips in silence. Then, he swiftly grabbed the bundle he had placed down earlier and started unpacking it.

“Elders, please distribute these to the youngsters.”

“Understood.”

“One pill each! If anyone tries to cheat, they'll lose their hand!”

The elders nervously nodded and approached to receive the pills from the bundle. Then, they proceeded to distribute one pill each to the disciples.

“What's this?”

“What are they giving us?”

Those who stood at the back, looking puzzled, hesitantly moved forward to join the others. It seemed like something was happening, but with so many people around, it wasn't easy to grasp exactly what was going on.

‘What’s this?’

Beast warrior, looked towards his elder with a puzzled expression.

‘It doesn’t seem like anything significant?’

If something significant were happening, why would it involve both the Beast Palace and the Ice Palace?

Before simply discussing the discrimination between the Central Plains and the Outer Palaces, both the Beast Palace and the Ice Palace lacked qualifications for Cheonumaeng’s discussions. So, from the start, not having high expectations is...

“Take it.”

“What...”

The elder, who had come right up to him, silently placed a pale violet sphere he had been holding awkwardly onto his outstretched hand.

“What is this...”

As the beast warrior looked at the slightly purplish sphere, he twitched as if struck by lightning.

The indescribably pure fragrance wafting to his nostrils provided a clearer explanation than words of what it was.

“El... Elixir?”

When he glanced at the purple pill once again, his hand started trembling. Worried that the trembling might cause the pill to fall, beast warrior quickly supported it with both hands and glanced around in panic.

«Oh the great heavens. What is this?»

«Elixir?»

«Why are you suddenly giving this to me? I mean, is it even okay to have this amount of pills? Is this a scam?»

Others reacted similarly.

Originally, what exactly is an Elixir? It’s an item so scarce within a single martial arts sect that only a minuscule quantity is produced. It’s an item that only those recognized as core talents leading the sect or those who have achieved significant feats can behold.

Of course, those who saved the country in their past lives might come across elixirs like Doll Shaped Climbing Knotweed* root or Hundred Year Snow Ginseng [백년설삼(百年雪蔘)] and consume them while climbing mountains, but that’s an occurrence so rare, happening once every ten years or so.

Even in Shaolin, which is rumored to be the wealthiest in the world, energy pills, let alone the elixirs, were so rare that not even one of 100.000 people in the temple have ever seen them?

However, is it really possible that such elixir is being distributed like a trivial snack among the guests in this manor?

Fortunately, there was someone here who could dispel their doubts.

The attention of everyone reflexively turned towards the young lord of the Sichuan Tang clan. He was blankly staring at the pill. After a moment of being absent-minded, he brought it close to his nose and sniffed it. Then he murmured,

«...This is indeed an elixir. And a top-grade one at that.»

Everyone fell silent as if a mouse had grabbed their tongues.

* 인형하수오(人形何首烏) — inhyeonghasuo — Rénxíng Héshǒuwū — a root of a plant *Reynoutria multiflora* which looks like a human doll. Google the chinese characters — it looks very funny.