

Chapter 1083

That's the duty of a true Taoist. (3)

The disciples of Hwasan rushed out like the wind. He kept staring at Tang Soso who was gently cradling the child in her arms.

«Is the child okay?»

«I said they are okay.»

«Are they really okay?»

«I told you, everything is okay!»

«So, really...»

«This person?!»

Tang Soso gave Baek Cheon a sharp glance. She had been patient all along but finally showed irritation.

«Oh, no. I was just worried...»

Looking at Baek Cheon, who was unusually agitated, she shook her head in dismay.

«The child is fine. It's just exhaustion. She is the real problem.»

With those words, everyone's attention returned to the woman being carried on Yu Iseol's back.

«If we had found her a little later, it would have been truly irreversible.»

«Ah...»

Those words sent shivers down everyone's spines. If they had just left Hangzhou and departed earlier, the woman and the child would have remained buried beneath the rubble, unable to escape in their exhausted state.

«Could it go wrong...?»

«No, think positive!»

«Give it a rest, Siju!»

«Exactly!»

«...Sorry, but who was the last one?»

Baek Cheon squinted his eyes, and Jo Geol subtly turned his head. Baek Cheon wanted to scold him for that, but there was no time to waste on hitting Jo Geol right now.

First and foremost, they needed to move survivors to a safe place as quickly as possible.

«What about Yangtze?»

Im Sobyong, who was following them, answered with a slightly urgent tone,

«If you run to the north, it'll take a full day.»

Upon hearing that, Baek Cheon's gaze shifted to the woman being carried by Yu Iseol. Tang Soso said she was fine, so there shouldn't be an immediate issue, but he couldn't help but feel anxious.

Perhaps what he was feeling now wasn't entirely rational. It might be impatience born out of the desperate need to hold onto what they had just rescued from that deadly battle in Hangzhou.

However, Baek Cheon knew that sometimes there were things more important than reason. The urgency they were feeling now might not be wrong at all.

«Sasuk!»

«Yes, let's pick up the pace.»

«W-, Wait a minute! Dojangs, you can go faster from here?»

While Im Sobyong shouted, 'Hey, you crazy people! Are you seriously making sense right now?' Baek Cheon didn't respond and just glanced elsewhere.

Im Sobyong naturally followed Baek Cheon's gaze. Namgung Dowi's face, which turned a pale shade of blue, was insisting, 'Even if I drop dead, I won't slow down!'

«...This is why Father told us not to associate ourselves with those from the orthodox factions...»

Whoever said that the Sapa were insane? Those who spoke such words should be rounded up and thrown into the midst of those mad Hwasan's disciples.

«Run!»

“Eek! Wait, wait for me!»

Im Sobyong, terrified, joined Hwasan's disciples who were increasing their pace. While for others, it might just be a matter of providing support, for Im Sobyong, it was a matter of survival. If he ended up isolated in the Gangnam region, he couldn't guarantee what might happen next.

«Oh, no. W-wait... Cough! I'm sick too... Cough! Aren't we all... cough! Aren't we all... patients... You jerks! Cough! Cough! Cough!»

Im Sobyong, whose stomach was churning, coughed as if he was going to vomit. But, surprisingly, no one paid any attention to him.

Well, actually, one person did. Chung Myung gave a slightly pitiful look, as if he had more reasons to hate him than others.

«Do-Dojang!»

It was the moment when Im Sobyong was about to shout with a face filled with excitement.

«Tsk, tsk. Those Sapa guys. We wondered when they'd drop dead, and now it looks like they finally are.»

«...»

«Whether you die here alone, drop dead while running, it's all the same. Why not just bury yourself in advance? Isn't that a way to leave a body intact, even if it's a corpse?»

«You...!»

«What?»

«Cough! Cough! Cough!»

Im Sobyong quickly coughed and turned his gaze away from Chung Myung. Of course, he cursed inwardly.

‘What did I say wrong, you jerk?’

