

Chapter 1257

He will take care of that, won't he? (2)

The forces of Sapaeryeon began to move into the island. Watching this, Lee Jayang's face hardened.

«Daesahyeong.»

«...»

«Isn't everything ruined?»

Cold sweat formed on Lee Jayang's forehead.

Their plan wasn't initially too complicated. When Sapaeryeon landed on the coast, they would keep an eye on the situation while enemies headed towards Jinsan where Haenam sect was located, then seize the ships and head to the mainland.

It was as simple as it was foolproof.

Why? The reason was obvious.

From the perspective of Sapaeryeon, they wouldn't even consider the idea of Haenam sect, who was based on Hainan Island, abandoning their stronghold and advancing to Gangnam. Even for Haenam themselves, it was a plan they had never even considered once. Could Sapaeryeon possibly entertain such a possibility?

It would be incredibly difficult to make the decision, but if they were prepared, it was a plan that was even more difficult to fail.

But then...

«These guys... guarding the ships? Have we been caught?»

Gwak Hwanso responded in a firm voice.

«...It's unlikely that our plan has been exposed. If it had, they wouldn't have left only that much manpower behind. They would have been more vigilant, guarding the coast thoroughly to track us down.»

Lee Jayang nodded. Indeed, there was logic in Gwak Hwanso's words. However...

‘Nevertheless, isn't it a fact that the plan has gone awry?’

As he watched Changgwi Unit guarding the ships, his heart felt heavy like a lump of lead.

Judging by their attire, they were undoubtedly members of Maninbang. If the members of Maninbang were remaining there as well — prepared as they were, it would undoubtedly be difficult for their plan to seize the ships quickly to succeed.

‘What should we do?’

Sweat dripped down Lee Jayang's nose. Among the disciples of Haenam, Lee Jayang was known as a box full of wisdom, but in this situation, he couldn't find a suitable solution.

Of course, if they mobilized the full force of Haenam, defeating them wouldn't be difficult.

No matter what anyone said, Haenam was one of the powerful sect, part of Gupailbang.

However, that didn't mean they could end the battle in one fell swoop.

The opponent is also none other than the leaders of Sapaeryon, Maninbang, isn't it? If they delay for even a short time, the main force of Maninbang, which had left the coast, might realize the situation and return. If that happens...

'It's a mess.'

Even fighting with the advantage of the terrain, it was difficult to hope for victory. It was all too obvious what would happen if they were ambushed by Maninbang while being pressed towards the coast.

«For now, we have no choice but to wait as much as possible, Sahyeong.»

«Wait?»

«Yes. We have to wait until the main force of Maninbang penetrates deep into the island. Even if they realize that we are attacking the remaining forces, it will take time for reinforcements to arrive.»

Taking advantage of that gap, they had no choice but to quickly deal with them.

«...The damage will be significant.»

«There's no other way.»

A sigh escaped Gwak Hwanso's lips. The reason they had tried to seize the ships as quickly as possible was because Maninbang's main force going deep into the island was also an unwelcome development.

The current goal of Maninbang is the mountain, where the main base of Haenam sect is located. However, even on the way to the mountain, there are people living there.

From Gwak Hwanso's perspective, who had carefully listened to what had happened in Shaanxi while Hwasan was absent, he wanted to prevent Sapaeryon's forces from approaching the civilians by any means necessary.

'Is there no other way?'

However, Lee Jayang's words also made sense. Rushing the operation recklessly could lead to being trapped on this island or suffering a joint attack, resulting in even greater losses.

'What about Sect Leader?'

Gwak Hwanso turned his head to look at the opposite peak. There was no noticeable reaction from Geum Yangbaek, where they were lying in ambush. They were probably in a state of confusion as well.

«...And anyway, that's how it's going to be.»

«Huh?»

«The signal for the attack was supposed to come from Cheonumaeng. Even if we might, Cheonumaeng has no reason to take a risk worrying about the civilians of Haenam.»

