

Chapter 1218

Who will help? (3)

Im Sobyong kept his promise.

Crossing the Yangtze River like a water deer... No, crossing the river like wet dogs, they traveled for a whole day without encountering any surveillance from Sapaeryeon. They haven't even caught a glimpse of a human shadow.

Im Sobyong had firmly proven that the paths on the mountains were not for Sapaeryeon, but rather, he guaranteed that no matter who came, they wouldn't be able to trace their whereabouts.

Just as he proved he didn't just stumble upon the position of Nokrim King, he knew the mountain paths of Gangnam as clearly as the palm of his hand, allowing the group to pass through Gangnam without encountering anyone.

Of course... if one could truly call the path they were taking a 'path.'

Thud!

Looking down from above, even the bravest warrior in the world would hesitate to step forward, as large rocks tumbled down the precipitous cliff.

It was fortunate that there were no travelers in these deep mountains with such steep cliffs. If by chance there were people below, they would have no way to avoid the falling rocks.

However, if someone had been below and miraculously dodged all the rapidly falling rocks, then looked up in astonishment, they might have spotted something clinging to the cliffside. Several small figures tightly attached to the distant cliff.

«Ugh!»

Namgung Dowi, instinctively peering down at the falling rocks, clung to the cliff in terror.

Considering the prestigious position of Namgung clan's Young Lord, one might deem his clinging to the cliff with arms and legs spread out like a frog to be an undignified act, but now, there was no room left for dignity in his mind.

«Why... Why! Whyyyy!»

Namgung Dowi screamed in protest.

«Why are you insisting on going this way!»

His cries echoed pitifully.

«Tsk tsk tsk.»

At that moment, Im Sobyong, who was hanging casually by his side, grasped a rock with one hand while leisurely fanning himself with the other.

«Please be quiet. Who knows who might hear us. We're on a secret mission.»

«Who would hear us, who! There's not even a single bird in sight.»

Namgung Dowi screamed, as if he was throwing a tantrum.

In reality, clouds were passing beneath their feet at that moment. Even if a bird had wings, why would it fly up here?

«Tsk tsk tsk.»

But Im Sobyong didn't even bother to listen to Namgung Dowi's words.

«For the esteemed Young Lord of Namgung, to fuss over a mere cliff like this...»

«A mere cliff! If you fall from here, it's certain death!»

«Whether you fall off a cliff or die by a sword, death is death. How can someone who is wielding a sword be so afraid of dying?»

«Are they the same thing? Are they?!»

«What's the difference?»

Im Sobyong chuckled and clicked his tongue.

«Anyway, since you seem so scared, please be quiet.»

«Ugh...»

Namgung Dowi, his face flushed with anger, gritted his teeth and glanced down below. Shivers ran down his spine.

Feeling the sudden chill of fear, he quickly averted his gaze upward. Then, tightly shut his eyes and shouted.

«T-Tang, Hyeong-nim!»

«... Why.»

«A-Are you... okay?»

«... Am I okay?»

As he cautiously opened his eyes, he realized even Tang Pae's face of was tinged with fear. He struggled to speak, taking deep breaths.

«Don't... look down. It's better to think of this as flat ground.»

«But it's not flat ground, how can you think of it as flat ground?»

«Just do it, damn it!»

«...»

At that moment, another cascade of rocks tumbled down above their heads.

«Eeek!»

«Aaaahhh!»

Both of them shivered in fear, clinging tightly to the cliff. Just behind their heads, head-sized rocks fell down incessantly.

«This, this is madness!»

Namgung Dowi glared at Im Sobyong again, his eyes bloodshot.

«Why! Why do we have to take this path!»

«Oh, come on! Stop overreacting. Others manage to behave decently.»

«Who! Who's behaving decently!»

«Don't you see over there?»

«Huh?»

As they turned to where Im Sobyong's fan pointed, they locked eyes with someone. Soon, Namgung Dowi's mouth fell open in disbelief.

«.....»

«.....»

With one hand gripping the protruding rock on the cliff, and the other hand holding a rice ball, Jo Geol awkwardly hid the rice ball behind his back.

«Uh, sorry. I was a bit hungry...»

«...»

«And, um, it's kind of boring.»

And it wasn't just Jo Geol.

Disciples of Hwasan following behind all looked at him with expressions as indifferent as if this steep cliff was just a leisurely stroll path, muttering criticisms like, 'Oh, that guy's blocking the way.'

«Aren't you scared?»

«Of what?»

«.....This.»

«Well?»

Jo Geol shrugged casually. When Namgung Dowi saw him move, he almost collapsed halfway, nearly scared to the point of ruining his pants.

«Well, it's kind of high but... compared to Hwasan, this is almost flat ground, really.»

«Ah, even beginners can climb this much after just two months at Hwasan.»

«Why bother going to Hwasan? Even if you bring the kids from Hwaeum village, they could play ball here.»

«Let's hurry up. Is this your first time climbing a cliff?»

Tears welled up in Namgung Dowi's eyes.

«...I-I said.»

«Yes? What did you say?»

«H-Hefei.»

«Huh?»

«Hefei... There are... no mountains... in Hefei...»

«...»

«Ah, well.»

Somehow, everyone became solemn.

«Ugh...»

«...»

«Uhh...»

«...»

In the middle of the cliff, nestled in a small cave, Namgung Dowi wrapped his head and lay down. They had intended to go further, but the sun had set, and they had stumbled upon a cave even wild animals wouldn't easily enter.

Watching Namgung Dowi groan in pain, the others let out deep sighs.

«...The esteemed Young Lord Namgung has a fear of heights.»

