

Chapter 1239

Who has come? (4)

«Sahyeong, what should we do?»

«...»

«Sahyeong.»

Go Hong looked at Yu Gong with desperate eyes.

«... You said there wouldn't be any reinforcements, right? You said we'd have to abandon the sinking ship?»

«...»

«But suddenly, if someone like that comes...»

Frustrated by Yu Gong's silent response, Go Hong raised his voice.

«If they end up actually assisting and blocking Sapaeryeon, then we...»

«Make some sense!»

Yu Gong's eyes flared.

«Who do you think Sapaeryeon are? Some neighborhood dogs? Do you really think a few people can stop them just because they've arrived?»

“But even so, they must have some plan, right? They wouldn't come to Haenam without any preparations. Moreover, there are rumors that even Gupailbang is threatened by the momentum of Cheonumaeng, spreading all the way to Haenam...»

«Nonsense.»

Yu Gong cut off Go Hong's mixed concerns with a single sweep.

«What's so remarkable about threatening Gupailbang? This is Hainan island, after all. Even Shaolin can't reach this land. So, what can Cheonumaeng possibly do?»

«Well, that's true, but...»

«No need to worry. At best, they'll just show their faces and leave.»

«Did they really come all the way here just for that?»

«Better than doing nothing.»

«Well...»

Yu Gong's face showed annoyance.

‘The situation has become messy.’

The timing was incredibly inconvenient. If they had arrived just one day earlier, they could have assessed the situation and made a decision later.

And if they had arrived after the typhoon subsided, they would have already been excommunicated and avoided stepping into this uncomfortable coexistence.

But arriving amidst uncertainty, no one wanted this awkward cohabitation to occur.

‘Why now?’

The ones wishing to be excommunicated were already receiving cold glances as it was.

However, amidst the disciples considering leaving the sect on their own accord, a group of people from distant lands suddenly appeared, seeking out Haenam. Naturally, the eyes observing the disciples who had demanded the excommunication ceremony grew even colder. Even those who had previously shown a realistic acceptance now cast cold glances. Why wouldn't they be like that? Even if they had been on the opposite side, they would have pointed fingers and criticized. Even those from other sects, who understood loyalty, would have cursed those who received Haenam's grace yet remained ungrateful as beasts.

«Well, Sahyeong...?»

«Why?»

«Truly one in a million, no, one in a thousand chance, perhaps.»

Go Hong spoke with a slightly apprehensive tone.

«If, hypothetically speaking, Haenam... No, if the main sect were to receive their support and prevent the downfall of Haenam... What would become of us?»

Even Yu Gong couldn't provide an answer.

What would happen? Was that something one could figure out by simply thinking?

The moment such a thing happens, all the disciples who requested excommunication will be branded as traitors. They will be openly rejected by Haenam, which has risen to prominence by preventing the downfall by the hands of Sapaeryeon.

Being rejected by Haenam sect means it will become difficult to make a living in this region. Being ostracized by Haenam means that it becomes difficult to establish oneself and live in Hainan Island. At least within Hainan Island, Haenam sect has a stronger position than Tang clan in Sichuan or Namgung clan in Anhui.

«Sahyeong. Isn't it better to cancel excommunication...?»

«Stop talking nonsense!»

Yu Gong shouted irritably.

«Just because a few of them showed up, how can you claim they will prevent the downfall of Haenam?»

«...»

«In this situation, even if those bastards from a hundred years ago claiming to have stopped Demonic Cult themselves showed up, they wouldn't be able to stop Sapaeryeon.»

«That may be true, but still...»

«And if we cancel it? Do you think anything will change? We've already crossed the river. At best, we'll be treated like worthless beggars clinging to a straw.»

Go Hong let out a deep sigh. In truth, he knew as well. Even if they were to change their stance now, the stigma engraved upon them would not disappear.

Once they mentioned leaving the sect, they would never be able to return as true disciples of Haenam.

«So, there's nothing to worry about.»

«...»

«When the storm settles, we'll proceed with the ritual as planned and go down the mountain. And for the rest of our lives, we'll live as if Haenam never existed.»

Go Hong bowed his head deeply.

Yu Gong, who had been staring at him intently, sighed and said,

«Go Hong.»

«Yes, Sahyeong.»

«Think of your elderly mother at home. She's already frail, how could she survive if something happened to you?»

«Yes.»

«Even though I may not know, you haven't done anything wrong. There's no need for you to bow your head as if you've committed a sin. As important as your roots are, are they as important as the parents who brought you into this world?»

«But even Sahyeong has a child, right?»

«...I'm just scared, that's all.»

Yu Gong chuckled bitterly.

«Perhaps growing up without a father is why I find it terrifying to think of my own child growing up without one.»

«Sahyeong...»

Yu Gong turned his head and silently watched the raging storm.

Hainan often experienced typhoons. However, that didn't mean they were accustomed to them. Typhoons were still fearsome, even after experiencing them repeatedly. A sudden typhoon in the Southern Sea could turn a calm ocean into hell in an instant.

How many souls had that hellish sea claimed?

«When my child was born, I wanted nothing more than to raise them in comfort. I didn't want them to long for a father they couldn't even remember.»

«I understand. Well, everyone will understand.»

«...Understand what?»

Yu Gong smirked.

