

## Chapter 1154

Well, if it's absolutely necessary. (4)

«Cough...»

Tang Gunak let out a loud cough. It seemed almost palpable, just by giving it a little thought, what Beop Jong might be thinking right now.

«...Then, what about Shaolin...»

«They'll figure it out. Why should we bother with that?»

Closing his eyes tightly at those words, Tang Gunak asked again in a subdued tone.

«But if what you say is true, wouldn't they need to vacate their positions for us to leave the Yangtze river?»

«Well, it's not necessarily like that. Actually, we've already gained everything we could.

Leaving or staying doesn't make much of a difference.»

«Huh? Weren't you saying earlier that it's up to them to decide?»

«That's a different story. As long as we keep at it, those guys won't be able to escape.»

«...Really?»

Chung Myung nodded, chuckling.

«Just sitting here is enough for those guys to be on the brink of death. Why should I get up first? Gotta endure until they're on the verge of collapsing.»

«...»

«Originally, picking fights isn't about winning. It's about making the annoying ones back off.»

Looking at Chung Myung, Tang Gunak thought once again.

'Luckily we are not enemies.'

If Tang Gunak had made even a slight mistake when he first encountered that person, he might have ended up in the situation Beop Jong is facing now.

«So, let's not bother about them. There's nothing we can do even if they watch us with suspicion. Actually, the real mess right now is the Gupailbang, not Sapaeryeon. For a while, they won't be able to do much other than making some noise from a distance. It's not the right time to provoke a conflict since public sentiment is not in their favor.»

«That makes sense...»

While public sentiment may not be substantial power, it subtly nudges people. Especially when there's no justification, actions can easily be distorted due to public opinions.

Moreover, if Beop Jong prioritizes dignity and justification as much as he does, he won't move for a while, no matter what Cheonumaeng does.

«But...»

Tang Gunak is a cautious person. He carefully pondered and continued his words.

«It may not be something to be too relieved about.»

«What do you mean?»

«Saying they can't move right now is not much different from saying they'll eventually move someday. And, based on what I know about Beop Jong, when the time comes, he might really unleash something huge...»

Tang Gunak stopped talking and closed his mouth. His face showed a surprised expression. Slightly narrowing his eyes and observing Tang Gunak, Chung Myung took over to conclude the conversation.

«You are saying they will emerge as enemies?»

Tang Gunak couldn't bring himself to answer either way. Whatever he said here carried too much weight due to the potential repercussions.

'Enemies?'

So far, Tang Gunak had been involved in several conflicts from Cheonumaeng's perspective, sometimes supporting Hwasan and sometimes acting on his will.

But what he had done so far was an extension of conflicts within the factions, not a genuine recognition of Gupailbang or Five Great Families as enemies. Yet, today, the word 'enemy' almost effortlessly slipped from his mouth.

Especially against Shaolin.

'Is this really okay?'

Unconsciously, his perception had shifted. Perhaps, until now, he hadn't firmly decided how Cheonumaeng should deal with Gupailbang, and that might be the reason for the sudden change in his words.

«...Hwasan Geomhyeop.»

«Yes, Lord Tang.»

«There's something I want to ask...»

Shrugging, Chung Myung interjected,

«I know what you want to say, but isn't this place and timing a bit inappropriate?»

Seeing Chung Myung understanding his intention so effortlessly, Tang Gunak let out a bitter smile.

«Well, that makes sense.»

«Well, in reality, it's probably not us who have anything to do with that, right? You must have noticed, I haven't been hostile toward them first.»

«...»

«Why are you like this?»

«Well, I just...»

Tang Gunak, who was about to say something, couldn't help but burst into laughter.

«Right, everyone has a different perspective.»

«I'm glad you understand.»

It's probably better not to think too much about this.

«Let's put that aside for now.»

Those who understood and those who didn't both nodded at that statement. Chung Myung shifted his gaze.

«So...»

«Yeah?»

Suddenly becoming the target, Baek Cheon blinked, not understanding a thing.

«Again.»

«Why are you suddenly doing this to me?»

«Because it seems like we're the only ones talking. Don't you have something to say? You probably didn't have no thoughts about this.»

Unable to answer with a straightforward «I had no thoughts,» Baek Cheon made an awkward excuse with a perplexed expression.

«Even if I don't say it, well...»

«Ah, who's going to step forward and say it?»

Chung Myung said with a nonchalant tone.

«It's been the ongoing discussion, but it's about time.»

«Yeah?»

«In war, there's no time to wait for someone to give orders. You have to assess and act immediately. In the time it takes me to turn my head, someone could die.»

Though he spoke with a harsh tone, the meaning behind his words was significant.

'So, naturally, think, judge, and express your opinions regularly. Even a seemingly ordinary meeting like this is a preparation for war.'

Feeling a sense of tension and slight discomfort even in such an obvious meeting being considered preparation for war, Baek Cheon couldn't help but be overwhelmed.

«Well, since we're on the topic... the small and medium factions.»

«Why them? I just mentioned...»

«No. Not that. I mean, wouldn't it be better to actively aim for their enrollment, rather than waiting for them to join on their own after the war starts?»

«Oh?»

Looking at Baek Cheon in amusement, Chung Myung asked.

«Why?»

«It's about what came up earlier. If Cheonumaeng's organization isn't properly structured, they might end up following someone else. Conversely, if we don't familiarize ourselves with who they are in advance, it might become difficult to give appropriate instructions, don't you think?»

«Oh...»

«Wow...»

Yoon Jong and Jo Geol's strong reactions made Baek Cheon squint his eyes slightly.

«What? Why?»

«No, it's not... It's just that...»

«Really feels like hearing something from Sasuk from long time ago.»

«...»

