

Chapter 1117

I've already prepared for that! (2)

To compare them to Gupailbang was beyond bearable.

How much disappointment had Hyun Jong experienced due to the hypocrisy of the Gupailbang? But when he thought about it, his words spoken out loud didn't seem so different from the conduct of that very Gupailbang.

Wasn't it the accumulation of concealing emotions and repeatedly presenting a pleasant facade that eventually led to the current state of the Gupailbang, festering and bursting forth? Chung Myung looked straight at Hyun Jong and spoke.

«In the first place, isn't it strange for there to be no issues between people, let alone between factions? It's unrealistic to expect perfect harmony between different factions, isn't it?»

«....»

«Of course, there are issues. The important thing is how we address those issues, isn't it?»

«Well, yes, but...»

Isn't the problem that the method of resolving those issues often falls short?

«Removing pretense is a good thing. But if it only leaves negative feelings about each other in its wake, isn't it worse than faking good relationships?»

Is the desire to cast away pretense driven by a wish to mimic the Gupailbang?

Fundamentally, society is a place where it's difficult for people to reveal their true emotions. The notion of a fair competition sounds nice in theory, but in reality, it's no different from a dragon or a giraffe — words exist, but the substance does not. In a competition between people, isn't it natural for envy to arise eventually?

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders.

“You might think that way, but covering it up just to avoid difficult situations might not be the best solution?”

“Hmm....”

Suddenly, Hyun Jong felt that the situation was truly peculiar.

Normally, he would engage in debates while Chung Myung would often resort to sophistry. However, the words coming from Chung Myung's mouth now seemed closer to a valid argument.

It was a difficult doctrine to uphold and put into practice.

“I think I'm starting to worry.”

“Sect Leader.”

Chung Myung looked at Hyun Jong with a serious gaze.

“If they were not from the Tang clan, Nokrim, or Namgung clan, how do you think it would have turned out?”

“Hmm?”

A firm voice emanated from Chung Myung's lips.

"If there was a rift between Baek and Chung disciples, would you still suggest just covering it up and pretending to be friendly as we are doing now?"

Hyun Jong tightly sealed his lips.

'Certainly....'

If Baek and Chung disciples were harboring ill feelings and were being pretentious towards each other, Hyun Jong would have tried by all means to resolve that situation.

Yeah, by all means. That would have been a very bad situation for Hwasan.

"...Are you saying that I'm putting up walls against them?"

"I wouldn't go as far as calling it a wall. However... you probably don't really consider them as a true ally."

Hyun Jong's brow furrowed. Was that really the case? Despite wanting to deny it, his mouth couldn't articulate any contradicting statements.

Chung Myung shrugged, speaking,

"It's not that serious. It's not as easy as it sounds, right?"

"...."

"I felt the same. I thought this would be enough. But... it wasn't."

Seeing Hyun Jong speechless, Chung Myung smiled bitterly.

"If we talk about being friends or whatever, we should treat them as true allies first. Until now, our appearance has been as if our disciples should roll up their sleeves and train hard, while others' must be raised with utmost respect. It's no different."

"...."

"Outwardly favoring others' disciples but in reality, it's just cherishing our own. Shouldn't we stop that now?"

Hyun Jong let out a bitter laugh.

Chung Myung he knew had an obsessive love for Hwasan. At times, Chung Myung's feelings about Hwasan may seem even more dreadful than the people of Hwasan themselves perceived.

This person, who held such strong feelings towards Hwasan, was now speaking against differentiation between Hwasan and the other factions.

"....Chung Myung-ah."

"Yes, Sect Leader."

"Is that the right thing to do?"

"Yes. I believe so."

"Even if it causes problems?"

"Yes. Every problem becomes insignificant once resolved. It's dangerous to merely cover up issues out of fear that they might arise."

A sigh emerged from Hyun Jong's lips.

"And."

“Hmm?”

Chung Myung grinned.

“Through this back and forth fighting, we might not be able to enjoy ourselves as we did before, laughing and having a good time. However, at least... we’ll come to trust those who stand behind us on the battlefield.”

“....”

“Wouldn’t that be enough?”

Hyun Jong nodded slowly.

“I thought you wanted friendship from them. But now, it seems you desire comradeship more than friendship.”

“No. What I want is a true friend.”

“....”

“Not just superficially close, but someone who can exchange a few curses and criticize each other, yet when in danger, would rush in even before anyone else.”

At that moment, Tang Gunak, who had been silently listening to their conversation, spoke up.

“Hwasan has fulfilled that role adequately until now.”

“Yes, that’s true. Somehow, it turned out that way. But what I wish for isn’t just that. I hope everyone belonging to Cheonumaeng can establish such relationships with each other.”

“It’s a challenging task.”

“Yes, it is.”

Chung Myung spoke calmly,

“Of course, maintaining it will be difficult. But... if we strive and make an effort, couldn’t it be possible for a long time?”

“Until we deal with Sapaeryeon and Magyo?”

Chung Myung chose not to directly respond to that statement. Instead, he simply smiled.

Observing this smile, Tang Gunak nodded.

“It’s more of an idealistic notion than reality... but anyway, I have no complaints.”

“Really?”

“Just having the chance to reassess the Tang clan is satisfying enough for me.”

Having finished speaking, Tang Gunak muttered with a grim face, ‘In the end, Tangga will be the ultimate winner, those damned Hwasan’s punks.’ Seeing this, Hyun Jong quickly glanced at Chung Myung. It was as if these words slipped out of his mouth, despite him seeing where they came from.

