

Chapter 1254

To fight! And to survive! (4)

«What?»

As Chung Myung nodded, Gwak Hwanso hesitated for a moment before asking.

«You all decided to stay here and fight with us, right»

«I said it already. Do I need to say it again?»

Gwak Hwanso hurriedly raised his hand.

«No, it's not that... Did you come here with the intention of fighting as individuals even if negotiations with us fell through?»

To that question, Chung Myung responded with a benevolent smile.

«No.»

«...Excuse me?»

«I didn't have any such thoughts?»

«...»

«I said it. Until we arrived here, we didn't expect the situation to turn out like this, did we?»

We knew that Jang Ilso was crazy, but one would think he'd be crazy within reason. Who would have thought he'd turn his forces away from facing the Yangtze River and come charging at you like a madman? Unless he became even more crazy.»

«...Stop saying crazy, Chung Myung-ah.»

«It feels like my head is getting messed up just listening to it.»

«Understandable. Just hearing the two words 'Jang Ilso' makes him lose his mind a bit too.»

Gwak Hwanso blinked his eyes.

«So, did you come to a conclusion after the negotiations fell through and held another meeting?»

«No.»

«What?»

«There wasn't really anything to call a meeting about.»

«...And then?»

«I just said it was time to start leaving, but no one moved. So, things ended up like this.»

«Well, that's... um...»

«Life is complicated.»

Chung Myung said with a shrug.

«Did you guys have some profound logic or stance to make a hard decision to head to Gangnam?»

«...That's not it.»

Of course, there was some logic to it. But Gwak Hwanso couldn't deny that impulse was more prevalent in his actions than logic.

«Then why are you looking for logic from us?»

«Let's just... find some, please.»

«Shut your mouth, Sapa bastard.»

«Okay...»

Chung Myung glanced back at Gwak Hanso and said,

«Of course, I didn't exactly offer to help from the start. But after a bit of bantering, a bit of anger, things just flowed, and before we knew it, we were discussing how to fight.»

«I kept opposing it!»

«Someone shut this Sapa bastard up.»

Namgung Dowi grabbed Im Sobyong's mouth and dragged him away, while Chung Myung continued as if relieved.

«So, there's nothing really profound about it.»

«...How can there not be anything profound about it?»

«I guess you just don't understand.»

«Sorry?»

«As I've said before, we're not here to say we'll die with you.»

«...»

«Having experienced it firsthand, I realized that the defenses in Gangnam are weaker than expected, and there might be a chance if we play our cards right.»

Gwak Hwanso looked at Chung Myung with a puzzled expression.

«Isn't it human nature to try to help someone drowning until they're safe, as long as I'm alive?»

«Well, yes...»

«The difference between what you think is 'until I die' and what we think is 'until we are alive' is a bit different. Don't get your hopes up with some strange expectations. If it comes to it, we'll all flee without looking back, whether it's Haenam or anywhere else. We only came to Haenam in the first place because we're the type of people who could do that.»

«I understand what you're saying... But it's easier said than done.»

«But does this guy really not understand a word I'm saying?»

«Yes?»

«Will you just shut up if I die?»

«...What do you mean by that?»

«You've enjoyed all the benefits of Gupailbang's sect so far, and now at the end, you think it's all over if you die without even paying back what you owe? While the remaining orthodox sects are fighting tooth and nail against Sapaeryeon's bastards?»

Gwak Hwanso closed his mouth.

«You're kidding. You guys have to fight until your spine is completely ripped out. Even if you die, you have to drag at least one more enemy with you to hell. That's the minimum obligation those who wield swords should uphold.»

«...»

«And stop your foolish antics. Do you think those Sapa bastards will just leave Haenam alone if you flee like that? Even then, do you guys who have been in Gangnam not understand the mentality of the Sapa bastards? You're not even spineless, really.»

Gwak Hwanso looked as if he had just been struck. But Chung Myung, clicking his tongue, turned away and walked briskly in another direction.

