

Chapter 1125

If a friend calls, of course, you should come. (5)

The atmosphere at the Beast Palace, unlike the camaraderie felt between Hwasan and the Ice Palace, was far from amiable.

Though they couldn't disregard the authority of the Ice Palace Lord, it was hard to feel content being overshadowed by someone who seemed to be just the age of their son, when looked at objectively.

Furthermore, the stark contrast between the attitude displayed by that young man and his demeanor only served to sour their mood further.

From an outsider's perspective, all these actions were sufficient to be perceived as acts of disregard towards the Nanman Beast Palace.

How bonded could the Beast Palace and the Ice Palace be, simply by bearing the same name of Cheonumaeng? The only element binding them was the distinctive discriminatory treatment received from the Central Plains.

But once Cheonumaeng started solving external issues to a certain extent, the unspoken cultural differences between them began to surface.

“No matter what, isn't this a bit too much?”

“Didn't they refer to us as enemies just a while ago?”

“Can those who kill innocent animals for mere unnecessary hides be considered righteous? They are just arrogant.”

“This is the worst.”

Amongst themselves, the members of the Beast Palace exchanged quiet opinions. The animosity towards the Ice Palace continued to escalate.

“He is still young and yet so insolent.”

“If he was at the Nanman Beast Palace, he wouldn't be fit for the role of a Young Palace Lord.”

“He seems lacking in ability.”

“It doesn't sit well with me.”

Particularly, what they found most vexing was the fact that, no matter how you looked at it, the Ice Palace Lord didn't seem all that strong. Of course, it's undeniable that his display of vigor is impressive considering his age. Yet, to anyone's eyes, those standing behind him seem stronger than the Ice Palace Lord himself.

In reality, it's only natural for the strongest to lead. What these people couldn't comprehend, based on their understanding, was how someone lacking experience and strength had managed to claim a higher position solely based on their status.

“He wears a Gamtu [갸투 — a type of a hat/headpiece] and thinks he's soaring high in the sky.”

At that moment, a sharp voice pierced their ears.

“What did you just mutter?”

“Hmm?”

Unlike Hwasan and their chaotic behavior, the members of the Ice Palace, who were quietly observing the situation from behind, seemed to have heard their conversation.

Several warriors from the Ice Palace approached the members of the Beast Palace, shooting cold glances at them.

“What did you just mutter?”

“But these guys... do they think we're easy to handle?”

“Wild savages who can't even properly manage their garments have such gaping mouths.

What? Is it a lack of capability?”

Naturally, the disdain of the Beast Palace towards the Ice Palace was equally incomprehensible to the Ice Palace.

While the Beast Palace followed the law of the jungle, the Ice Palace was a realm combating the greater nature. They believed that it wasn't the strongest who survived, but the wisest. Moreover, Seol Sobaek is acknowledged even by the elders of the Ice Palace as their Lord. To deny his authority over the Ice Palace was tantamount to rejecting the entire way of life of the Ice Palace members.

“...Did they just call us savages?”

Tension was mounting between the two factions.

Until recent opening ceremony conducted by Cheonumaeng, the relationship between the two Palaces wasn't sour... in fact, they were rather on amicable terms. However, now they were bearing their teeth.

...At the peak of the escalating tension between the two groups.

“That's enough.”

At that moment, Maeng So, the Lord of the Beast Palace, spoke in a rumbling voice, putting an end to the situation.

As soon as he stepped forward, the members of the Beast Palace lowered their heads and retreated.

Though the Ice Palace members weren't pleased, they had no choice but to step back. They understood that ignoring Maeng So's words now would be akin to condoning the earlier actions of the Beast Palace members pressuring Seol Sobaek.

“Hmm.”

Maeng So furrowed his brow while looking at his subordinates.

“This time, you've been in the wrong. Apologize to the Ice Palace Lord.”

“Bu...But, Lord! We...”

“Enough.”

Maeng So waved his hand.

“How did the Central Plainers used to speak of our actions?”

“...”

“Do they not call those who lack courtesy and knowledge of how to live barbaric? Every time that’s said, what have you replied?”

“...”

“Answer me.”

A member of the Nanman Beast Palace bowed their head and replied,

“They also said that if they were forced to live at the end of Yunnan or entered the Territories of Nanman, they would have no choice but to live like us.”

“Indeed. The way of life varies depending on where one lives. But... you, who were so displeased with such perception, are now doing the same thing to the Ice Palace. Without understanding, merely criticizing according to your standards.”

“...”

“Had you been a little more impudent, I would have personally broken your backs.”

“We... apologize.”

“I’m not the one you should apologize to.”

Upon these words, members of the Beast Palace bowed their heads towards Seol Sobaek.

“We apologize, Lord of the Ice Palace.”

“We have crossed the line.”

Seol Sobaek glanced at the members of the Beast Palace. In the past, he would have immediately accepted such an apology, but this time, he remained silent. It wasn’t that he was upset — the problem lay in the disrespect shown towards the Northern Ice Palace.

“I also apologize, Ice Palace Lord. Please understand.”

“Oh, no. Lord, of course, I understand.”

However, even with such sentiments, when Maeng So slightly bowed his head, those feelings melted away like thawing ice. Seol Sobaek knew well how difficult it was for someone like Maeng So, the Lord of the Nanman Beast Palace, to lower his head to another, and that understanding softened his heart.

Seol Sobaek nervously scratched his nose.

“Actually... I was also a bit sensitive.”

“I understand. You also must have heard similar words as us due to your different way of life.”

