

Chapter 1011

They got me today. (1)

Thud.

Namgung Dan fell to the ground, moaning. A white steam rose from his head.

Yoon Jong slowly opened his tightly closed eyes and examined the fallen Namgung Dan.

“...He’s dead.”

“Yeah, seems like it.”

Jo Geol laughed heartily, crossing his hands. He mentioned that he hadn’t heard such a cheerful sound of impact in a long time.

However, the astonishment they felt couldn’t compare to Namgung Clan’s swordsmen who had been watching from behind. Their expressions were as if their eyes were about to pop out. Not one of them could speak properly, staring blankly at the fallen Namgung Dan.

“B-brother...”

“In a single blow...”

Their mouths remained agape.

What on earth had happened?

No matter how many times they looked back and forth between the fallen Namgung Dan and Tang Soso, who was smiling while carrying a sword on her shoulder, they couldn’t understand the situation.

“Ugh.. uh...”

“Brother!”

“Dan!”””

“At that moment, Namgung Dan, who had briefly lost consciousness, began to squirm.

While groaning in pain, he held his head and soon picked up the fallen wooden sword, lifting himself up.

“Ugh...”

Half-raised, he grasped his head again and trembled.

‘It hurts.’

‘It must hurt.’

‘I just want to die.’

As if he couldn’t bear to look at the wooden sword, he tightly closed his eyes and tilted his head down. Only those who have experienced such pain can understand it.

“Ahem. Cough. Cough.”

Wobbling as he stood up, Namgung Dan, with a strained expression, looked at Tang Soso.

“Why? More?”

“Th-that...”

Namgung Dan spoke with half his wits about him, gazing towards her.

“Gu- guard...”

“Oh, you let your guard down?”

Tang Soso nodded as if she knew it well.

“Right. Well, since you were careless, let’s call it invalid. It’s reasonable, isn’t it?”

Originally, making excuses of letting your guard down is never acceptable for a swordsman, no matter when or where. In fact, it’s nothing more than eating away at one’s own dignity. These individuals stake everything on a single sword, so being careless is something they can never tolerate.

But Tang Soso accepted Namgung Dan’s excuses generously. From Namgung Dan’s perspective, he was extremely grateful.

So, at first glance, it might sound like a truly kind and compassionate response.

However, Ogeum’s reaction was entirely different.

“...She caught him today.”

“Seems like she’s genuinely pissed, doesn’t she?”

“Should’ve prepared a coffin in advance?”

“...Yeah.”

Regrettably, Ogeum’s muttered words didn’t reach Namgung Dan’s ears.

“Grr...”

Namgung Dan squeezed his head tightly.

His vision was dizzying, and his mind was numb. At this very moment, indescribable pain was still emanating from his head. But somehow, he had to regain his composure.

‘If I can just show my true skills...’

It was a mistake to think that Tang Soso would use a fast and light sword.

Who would have imagined that such a small body could wield such an unbelievable heavy sword? The wrist that blocked the sword were still throbbing.

Creak!

Namgung Dan once again aimed his sword at Tang Soso. He was well aware that what he was doing now was embarrassing, but right now, his pride was not important.

If he were to back down now, Namgung’s sword would be completely crushed without even a chance for a counterattack against Hwasan’s sword. And that was against Tang Soso, who had only recently entered Hwasan. It was an unparalleled disgrace for Namgung Dan.

“Hmm.”

Tang Soso aimed her sword at Namgung Dan, who was approaching.

“How much longer should I wait?”

“...What?”

“I mean for you to recover. Later, you’ll probably say that you couldn’t show your true strength because you were not in your right mind.”

“...”

Namgung Dan bit his lips as if he could barely stand that remark.

The fact that he couldn't refute the statement brought even more shame to him. After all, it was Namgung Dan who was prolonging a fight that was already over.

"I'm... ready!"

"Is that so?"

Tang Soso approached him with a cheerful smile. In that moment, sparks flickered in Namgung Dan's eyes.

'This...!'

Even if you disregard people, how can you have no sense of personal space! Approaching someone without any boundaries, even when they are right in front of you!

«Taaah!»

Namgung Dan let out a shout as he struck down his sword. The sword technique of Namgung Clan, the exclusive sword technique, the Twelve Strikes of the Iron Sword, was executed flawlessly.

Thud!

As the swords met in mid-air, he twisted his wrist and fiercely swung the sword as if it could sweep Tang Soso away. It was a powerful sword technique.

'All I have to do is show my true strength!'

He was not someone who would lose to Tang Soso, who had only practiced the sword for a few years. Could she withstand his attacks for even a second? No matter how talented Tang Soso was, she couldn't catch up with the time he had devoted to his sword. No, she couldn't! Certainly.

It was definitely supposed to be like that...

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

It was blocked. All of it.

Namgung Dan began to panic little by little.

Did his sword weaken due to the blow to his head?

No.

A sword is something engraved into his body. His sword is being drawn precisely as the sword he desires. However, no matter how much he swung the sword, it never seemed to reach Tang Soso's body.

Throb! Throb!

Ironically, with each collision of the swords, his wrist seemed to hurt as if it was about to break.

His wrist couldn't withstand the shock transmitted through the sword with each collision.

'This... can't be happening!'

Namgung Dan screamed and swung the sword with all his might. A furious storm of the sword energy was unleashed toward Tang Soso.

