

Chapter 1009

That's what it means to become an adult. (3)

Kang!

The moment their swords clashed, Jo Geol was pushed back.

«Kuk!»

Quickly readjusting his stance by moving his foot, he lowered his body and stared at Baek Cheon.

«...»

It felt like a groan would escape if he didn't clench his lips. The hand that held the sword was trembling continuously.

On the other hand, Baek Cheon showed no sign of wavering. He just stared at Jo Geol with an expressionless face.

Feeling an overwhelming pressure like a mountain was looming over him, Jo Geol unconsciously took a short breath.

'Sasuk.'

The disciples of Hwasan live together like brothers regardless of their generation. It's something unimaginable in other martial arts clans.

And the one who creates that atmosphere is none other than Baek Cheon.

No matter how much Chung Myung doesn't care about anyone's position, if Baek Cheon had asserted his authority, no one except Chung Myung would have dared to resist.

But Baek Cheon didn't do that. He lowered his authority as the leader and interacted with them on an equal footing. It was like having a neighborhood older brother you could tease. Even though it's Baek Cheon...

'He's really different at times like this.'

Only those who faced Baek Cheon with a sword in hand can understand. Just how remarkable a person he is.

«It's light.»

«... Yes?»

Baek Cheon looked at Jo Geol with sunken eyes.

«Your sword is fast. It's no exaggeration to say it's the best in Hwasan.»

«...»

«But it's equally light. Focusing on speed isn't a bad thing, but losing weight in the process is definitely a problem.»

Jo Geol nodded slowly.

Being pointed out for a flaw is never enjoyable, especially when it's a flaw you're well aware of.

But Jo Geol didn't mind. He knew that Baek Cheon's words were meant for his benefit alone.

He smiled faintly and spoke.

«Thank you for the kind words, but...»

Then, he gently waved the sword he held forward.

«Aren't those words meant for when you can catch up to the speed of my sword?»

«Oh, really?»

Thwack!

At that moment, Baek Cheon launched an attack. Jo Geol, in surprise, raised his sword to block the attack. When their swords clashed a low sound vibrated through him and Jo Geol's body bent backward.

«Oof...»

«Anyone can say it with their mouth. What matters is making it a reality.»

Blood started to rush to Jo Geol's face.

He was struggling to push back Baek Cheon's sword, barely able to catch his breath, but Baek Cheon was calmly continuing to speak. Just by looking at this, the difference between the two was stark.

However!

Just like that!

Jo Geol didn't give up. He twisted his sword to momentarily divert Baek Cheon's sword and unleashed dozens of sword energy blasts in an instant.

Clang!

Before those sword strikes could fully extend, Baek Cheon's plum blossom sword struck the lower part of Jo Geol's sword forcefully.

As a result, he was sent flying backward to the ground.

«Kuk!»

Quickly getting up and gritting his teeth, Jo Geol snarled.

Baek Cheon, casually swung his sword once, resumed his stance as if it was nothing.

«When you're attacking vigorously, your swift sword becomes a weapon. But what will you do when you meet someone stronger than you?»

«...»

«If you don't want to give up the swift sword, you should learn how to endure.»

«Damn it, I know that much!»

«Then stop blabbering and show me!»

Crash!

Jo Geol kicked the ground as if Baek Cheon's words were a signal and charged forward. His fierce red sword energy surged as his sword aimed directly at Baek Cheon's face, as if it would pierce it in an instant.

Baek Cheon's sword moved to parry his attack.

However, in that moment, Jo Geol's sword changed direction, targeting Baek Cheon's thigh as if it would pierce it with a powerful strike.

Thwack!

Baek Cheon stepped back to avoid the attack. Then Jo Geol, as if waiting for this moment, began to relentlessly press forward with a storm-like flurry of strikes.

«...»

Watching this spectacle from afar, Namgung Dan subconsciously looked at his hands. Cold sweat had formed on his palms.

'Is this... really a sparring match fellow disciples?'

From Jo Geol, who was pushing Baek Cheon relentlessly, an eerie aura was emanating. In accordance with that aura, each swing of his sword was nothing less than deadly.

His sword clearly aimed at vital points.

Even the sword that grazed right next to Baek Cheon's face was dangerously close to being lethal.

'If he used such skills during sparring in Namgung clan...'

The entire clan would have been turned upside down.

As far as he knew, Hwasan's Jeong Geom was the top disciple of Hwasan. This meant that someday, he would become the leader of Hwasan, which meant he would become the top martial artist of his sect.

If Namgung Dan had used a lethal move against Namgung Dowi during their sparring, he would have been arrested without question and imprisoned. Using a fatal technique in a martial arts sparring match was such a serious matter. However, here, no one pointed out that fact. Even the two participating in the sparring continued as if it was perfectly natural.

Pahh!

A spray of red blood erupted from Jo Geol's chest.

"Ah...!"

At that moment, Namgung Dan's eyes widened. They had just created a situation that should have never occurred in this intense sparring.

But the truly astonishing thing happened afterward.

Despite bleeding profusely from his chest, Jo Geol not only didn't retreat but instead charged at Baek Cheon. It was as if he was saying that sustaining injuries during sparring was always to be expected!

With a powerful leap, Jo Geol propelled himself towards Baek Cheon, but was kicked in the chest and fell flat on his back. The force of the kick was so strong that even Namgung Dan, who was watching, was startled.

"Urgh!"

Jo Geol, once again, rose with venom in his eyes and launched his sword at Baek Cheon more aggressively than ever.

'He's gone insane.'

It had reached a point where no one knew whom to blame.

There are so many things to point out. Sasuk who allows it, and Sahyeong who dares to use lethal techniques in a sparring match. Jo Geo is strange and Baek Cheon, who accepts it so nonchalantly, is also strange. But what's even stranger is that right next to them, a life-and-death sparring match is unfolding, and others are showing little interest, as if it was a sideshow.