«...»

Lee Jayang clenched his teeth with a face that seemed strangely angry.

«After those damn Maninbang lowlifes mess things up, then they'll come out and fight. That's rational.»

Gwak Hwanso sighed heavily. Right now, Lee Jayang's words didn't seem consistent. He clearly understood that in this situation, waiting as long as possible was the best option. Yet, the reason for his dissatisfaction was clear.

'Was it nearby?'

Lee Jayang's village before he entered Haenam was located on the route from the coast to Jinsan. If Maninbang marched straight towards the Jinsan mountain, Lee Jayang's village would inevitably be passed through. And some of his family still lived there.

While he reasoned with his mind and discussed the sacrifice of the individual for the greater good, his heart wasn't cooperating.

After all, who could remain calm when their family might be at risk because of their silence?

«Jayang...»

«...Nevermind.»

Lee Jayang cut off coldly, his voice tinged with barely concealed irritation.

«I'm not a fool who doesn't know what's more important. I understand that my family shouldn't be treated any differently from other villagers on the island.»

Lee Jayang bit his lip tightly after finishing his words. Gwak Hwanso couldn't say anything to him in response. All he could do was tightly grip the trembling shoulders of his Sajil.

«Hold on.»

«I... I understand.»

Why wouldn't he want to rush out immediately? But he had to hold back. If he didn't, the situation could lead to even more lives being lost.

«It's fortunate that Cheonumaeng took the command. If Sect Leader had the command, I might have already rushed to him.»

Lee Jayang forced a smile as he spoke. However, his forced smile only made the situation more pitiful. Gwak Hwanso just nodded slightly in response.

Just then.

«No, wait, Sahyeong. Is this really okay?»

The other disciple who was with them opened his mouth with a bewildered expression.

«Why do you ask?»

«Isn't it obvious? We've punctured holes all over that ship. It's floating now, but it'll sink soon!»

Lee Jayang and Gwak Hwanso turned pale in an instant upon hearing those words. They had completely forgotten that fact due to their nerves being on edge.

«We thought it would be better to sink the ship completely, so we deliberately made those holes. If we delay now, it will all be exposed because of that. Then...»

Lee Jayang and Gwak Hwanso looked at each other with a sense of impending doom in their eyes.

«Damn it.»

If they had known this would happen, they should have just destroyed the ship as they were instructed! Why did they insist on being stubborn?

«And Hwasan? Does Hwasan know about this?»

«I'm not sure. Even if they do, we don't know exactly when the ship will sink. We made the holes and prepared for it.»

«Ah, shouldn't we notify them?»

«How can we? We can't reveal our current situation! They're right in front of us, aren't they?»

«Oh no...»

«I... I might have caused unnecessary trouble...»

Lee Jayang, sensing that things had taken a turn for the worse, stared anxiously ahead with trembling eyes.

And then, in that moment.

«...Huh?»

Lee Jayang's mouth slowly fell open.

«T-that... that thing... that?»

«Huh?»

Gwak Hwanso looked at Lee Jayang with a puzzled expression. His face was now as pale as if he had just encountered a ghost.

«Why are you...?»

«T-that... what is that...? That crazy... that crazy guy?»

«Crazy guy?»

If there's a crazy guy here... Could it be?

Gwak Hwanso quickly turned his gaze to where Lee Jayang was looking.

«...That.»

And in that moment, Gwak Hwanso's eyes widened twice their usual size.

Descending the slope toward the coast, a man with a drawn sword slumped loosely over his shoulder was walking down.

«H... Hwa... Hwasan Geomhyeop?»

«W-what in the world is that crazy guy...?»

Both of them were left speechless. Chung Myung's expression, amidst all this, remained as somber as ever.

«Ugh.»

Heo Maeng [허맹(許孟)], vice leader [Budaeju] of Maninbang's Changgwi, grimaced and clicked his tongue.