Baek Cheon approached with a faint smile and said to Gwak Hwanso,

«Don't mind him. That's just his way of speaking.»

«No. It's not just the way he speaks...»

Ironically, the content was even more shocking.

'The remaining ones.'

He've never thought about that. The ones they were worried about were just the people of Hainan Island. They have never considered how the remaining sect would fight Sapaeryeon, or what would become of the world.

But even if they die, the fight will continue. Especially these Cheonumaeng's members will fight against Sapaeryeon until the very end.

He suddenly felt ashamed that he had only worried about the situation of Haenam and the people of Hainan. How short-sighted he had been.

Despite discriminating against islanders and harboring so much animosity towards mainlanders, when the crisis came, their mainland situation didn't even cross their minds.

«... We have to fight.»

As Gwak Hwanso nodded with a determined face, Baek Cheon smiled.

«That's settled then.»

«Well, but...»

«Yes?»

«May I ask one more question?»

«Of course, feel free.»

«I'm not sure if it's possible to infiltrate Gangnam. But once we're inside Gangnam, the situation will change, won't it? They'll realize that we've entered their territory.»

«Indeed.»

«Then they'll naturally strengthen the defenses along the Yangtze River. But is it possible for us to break through them alone? It might be better to take a detour towards Yunnan...»

Baek Cheon shook his head.

«The final obstacle remains the same.»

«That may be true, but...»

«The longer the advance route, the more we'll suffer. If we consider possibilities, the fastest route to reach the Yangtze River before they fortify their defenses might be our best option.

Moreover...»

Baek Cheon's gaze darkened slightly.

«If we can't disrupt the enemy's center and lead that chaos towards the confrontation at the Yangtze River, they'll have resources to spare. And if that happens... the likelihood of them doing something useless will also increase.»

Gwak Hanso fell silent.

He understood what Baek Cheon meant by «useless actions.» If they were to hastily retreat and choose a detour, giving Sapaeryeon the chance to retaliate in anger, that fury might be directed towards the remaining people in Hainan.

In that case, Hainan Island would bear the brunt of the damage that should have rightfully fallen on Haenam sect. Therefore, Baek Cheon's intention was to disrupt the enemy's core, intensify the standoff between Cheonumaeng and Sapaeryeon near the Yangtze River, preventing Sapaeryeon from diverting their forces.

'I never even considered the situation on the mainland.'

Even amidst all this, these people are worried about those remaining in Hainan. Therefore, even if it means taking a bit more risk, they want to divert Sapaeryeon's attention away from Hainan.

«...Is it possible?»

«Well, that remains to be seen. However...»

«However?»

Baek Cheon flashed a meaningful smile.

«No one here is eager to die. The primary principle of Hwasan isn't about being righteous or upholding one's pride. The most important principle is simply survival.»

Just then,

«There, there! Look, it's finally crawling over here, that thing!»

«Huh?»

Everyone turned their heads at Chung Myung's shout.

In the middle of the now considerably calm sea, a small, white something was swiftly swimming towards them.

«Baek Ah!»

«Oh my, it's Baek Ah!»

«Goodness, he's really here!»

Ogeum dashed towards the shore without hesitation. Tang Soso leaped into the sea and embraced Baek Ah as he half-collapsed in her arms, panting heavily.

«He's completely exhausted!»

«...But admirable in a way.»

«That's not admirable, it's foolish. If it were me, I would've run without looking back.»

«...Well, that's because Baek Ah is smarter than you. If he gets caught by this vicious guy, he'll really end up as a fur scarf.»

As Tang Soso handed Baek Ah over to Chung Myung, Chung Myung firmly grasped Baek Ah's back.

«Did you handle it well?»

Even in his exhausted state, Baek Ah's mind seemed to clear up as he vigorously nodded. Then, with eyes shining with pride, he looked at Chung Myung, as if expecting praise. But as always, Chung Myung dashed his hopes and greeted him with bitter disappointment.

«Hey, hey. Snap out of it.»

«Kii!»