«It's just an excuse. I simply lack the courage to die. But what's so wrong with that? Death is terrifying for everyone.»

«...»

«So if you're going to leave, don't leave any regrets behind.»

«Yes, Sahyeong.»

Go Hong nodded heavily.

Though he had spoken as such, Yu Gong's heart wasn't at ease either. What weighed on his mind, especially, was the question Go Hong had posed.

If indeed Haenam miraculously stops Sapaeryeon, what would they do then?

Gwak Hwanso?

No, Daesahyeong would never seek retaliation. Despite his hot temper, he was also a noble person.

But what about the other disciples?

Would they tolerate those who abandoned the sect in crisis and lived proudly on this land?

Even if Gwak Hwanso intervened, wouldn't they find a way to avoid repercussions?

He could endure any persecution directed at himself. No, it was something he should naturally endure. But... how could he shield his children from the troubles they would inevitably face?

Yu Gong, feeling increasingly uneasy, asked cautiously,

«So... what are the outsiders doing now?»

«They seem to have unpacked at the guest hall. Isn't it quite late now? The formal meeting with Sect Leader will probably take place tomorrow morning.»

«Is that so?»

Yu Gong pondered for a moment before rising from his seat.

«Let's go.»

«Yes?»

«We need to see why they've come. Staying here among ourselves will only fuel our anxiety.»

«But, Sahyeong. There are others...»

«The die is cast anyway. Are we going to hide in our rooms until the storm passes?»

«...»

«Let's go.»

«Yes.»

Yu Gong swung the door open. Despite the pouring rain, now wasn't the time to worry about such things.

'Even if they seem clueless, they must be aware of Haenam's situation. They won't just sit back and do nothing. They'll likely be discussing strategies while maintaining a safe distance.'

That's what Yu Gong thought. If the visitors' intentions were as he expected, they would also need someone to testify to Cheonumaeng's kindness even after Haenam was destroyed.

'We might even be able to strike a deal if we play our cards right.'

With firm determination, Yu Gong strode forward without hesitation.

«Sahyeong.»

«...»

«Hey, Sahyeong?»

Yu Gong stared blankly at the guest hall, not even hearing the call. What was unfolding inside had surpassed all common sense.

«Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!»

A person joyfully slammed down their glass after taking a gulp of alcohol.

«What's this! Do they make the alcohol with water here? It's bland! Bland!»

«Chung Myung, alcohol is usually made with water.»

«Oh, is that so?»

People were sprawled everywhere. Among them were some whom Yu Gong had never seen before and others he knew well. So...

«G-g-guys... I'm d-d-dying...»

'Why is he acting like that over there?'

What shocked him the most was the fact that Lee Jayang, who was usually so cold and ill-tempered that everyone except Gwak Hwanso kept their distance from him, was crawling on the floor almost incapacitated.

No, it was the same for everyone else.

So, not only the outsiders visiting Haenam but also the disciples of Haenam were all behaving as if they had lost their minds, scattered around.

Just by seeing the scattered empty liquor jars strewn about, one could guess what had happened here.

«They've been drinking?»

No, of course they could drink. It was only natural to offer food and drink to guests visiting. What was truly incomprehensible was why the disciples of Haenam were wandering around the guesthouse, where the guests should be resting after enjoying food and drinks.

«That... drunkard... drinking too much...»

«Untwist your tongue... speak properly.»

Among the disciples staggering around, two individuals sat facing each other, clutching their glasses, swaying as if they were about to fall over at any moment.

«...Daesahyeong?»

«Isn't that Hwasan's Vice Sect Leader who we saw at Shaolin before? Why are they two...»

Gwak Hwanso and Baek Cheon, with awkward expressions, stared intently at the glasses in their hands with wide open eyes. Then, as if by agreement, they downed their drinks in one go.

Gulp! Gulp! Gulp! Gulp!

«That... that's...»

With not a drop of alcohol left in their glasses after emptying them in one go, the two simultaneously dropped their glasses as if in victory.

«I... won...»

Thud!

And just like that, the two collapsed sideways.

The snoring, mumbling, and someone whimpering formed a strange dissonance filling the guest hall.

'What on earth is happening?'

Just half a day ago, suspicion towards each other was sharp. How could they have loosened up so quickly in such a short time?

And especially with the outsiders visiting Haenam.

It was at that moment when Yu Gong, trying to somehow make sense of what had led to this situation, was interrupted.

«What? Are they all knocked out? These kids, can't handle their liquor. Tsk!»

Someone leaning against the wall, swaying as they drank, looked around with unfocused eyes.

«Oh.»

Then, noticing Yu Gong and Go Hong standing at the door, he grinned.

«Wanna join for a drink?»

Yu Gong was momentarily speechless. At that moment, Go Hong quickly whispered.

«Sahyeong. It's Hwa... Hwasan Geomhyeop. I remember him clearly.»

«Hwasan Geomhyeop?»

Him?

«Don't stand there hesitating, come over and have a drink. There's no one to bother us, so let's have a friendly chat. You should treat your guests properly, right?»

«...»

«Sahyeong...?»

With a determined expression, Yu Gong entered and sat facing Hwasan Geomhyeop.

«I am Yu Gong.»

«Chung Myung.»

Chung Myung grinned as he raised his glass.

«You're late, so let's start with three rounds first.»

Yu Gong silently raised his glass.