«But still, doesn't it make him a bit more human? Honestly, until now, he seemed so upright, just like Sasuk when he didn't have his head broken.»

«Why do I always end up falling for it!»

Ogeom glanced at Namgung Dowi, clicking their tongues. Indeed, Namgung Dowi's face was pale as if he had just escaped from hell.

«Is this really that scary?»

«...There are no mountains in Hefei. It's all flat.»

«That's why the people there are...»

«No, if you think about it, isn't Vice Sect Leader's family also from a place without mountains?»

«Geol-ah, compare things properly. Compared to Namgung family, a family from Jongnam is like a beggar.»

«...Those who came from real beggars are Sahyeong and Chung Myung.»

«But this bastard?»

Though Ogeom seemed to understand something, they also seemed perplexed as they looked at Namgung Dowi. They knew that guy wasn't one to make a fuss, so it was hard to believe he'd be scared for no reason... On the other hand, understanding someone who was afraid of such cliffs was difficult for them.

In the first place, those afraid of cliffs were naturally filtered out before reaching the mountain gate of Hwasan. So, in their eyes, Namgung Dowi was inevitably a strange(?) species they encountered for the first time in their lives.

«But really, aren't they overreacting? Even the Young Lord of the Tang Clan looked pale.»

«That guy is ridiculous too. There are plenty of mountains in Sichuan.»

«Who would walk along those mountain cliffs!»

Tang Pae, who at least maintained some dignity amidst this situation, retorted sharply.

«If people walked there, would it still be a cliff? It's only a cliff because people don't walk there!»

«Tsk tsk tsk. General Muho himself led armies through those treacherous paths.»

«That was Zhuge Liang! Would just anyone have made history doing that?»

«...Doesn't it make sense?»

As Im Sobyong nodded thoughtfully, Tang Pae erupted again.

«No! Can't we just go over the cliff or go under it! Why! Why on earth are we going along the middle of the cliff! Why! We're not spiders, for heaven's sake!»

«I told you. We have to avoid human eyes.»

«Why are there people on the cliff! In such deep mountain valley!»

Im Sobyong silently pulled Jo Geol forward and placed him in front. Then he spoke.

«Say it again.»

«.....Ah.»

Oh... They're even living on the cliff, not just being there.

Come to think of it, aren't those people really insane?

Im Sobyong said,

«Why would someone knowledgeable like you say that? No people in the mountain valleys? The most inaccessible place to avoid people are precisely the mountains! Why do you think all the famous mountains in the world are full of temples and hermitages!»

«...»

«But still, monks and priests are a bit better. At least they build pavilions and say 'I'm here.' But once someone finds a suitable cave as a base in the mountains, and when they start building there, suddenly a hoard of hidden bandits pops out and massacres everyone inside the mountain dwelling. Do you know how often that happens?»

«... What's the purpose of that? Why would people suddenly pop out from there?»

«That's what I'm saying!»

The problem lies with Gangho, the people of Gangho.

The saying from Chung Myung, who always had a word ready, that 'there's no sane person among those who wield swords,' seemed to be quite accurate.

«To make a living in the mountains, you have to consider so many things! Are there any monks or hermits wandering around here? Aren't there guys hiding in deep caves, silently training for decades? Aren't there those chased away by their orthodox sects, sharpening their blades in some remote place?»

«...»

«And as soon as someone finds an uninhabited spot and builds a mountain dwelling, what then? Suddenly, they find some elixir somewhere, and all the guys itching to use a sword rush to the mountains...»

Baek Cheon nudged Im Sobyong's shoulder.

«Stop crying as you speak.»

«... Sorry. I got carried away.»

«That's why you shouldn't engage in banditry...»

«I was born into a bandit family, what else could I do!»

«That's why I ran away.»

«...»

Im Sobyong, momentarily stunned, stared blankly at Baek Cheon. By this point, it's a serious matter to determine who's the bigger rogue.

«... Lord Seol, are you all right?»

Turning away from the idiots who continued bickering, Tang Pae turned to Seol Sobaek and asked. Those mountain beasts don't need to worry, but isn't Seol Sobaek at least a normal person?

«Ah. Thank you for your concern. I'm fine.»

Seol Sobek replied with a bright smile.

«It was a bit scary, but since I made it hanging on, I didn't exert much effort.»

«...»

«And surely Chung Myung Dojang-nim wouldn't fall from a place like this, right? It would be unfair if he died like that. It's worse than being struck by lightning in clear skies.»

We call that 'unfair'... What kind of mindset does he have?

At that moment, Namgung Dowi, like someone who found hope, abruptly raised his upper body.

«Please carry me too for a bit...»

«Lie down, lie down!»

«Think before you speak. Otherwise, you'll be ridiculed for life.»

«Think about your late father!»

«Ugh...»

Namgung Dowi collapsed again as if all his strength had left him. Everyone lowered their heads in unison.

From the moment they resolved to traverse the rugged mountains of Gangnam, they had prepared themselves for hardships, but... who could have imagined that the hardships would be like this?

Tang Pae let out a deep sigh.

«At least we've got a moment to rest, so let's start setting up camp...»

«Euracha!»

At that moment, a voice from outside the cave was heard, followed by something flying inside.

Tang Pae's mouth fell open as he saw a wild boar and a deer suddenly appear at the entrance of the cave. Then, Chung Myung stepped in, brushing his hands together.

«I'm hungry! Prepare some food!»

«It's meat!»

«Let's eat!»

Seeing Ogeom eagerly rushing forward, Tang Pae closed his eyes tightly.

'They will adapt, even if thrown into hell...'

Still, it seemed they wouldn't have to worry about starving on their journey. It was one small blessing amidst a thousand misfortunes.