«Come to think of it, Sasuk used to be like this.»

«Have heard the rumors about him leading Hwasan before. Now he's just a neighborhood b...»

«...It would be good for your reputation to shut up, wouldn't it?»

«Yeah!»

Jo Geol immediately closed his mouth. Baek Cheon gritted his teeth. Amidst this, Yu Iseol, who silently nodded in agreement, kept getting on his nerves.

«Not a bad idea.»

«Actually, just waiting is passive.»

Various concurring opinions were voiced. Especially, Tang Gunak and Maeng So showed positive reactions.

«Accurately understanding those who we should lead is certainly important.»

«As Hwasan Geomhyeop mentioned earlier, most of them still seem to trust Gupailbang more, so it wouldn't be a bad idea to open their eyes and take action before they are snatched away. Especially considering that the current public sentiment is diluted, it might be good to act before they naturally accept Gupailbang again.»

«Hmm. I agree. Baek Cheon came up with a good suggestion.»

Baek Cheon felt a surge of confidence. He couldn't help but feel that his abilities were recognized in a gathering of highest level members of Cheonumaeng, compared to the treatment he received before like a village idiot. This renewed confidence brought back the sense of self-assurance he once had.

«Yeah, this is...»

«Ugh. Meaningless nonsense.»

A voice cutting through his returning self-assurance brought Baek Cheon back to reality. Turning around, he saw Im Sobyong still leaning against the wall, grinning and speaking.

«Oh. Sorry, Baek Cheon Dojang. The little club here sometimes can go astray.»

Seeing Im Sobyong mockingly flapping his lips, Baek Cheon's anger flared up.

«...Did you say it's meaningless?»

«Yes. Well, um... It's just that... Baek Cheon Dojang's thoughts aren't necessarily bad, but it's more like... willingly taking on something that's not worth anything. I know that's the nature of the Orthodox sect, but... haha.»

«Why do you consider it meaningless? I think it could clearly be helpful.»

«It might be helpful, of course. What in the world wouldn't be helpful? Even if the people here open the door and sweep the yard, it could be helpful for living, right?»

‘Better just say it's not helpful, you bastard.’

Baek Cheon's anger flared. Chung Myung alone is hard to handle, but with Im Sobyong at the same time, it felt like his stomach was hurting from both sides.

«If you think like that...»

«Do you need to ask for the reason? Of course, you do. Well, answering that won't be difficult.»

Im Sobyong moved himself from the wall and adjusted his posture as he sat down.

Unconsciously, the fan in his hand unfolded with a crisp sound.

«If you lose the purpose of the meeting from the start, these useless opinions will keep popping up.»

«Uh... yes?»

«Let's find other things to do now that we've solved one. What's the major premise before us?»

«Well... to more efficiently organize Cheonumaeng and fight against Sapaeryeon...»

«That's the problem, you see! That's the problem!»

Im Sobyong's outburst startled those who were nodding in agreement.

«Talking about such trivial matters like this is making the meeting go around in circles! It's a waste of time!»

People who were nodding their heads now froze, trying to pretend they have never did such a thing. Then, subtly going back to Im Sobyong's side, Ogeom, who had been nodding their heads, began to send hostile glares towards Baek Cheon.

A sense of injustice surged through him.

'These ungrateful bastards with no loyalty...'

Thwack!

Im Sobyong struck his folded fan against his palm.

«It's not about opposing Sapaeryeon. It's about winning against Sapaeryeon.»

«...»

«When people start doing something, they find comfort. The satisfaction of knowing they're not just idling, that they're putting in effort. However, that sense of comfort can be destructive. It leads people to waste time on utterly useless things.»

«Hmm...»

«Let me ask you, does creating a new position guarantee victory over Sapaeryeon?»

Under Im Sobyong's sharp gaze, Namgung Dowi flinched.

«Well...»

«Well, then? Can you defeat Sapaeryeon by recruiting smaller factions and organizing them within the Alliance?»

«Rather than doing nothing...»

Baek Cheon also trailed off, realizing that, in the grand scheme, it wouldn't make a significant impact.

«Tsk, tsk, tsk.»

Thwack!

Im Sobyong struck his folded fan against his palm once again, saying,

«With these noble lords leading Cheonumaeng!»

Namgung Dowi and Baek Cheon's faces turned red. It was true that it was hard to argue against such a statement, but having Im Sobyong say it made them feel even more embarrassed. When would they ever receive a lecture from Sapa bastard?

«Still, Namgung's Young Lord is somewhat better.»

«What?»

Namgung Dowi was surprised and looked at Im Sobyong. Could it be that this man was going to defend him?

«The need for a position is indeed correct. Instead of wasting time gathering these people for meetings, it's better to create a proper military position and seat me there! Then, rather than struggling to control these stubborn minds, you can just roll according to my orders! Easy!»  
Thrown into the air, mogchim [목침 — a type of a wooden pillow/stand] hit Im Sobyong, making him tumble and crash against the wall.

«Anyway, that Sapa fellow is crossing the line without realizing it.»

Clearing his throat, Chung Myung clapped his hands. The onlookers, who had been staring blankly, flinched at the sight of Hyun Jong retracting his hand.

«Oh? Now that I think about it, wasn't that mogchim originally... on the side of Alliance Leader?»

Oh...

«However, it's not an unreasonable suggestion.»

Chung Myung shrugged and looked at the writhing Im Sobyong.

«Sure, go ahead and say it. Tell us what we need to do if we want to defeat Sapaeryeon.»

«Are you mocking me like this?»

«Oh, do you want more punishment?»

«Ugh, forget it.»

Wiping the dripping nose with his sleeve, Im Sobyong adjusted his posture and put on an arrogant look.

Everyone stared at him with anticipation.