«You see this? This?»

Chung Myung lightly shook the small pouch in his hand and then placed it around Baek Ah's neck. Baek Ah tilted his head, looking at the pouch around his neck.

«Kii?»

«That's important. Deliver it well.»

«Kiii?»

«Now go.»

Baek Ah tilted his head, as if finding it difficult to understand. His large, black eyes twinkled. Despite the cuteness of his actions, the reality contained within was rather grim.

«Why can't you understand? Go back.»

«Kii?»

«What's wrong?»

«Kii...?»

At that moment, everyone saw it. Baek Ah's face, as white as snow, turning pale.

'Isn't that... fur? How can fur turn pale?'

'Would the Lord of the Beast Palace have seen something like that?'

'Who would believe us if we told them?'

Suddenly, Baek Ah began to convulse, letting out a loud cry.

«Kiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiik!»

While animals may understand human speech to some extent, humans cannot understand animal speech. However, strangely enough, the people present here could accurately interpret that cry.

«That was an insult.»

«Sounds like a curse?»

«It's definitely a curse.»

If it were human speech, it would likely be an unbearable string of curses, too foul to listen to.

«But this scoundrel!»

Chung Myung grabbed Baek Ah and threw him away.

«Kiiiiii!»

As Baek Ah flew away, Chung Myung scolded him loudly.

«After pampering him like a pig, feeding him well and letting him sleep, he's biting the hand that feeds him! What kind of gratitude is this!»

«Chung Myung... You should speak to him directly. He probably lived better in Yunnan.»

«To be honest, he's been suffering since he got here...»

«He probably wondered why he came here in the first place, long before now.»

Of course, Chung Myung couldn't hear those words. Baek Ah quickly turned around, landed, and then bounced back, running towards them again. Chung Myung grabbed him and brought him close to his face.

«Time is short, go quickly and I'll... Ow!»

In that moment, Baek Ah's front paw fiercely struck Chung Myung's cheek. Chung Myung's head snapped back from the unexpected blow.

«Ooh!»

«He's fighting back!»

«Ugh, took him long enough. Honestly, it's about time.»

In that moment, Chung Myung glared at Baek Ah with fiery eyes.

«This tiny bastard?»

«Kiiiiii!»

A human-like beast and a beast-like human began to fight, exchanging blows.

Watching the scene, Baek Cheon covered his face with both hands.

'Don't fight seriously with a beast...'

No matter how extraordinary it may be.

«Huff! Huff!»

After struggling for a while, Chung Myung finally grabbed Baek Ah's tired back and vigorously shook him.

«Ah! If only he hadn't been so disobedient, I could've really taught him a lesson today!»

«Kii!»

«Deliver the message properly. If you're late, you'll really be in trouble. Got it?»

«Kiiiiii!»

«Stop talking back!»

Finally giving in after resisting until the end, Baek Ah nodded weakly, tears streaming down his face. It was a sign of surrender.

«Go! Quickly!»

«Kiiiiiiii!»

Baek Ah, now on the ground, let out a mournful cry and ran towards the sea. Everyone watched him with somber eyes.

«...He came all the way from the Yangtze, only to turn back as soon as he arrived here.»

«...No matter how stubborn he is, is this really the right thing to do?»

«I'm sorry we couldn't protect him.»

«A pity indeed.»

Amidst the solemn atmosphere, only Chung Myung seemed to be unable to let go of his anger.

«Anyway, he's getting worse and worse!»

‘A heartless bastard.’

‘A cruel abuser.’

‘With trashy personality!’

As everyone watched Baek Ah's figure receding into the distance across the sea, their expressions filled with resignation, Chung Myung was simmering with resentment.

«...Sasuk.»

«I saw it too.»

Yoon Jong's surprised voice prompted a stiff response from Baek Cheon.

Far across the sea, a fleet of ships appeared on the horizon like a small dot.

«...It's Sapaeryeon.»

The already relaxed atmosphere along the coast was now filled with a suffocating tension.