«Brother!»

«No, brother!»

The onlooking swordsmen of Namgung Clan unwittingly let out screams. They realized that Namgung Dan's sword was changing and was no longer suited for sparring.

If this continued, Tang Soso's body would be torn to shreds by the raging storm of the sword energy!

But contrary to what appeared on the surface, it was Namgung Dan who was being cornered. Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

Even amid the continuous collision of the swords, Tang Soso's gaze became progressively colder. There was not a hint of hesitation in her eyes as she observed Namgung Dan.

At that moment, her soft voice rang clearly in Namgung Dan's ears.

«You done?»

Gasp!

It was precisely that moment.

Kuwung!

As the swords met, Tang Soso deftly twisted her wrist, deflecting Namgung Dan's sword upwards. Naturally, Namgung Dan's upper body opened wide.

«The head!»

Tang Soso's sword descended like a flash of light toward his forehead. Namgung Dan desperately pulled his sword to block above his head. This time, he used all his strength to prevent being crushed by Tang Soso's sword.

'I, I blocked it...'

However, at that very moment, prepared for the impact between the swords, Tang Soso's sword spun around and simply passed by Namgung Dan's sword.

'What?'

At that moment, Namgung Dan looked closely. The sword that had passed his head had precisely lodged itself into his right ankle.

Da-a-a-a-ah!

Accompanied by a desperate sound, Namgung Dan's mouth widened as if it would tear apart.

Unbearable pain surged from his ankle, spreading throughout his entire body.

«N-No, no...»

In that moment, Namgung Dan, filled with anger, swung his sword frantically.

Da-a-a-a-ah!

However, before he could even finish swinging his sword, Tang Soso's sword struck his knee this time.

«Uh... Uwaaaah!»

Namgung Dan put all his strength into swinging his sword. But right at that moment, Tang Soso didn't evade the sword flying towards her; instead, she struck it head-on.

Kwaaaaaang!

Namgung Dan's waist seemed as if it would break as it twisted. His sword was completely pushed behind his back. The grip of the sword was torn, and blood dripped steadily.

'This, this can't be...'

At that moment, Tang Soso's voice, laced with anger, pierced his ears.

«Does the so-called 'Sword Master' swings his sword out of anger?»

Tang Soso raised the sword high enough to be seen clearly. Terrified, Namgung Dan covered his head with both hands.

Tang Soso's sword descended fiercely.

«With the sword!»

Kuuuuuuuung!

«Comes strength!»

Kuuuuuuuung!

«If you want to carry it!»

Kuuuuuuuuuuuuuung!

«Lower your stance, you jerk! Posture!»

Kuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuung!

Namgung Dan lowered his stance according to Tang Soso's command. If twisting his waist that much could be called «lowering his stance.»

«Pride? What's the use of pride for someone whose head hasn't even shed blood?»

«N-No... Ugh.»

With his mind partially gone, Namgung Dan instinctively tried to straighten his body. No, he attempted to do so.

«I said hold your stance, you jerk!»

Kwaaaaaang!

Namgung Dan's wooden sword struck his face. Two streams of blood sprayed dramatically into the air from his nose.

«This one can't understand a word, can he? Fine. If he can't understand with his ears, he'll have to understand with his body!»

Watching this spectacle, Ogeom turned their heads away in anticipation of the gruesome scene that would unfold behind. They couldn't bear to witness it.

«Lower your knees!»

Tang Soso's sword ruthlessly struck Namgung Dan's knees.

«Straighten your back!»

She forcefully straightened Namgung Dan's back, which had leaned to the side without any strength.

«Shoulders! Relax your shoulders!»

Both of Namgung Dan's shoulders were rapidly struck, forcing his body into the correct position.

Baek Cheon quietly looked at the distant sky and let out a deep sigh.

Why does violence perpetuates through generations?

Why...

«Use your sword while rolling your head! You bastard!»

Tang Soso's sword flew like a flash of light toward the center of Namgung Dan's forehead. As Namgung Dan watched the sword descending towards his head, he found himself faintly smiling.

'This is... a dream.'

Kwaang! Kwaang! Kwaang! Kwaang! Kwaang!

A series of sounds, which they didn't want to think had come from a person's head, rang out in succession, five times.

Thud.

Namgung Dan finally collapsed to the ground like a rotting straw stack.

Everyone on the training grounds watched him tremble on the ground like a stunned frog that had been hit by a stone.

«What's this? He falls over from this? Hey. Get up?»

At that moment, Yoon Jong turned his head and asked Baek Cheon quietly.

"Sasuk."

"Hmm?"

"Why did Soso end up like that?"

"Yoon Jong."

"Yes?"

"...People can only grow as they see and learn. What can the lower water do when the upper water pours down?"

"..."

"Just be thankful that you're Chung Myung's Sahyeong and live like that."

It was truly a profound statement, but Yoon Jong still seemed troubled.

"Sasuk."

"Again, why?"

"...Then, what will happen to the disciples who will enter Hwasan in the future?"

"..."

Baek Cheon couldn't bring himself to answer that question. Standing behind, Chung Myung was happily laughing.

"...Oh, the Primeval Heavenly Lord."

Watch over Hwasan.

"Next! Who's next! Not coming out? Hey, Dowi, you come out!"

In the now-silent training grounds, only the sounds of Tang Soso running wild and Chung Myung's laughter echoed far and wide.