However, Chung Myung continued to smile. Eventually, Hyun Jong sighed.

‘It couldn’t have been any different, could it...?’

Hyun Jong was well aware that Chung Myung would not initiate anything without any particular intentions. This time, the issue laid deeper, involving not only Hwasan but also other factions.

“Chung Myung-ah.”

“Yes, Sect Leader. Don’t worry.”

“....”

“There won’t be any issues.”

Hyun Jong looked at Chung Myung with deeply settled concern in his eyes.

‘Still the same.’

In truth, Hyun Jong didn’t want to protect the Tang clan and other factions. He was worried that if serious issues arose due to Chung Myung’s actions, the responsibility would fall solely on Chung Myung.

However, it seemed he had already sensed Hyun Jong’s apprehension.

“Okay. I understand. If that’s truly your intention...”

Hyun Jong nodded heavily. Ultimately, he had no choice but to support Chung Myung.

“But Chung Myung, the problem isn’t just that.”

“...What else is there?”

“Your encouragement... no, rather, your facilitation of the current situation — I understand that. But isn’t it a separate issue whether they can withstand this situation?”

“That’s a different matter altogether...”

At that moment, Hyun Sang opened the ledger in his hand and spoke up.

“As of today, fifteen injured and twenty with minor wounds in Namgung. Nokrim’s casualty count was twenty eight... but it hasn’t been confirmed yet. In the Tang clan, there are already ten serious injuries.”

“We didn’t bother counting the minor injuries. The Tang clan can handle that level of treatment internally.”

“...So you say.”

When Hyun Sang and Tang Gunak finished speaking, Hyun Jong furrowed his brow.

“Do you understand?”

“....”

“Lately, the frequency of injuries has been increasing rapidly. Moreover, the severity of injuries is gradually worsening. To me, it seems less of a problem caused by intensified training and more like their bodies unable to endure.”

“Well...”

Hyun Jong expressed a resigned smile this time, as if acknowledging it would be difficult to escape this time.

“No matter how good the training is, if the body can’t endure it, it’s useless, isn’t it? Usually, you consider these aspects, but this time it seems you missed that fact.”

“But we have Tangga...”

As Chung Myung glanced at Tang Gunak, he silently smiled.

“We are doing our best, but it’s not easy.”

“Are you really doing your best? Truly?”

“Haha. Speaking the obvious, aren’t we? Do you see me discriminating against those who share the same meal because of some petty pride?”

It wasn’t like that before. But lately, there had been some doubts...

“Swear on it, then.”

“Sure.”

Of course, he believed him.

However, he couldn’t believe in the blood that runs within the body of that Tang family member. Because the blood of a person who casually gambled with the most unfairly innocent face in the world is flowing in him.

“Tsk.”

There’s a feeling, but no evidence. Chung Myung glanced suspiciously at Tang Gunak, then turned back to Hyun Jong with a doubtful expression.

“That’s why it might be better to reconcile around this point. After finally coming to an understanding, if an unexpected illness prevents us from fighting properly, it would be a waste.”

“Oh, you don’t need to worry about that.”

“Okay, well... huh? What?”

“I said, there’s nothing to worry about.”

“Ah, no. Chung Myung.”

“So, you’re saying that despite maintaining the current situation, there should be a way for the kids to endure, right?”

“Th-that’s right?”

“Hey, Sect Leader too. Who do you think I am? I’ve already prepared for that!”

“...Huh?”

Is there really a solution to this?

“Well, what do you intend to do?”

The most practical solution would be to reduce the intensity of the training, but in reality, it’s practically impossible. This isn’t the type of training Chung Myung oversees.

“What about Hwasan?”

“Huh? Hwasan?”

Hyun Jong looked at Hyun Sang, asking for an answer. Hyun Sang responded with a slightly troubled expression.

“Hwasan... has around twenty minor injuries, but nothing major.”

“Why? How come?”

“...Hmm, maybe they’re unnecessarily sturdy?”

Chung Myung laughed heartily.

“Receiving Hwasan’s elixirs, the kids can’t help but be sturdy. Wasn’t that the result from continuous physical improvements?”

“....”

“Can’t endure it? Then make them endure. Why make excuses about not being strong enough?”

“Chung Myung, what on earth have you prepared?”

“It’s probably arriving soon.”

“What?”

“What... this will be a victory for some and a defeat for others. Soon, the Beast Palace and the Ice Palace will come. I’ve conveyed the message through the Eunha merchant guild. They were told to bring everything they’ve gathered over the past three years.”

“....”

“If I shove Jasodan into one’s throat, even if they want to rest, they won’t be able to. As a little extra, I should mix in both the Beast Palace and the Ice Palace. Those noblemen have been comfortably living under the pretense of being far away all this time, but we can’t keep watching them behave that way, can we?”

“Uh... that...”

Chung Myung’s peculiar statement about caring for the outer palaces is quite odd. It’s just perfect for someone to misunderstand...

“Hahaha!”

Chung Myung held his stomach, bursting into laughter.

“We’ve been bleeding alone all this time, can’t keep watching that forever. Even if we die now, we’ll all die together! We won’t allow anyone to cowardly stay back and take all the credit later! Hehehe!”

Ah... it seems there was no misunderstanding.

Yeah. That’s...