A sigh escaped from Seol Sobaek. Being disregarded for living differently, just like them in contrast to the Central Plains, made them not so different. Hence, they couldn’t help but be sensitive to such remarks.

“In essence, it’s the people of the Central Plains who are the issue.”

“That’s right.”

“We have no reason to fight amongst ourselves.”

“Yes. Your words, Lord, are correct.”

Chung Myung, who was listening to this conversation, picked his ear with his finger, looking quite sullen.

“It seems inappropriate to discuss this in front of the people of the Central Plains.”

“Hahaha. You’re a separate matter. You’re not someone who divides the Central Plains and the Outer regions.”

“Yes. That’s correct. I fully agree.”

“...Is that an insult?”

“Ahahaha! How could that be? If one values their life, they wouldn’t dare insult someone as renowned as Hwasan Geomhyeop.”

“That’s right! Who would dare insult Dojang-nim! I’d personally throw them to the bottom of the Northern Sea!”

Sect Leader Sahyeong.

I hate these guys... It’s so uncomfortable...

Chung Myung let out a sigh as if praying for the ground to swallow him. What could he do? Embracing all these damned nobles was the path he had chosen himself.

“What should we do now?”

“Huh?”

“Please give us orders! We are ready.”

As approaching Seol Sobaek made Chung Myung feel increasingly uncomfortable, he took a step back, sweating cold.

“Uh... your enthusiasm is commendable, but after the long journey, wouldn’t it be better to first ease off a bit? We should probably meet the Sect Leader first, right?”

“Yes! That’s what we’ll do!”

Seol Sobaek vigorously nodded, almost too burdensomely. He quickly began to lead the members of the Ice Palace into the manor.

“Be careful not to damage the gift carriages!”

“Yes!”

Chung Myung wiped the cold sweat off his forehead. Maeng So, who was standing beside him, spoke quietly.

“...Seems like someone grew a bit odd.”

“S-Sure?”

“Not necessarily a bad thing... but... it’s a bit peculiar.”

Maeng So suppressed a smile. A deep sigh escaped from Chung Myung’s lips.

Although the situation was somehow settled, the members of both the Ice Palace and the Beast Palace, even until the moment they retreated, couldn’t rid themselves of the resentment, exchanging displeased glances.

Observing this sight, Chung Myung lightly clicked his tongue. Soon after, he spoke in a serious tone.

“Thank you.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You must not have been in a good mood either.”

Maeng So chuckled.

“What’s there to feel bad about?”

Of course, he said it like this, but he couldn’t have been in a good mood. After all, the thought processes of the members of the Beast Palace and Maeng So weren’t significantly different. What the palace members found annoying also meant Maeng So couldn’t help but feel the same annoyance.

No, perhaps Maeng So’s mood might have been worse than the average palace member. He was, after all, the Lord of the Beast Palace.

However, he suppressed such feelings and first scolded his own subordinates.

Despite being the Lord of the same Outer regions, Seol Sobaek was someone incomparable to himself. If Maeng So had wanted, he could have easily exerted dominance through strength and authority, but instead, he chose to apologize and bow first. Hence, he said those words of gratitude to Chung Myung.

“Compared to what you’re doing, it’s nothing.”

“...Me?”

“Even a short-tempered person like you is keeping your impulses in check, aren’t you?”

“No... My temperament isn’t as bad as you think...”

“If it had been the old you, the moment the palace members clashed, both sides would have been beaten without a second thought.”

Oh? Come to think of it...

“However, it’s rather ridiculous for me to get angry.”

“...?”

“More than that... it might not be as easy as I thought.”

“What do you mean?”

Maeng So looked at Chung Myung, as if asking why he was asking something that he already seemed to know.

“I can’t rush to mediate every time something happens. If that was possible, I wouldn’t have asked for help when you came to Yunnan in the past.”

“...True.”

Palace members respect and revere the strong, but because of that, they fail to understand the need to endure. Especially when they are in situations they don’t agree with, they find it difficult to tolerate.

“Because they are so free-spirited.”

Maeng So’s expression turned bitter. He never expected such issues to arise as soon as they met. He felt sorry for causing unnecessary trouble when he came to help.

“There might be a few issues, but will it be okay?”

“Oh, what issues?”

“Huh?”

When Chung Myung’s response remained vague, Maeng So asked with a puzzled expression,

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you’ll find out soon enough.”

Instead of answering, Chung Myung grinned.

“More importantly, did the Beast Palace get tidied up neatly?”

“As you said, I took measures to ensure that we would not need to come back for a few years. That’s why it took so long.”

“Great.”

Chung Myung nodded. With this, the full strength of the current Cheonumaeng was gathered here.

‘Now that they’re all assembled, it’s truly no joke.’

From Hwasan to Tangga, Namgung and Nokrim, and even the Ice Palace and the Beast Palace, six of the dominating factions in Gangho were gathered here. Considering that Gupailnang controlled ten sects, this was an undeniably formidable force.

‘Still, it’s somewhat lacking...’

Chung Myung tilted his neck from side to side.

“Well, we can fill in those gaps from now on.”

It’s not such a difficult task. Just as Hwasan grew strong, isn’t it just a matter of nurturing these forces? Of course, there might not be enough time to nurture them leisurely, so it might be a bit intense, perhaps painful for those being molded...

“I need to understand that they all wish for their own success. What’s the point if they don’t understand that?”

“Huh?”

“Oh, it’s nothing.”

Chung Myung chuckled as if finding pleasure in his own thoughts.

But Maeng So felt a strange unease seeing him, almost like a child who had gotten a hold of an intriguing yet worrisome toy.