«Damn it.»

He was filled with frustration.

After running all the way from the distant Yangtze River to here in just a month, arriving in Haenam only to find himself tasked with guarding a boat was beyond irritating. It would be even more absurd if he was in a good mood.

«Why us, of all people?»

«If you have something to say, why didn't you say it when you were in front of the commander?»

«Damn it. What could I possibly say to this noble gentlemen who wouldn't shed a drop of blood even if you pricked him with a needle?»

Heo Maeng waved his hand dismissively at the boat behind him with an annoyed expression.

«Anyway, commander seems to think this is a problem. Who would target such boats? If he was really worried, he could just leave a few behind. It's ridiculous to sacrifice an entire unit just to guard some ships, isn't it?»

«Shh. Your voice is too loud.»

«If Ryeonju were here, he wouldn't even bother with such trivial matters. That's why I hate moving with the commander.»

This time, the others around him remained silent.

«But still, losing the ships wouldn't be good.»

«That's just talk. Where's Hainan? It's an island! There are boats scattered all over. If we lose one, we can just find another.»

«Commander must have a plan.»

«Damn it.»

Heo Maeng muttered curses under his breath, frustration evident in his voice.

«We came all the way to Hainan, hoping to taste some blood, and now we're just going to turn back after sightseeing on the island?»

«Since we came with commander anyway, we won't be able to enjoy ourselves properly even if we go up together.»

Heo Maeng sighed heavily with annoyance written all over his face.

‘Huh?’

At that moment, his eyes narrowed slightly.

Across the vast expanse of grassland that met the coast, at the edge of the dense bushes, someone was trudging towards them.

«What's that?»

«...Probably someone from Haenam. Seems like they've come to ride the boat.»

«The fool's rushing me without reason. He's got nothing to do, yet he's poking around...»

Heo Maeng suddenly closed his mouth.

«Hmm?»

The color of the approaching person's robes seemed oddly familiar.

«Is that... a warrior's robe?»

It was distinctly different from the usual attire of commoners — a black warrior's attire at that.

So far, there was nothing particularly unusual. Black warrior's attire was one of the preferred outfits among the martial artists of the Central Plains. Moreover, since Haenam was a relatively large island, it wouldn't be surprising to encounter someone who wasn't part of Haenam sect.

The problem lay in what followed.

«...That.»

«Yes?»

«Could that be... Plum blossom?»

Heo Maeng's question made everyone's heads turn sharply. Their gaze focused on the chest of the person approaching.

«...It seems so, doesn't it?»

«Yes, that's right. It's a plum blossom.»

«Plum blossom?»

Among the numerous martial arts sects in Gangho, there was only one sect that adopted the black warrior's attire with the plum blossom pattern as its symbol.

«Hwasan?»

But why would a member of Hwasan be appearing in a place like this?

«Budaeju!»

«Hmm?»

«That person... That's him! It's him!»

«Him?»

«Hwasan...»

«Hwasan Geomhyeop!»

The four characters[chinese characters] of the name Hwasan Geomhyeop pierced through the hearts of those gathered on the coast.

Just hearing this name seemed to tighten the muscles of their bodies, which had been relaxed without any tension, as if they were ready for battle.

«Hwasan Geomhyeop?»

«Yes! Hwasan Geomhyeop! I remember him clearly!»

«Why... why is he here...?»

But before they could deduce the situation, the man approached them at a faster pace.

Arriving at their side, barely finishing their preparations, Chung Myung halted his steps.

Then, with a dark gaze, he addressed the members of Changgwi Unit.

«Hey, you. Do you know how to scream properly?»

«What...?»

Someone blurted out in response to his unexpected question. Chung Myung spoke calmly.

«Try screaming loudly.»

His sword, hanging from his shoulder, descended slowly.

«So that even those who left first can hear it clearly.»

Under the scorching sunlight, Chung Myung's sword emitted a sinister gleam.