Kwaang!

Jo Geol soared through the air like a kite with a snapped string.

'Aren't they risking their lives doing this?'

Other Namgung's disciples couldn't hide their astonishment and murmured in concern.

They had experienced life-and-death battle. They understood what it meant to fight for their lives, both in their heads and with their bodies.

However, even to them, this training seemed so dangerous that it sent shivers down their spines.

«At the very least...»

Namgung Dowi, who had silently observed the two of them sparring, finally spoke.

«I understand how they could showcase their skills even in such a situation.»

«...»

Everyone had no choice but to nod in agreement.

Anyone can talk about training that resembles a real fight. But a martial art sect that actually practices training like a real fight doesn't exist. Who would allow training with lethal techniques, which could turn disciples into cripples with a single mistake?

But they were doing just that.

«And that's not all.»

«Yes?»

«Look.»

Namgung Dowi pointed to a spot not far from the two who were sparring.

The two were taking a break while watching the sparring, in a posture that seemed quite ordinary. The posture they were in was the fundamental stance for all swordsmanship, a posture that eliminated distractions and fostered concentration. Such training was often conducted in Namgung.

So there was nothing unusual about that sight.

Except for the fact that there were long iron rods hanging from the tips of their swords.

'How many of those are there...?'

The number of iron rods hanging from the ends of the swords was jaw-dropping. One could easily mistake them for large hammers.

'Are they enduring that with their bare bodies? Are they not using their inner strength?'

No, it can't be.

If they were using inner strength, they wouldn't be sweating like that. They must be enduring it with sheer physical strength.

'Enduring that with physical strength...'

If you were to add up the weight of those iron rods, it would likely be heavier than the rocks they had lifted. Just bearing the weight of those rocks was enough to make the Namgung's disciples gasp for breath. Yet here they were, not only carrying a weight similar to those rocks but also holding their sword stances.

Do we really need to explain which of these exercises is more challenging?

Yoon Jong, who was calmly holding his sword beside Tang Soso, whether or not he understood their feelings, quietly spoke to her.

«Soso-ya.»

«What?»

«How long has it been since you started?»

«It's been about half an hour.»

«Hmm. Should we consider wrapping it up soon?»

«What do you mean? We should continue for at least half an hour more.»

«...It seems a bit excessive.»

«No, it's not. As you know, my foundation as a swordsman is particularly weak. I have to do at least twice as much as others just to keep up.»

«I understand that, but why should I do it with you?»

«Are you unhappy?»

«No... It's not that, but...»

Yoon Jong looked at Tang Soso with a troubled expression and mumbled softly.

«Where did Sago go? You could've asked Sago to do it with you.»

«What nonsense are you talking, Sago? Sago went out early in the morning as usual.»

«Early in the morning?»

«Yes, she says she can't concentrate if there are other people around. She'll probably be back around midnight.»

«...I have something I'm really curious about.»

«What is it?»

«Does Sago ever sleep?»

«Of course she sleeps.»

«But how is that possible?»

«Because she's Sago.»

«...»

Yoon Jong sighed deeply and said in a grumbling tone.

«Soso-ya.»

«Yes?»

«The tip of your sword went down half a chi.»

«Ahh!»

Tang Soso raised her sword with an angry look on her face.

As they watched this scene, Namgung Dowi's voice, almost like a groan, reached Namgung Dan's ears, who was watching the scene with a blank expression lost in thoughts.

«I thought that Namgung Clan emphasized the basics...»

«...»

When he turned around, Namgung Dowi was shaking his head.

What gave Namgung Dowi even more shock was that the one practicing this wasn't anyone else but Tang Soso.

«Hwasan's swordsmen really practice like this every day.»

Even without Chung Myung, they were training themselves in the same way. As evidence, similar scenes were unfolding not only here but also in various parts of the training grounds.

«Alright then...»

Chung Myung, who had given them time to watch, looked at Namgung Clan's swordsmen with a meaningful expression.

«We have to confirm the results of this training with our bodies.»

Namgung Dan's expression stiffened. He understood the meaning of 'confirm with our bodies.'

'Sparring?'

It was exactly then when he instinctively grabbed the sword at his waist.

«Aaaargh!»

Jo Geol once again flew backward and tumbled on the ground. After struggling to get up several times with a groan, he eventually sat down in that spot.

«Damn it... this darn Sasuk...»

Namgung Dan swallowed dry.

'Hwasan Jeong Geom!'

If the opponent was the Hwasan Jeong Geom, there would be no shortage. Since it was burdensome for the head of the family to step in personally, the one who would face the Hwasan Jeong Geom would be Namgung Dan.

'I won't easily be defeated.'

Facing the renowned Hwasan Jeong Geom, Baek Cheon, wouldn't be easy, but Namgung Dan was determined not to tarnish his name.

At that moment, Chung Myung shouted,

«Soso-ya!»

«Yes?»

Tang Soso, who was deeply engrossed in training, turned to Chung Myung.

«Why? Did I get my posture wrong?»

«No. Leave that aside and come here. Oh, bring your sword.»

«Yes!»

Tang Soso quickly removed the piece of metal she had on her body and rushed over to Chung Myung.

“Why, Sahyeong?”

“Do you see that young nobleman over there?”

“Yes.”

“Give him some of your time.”

“... What?”

Chung Myung shrugged.

“He wants to see how effective Hwasan’s training is for himself.”

Upon hearing this, Tang Soso immediately chuckled.

“Oh, I see now. What should I do?”

“What should you do?”

Chung Myung slashed his throat with his thumb.

“Crush him.”

“Yes, sir!”

Tang Soso grinned mischievously and looked back at Namgung Dan.