Those guys were talking about having grudges and all that. They’re like the kind of guys in the army who get so annoyed that they hit their heads with their knees.

«Uh...»

At that moment, a soft moan escaped from the woman being carried on Yu Iseol’s back. Everyone stopped talking and turned to look at her. It wasn’t a moan of regaining consciousness, but rather just a moan.

«Samae, are you okay? Should we switch?»

«I’ll take care of it.»

«Alright...»

Baek Cheon nodded silently.

While it might not be a big deal for the woman from Gangho, having a strange man carry the woman from Saga(private family)* on his back could be a significant issue. So, ultimately, among the group, Yu Iseol, who was the most stubborn, had to be the one to carry the woman.

‘It must be tough.’

Baek Cheon looked at her with a concerned expression. Carrying a patient while running was more challenging than one might think. Any jolt could worsen the patient’s condition, so each step had to be taken carefully. It consumed twice as much physical and mental energy as usual.

But Yu Iseol carried the woman without a word of complaint. A sense of responsibility showed on her normally emotionless face.

«Soso, should I take the child?»

«Get your hands off, Sahyeong! Don’t you dare touch the child with your dirty hands!»

«...Dirty, you say.»

Jo Geol was greatly heart by her words, but Tang Soso absolutely refused to hand over the child.

«Anyone else can, but not Sahyeong.»

«That’s true.»

«You stay behind. If you wake the child and they see your face, they’ll start a commotion.»

«But these guys...»

The disciples of Hwasan rushed forward quickly. They brandished their weapons to fend off any potential attack from the Sapa, but their movements were just as desperate.

«Huff... Huff!»

As time passed, Im Sobyong, who had been keeping up, began to lag behind slowly. His long-standing illness likely affected his stamina. Besides, he had been overexerting himself since the start.

Hwasan's disciples momentarily considered slowing down, but a nonchalant voice broke into their ears.

«Just keep running.»

Chung Myung left behind these words and subtly moved back. Then, with a somewhat reluctant expression, he put his hand on Im Sobyong's back.

«Why is this bandit guy so weak in stamina?»

«What bandit would... cough! Have a reason to run like this!»

«Hey, hey.»

«Well, well, but... huff! You're helping...»

Chung Myung slightly clicked tongue.

«Well, I guess you've earned your keep.»

Without Im Sobyong, the Black Ghosts would have overwhelmed them all when they attacked. He had never expected to say he had survived thanks to a Sapa guy throughout his life, but that's what it came down to.

«Hurry up, you bandit. Before I really change my mind about leaving you behind.»

«... You're a stubborn person.»

«Huh?»

«... No, nothing.»

Im Sobyong gritted his teeth and pushed some strength into his legs. The headdress on his head shook uncontrollably and fell down. Nevertheless, thanks to Chung Myung pushing his back, he managed to regain some composure.

However, he suddenly slowed down the pace again. Chung Myung asked with a puzzled expression,

«What's wrong?»

«Just a moment.»

Im Sobyong, who had created some distance with the people in front, quietly spoke.

«Isn't this a bit strange, Dojang?»

«What do you mean?»

«I'm talking about that woman and the child.»

Im Sobyong squinted his eyes as he looked at the woman carried by Yu Iseol.

«We checked behind just in case, but there were no other survivors, right?»

«...»

«And now, a woman like that, surviving amidst that chaos... I just can't understand it.»

Chung Myung didn't respond and continued running. Observing his stern expression, Im Sobyong didn't press for an answer and ran in silence. After a while, Im Sobyong spoke again, his voice was heavy.

«Am I right in my suspicion?»

«... Well.»

Im Sobyong cast a meaningful glance at the women and the child. Originally, the one who had caused devastation of that whole area was Danjagang, spewing demonic energy uncontrollably. Jang Ilso and Chung Myung had only targeted Danjagang.

As those who were swept up in the conflict died due to Danjagang, the reason why this people survived could also only be found in him. However, Im Sobyong soon lowered his head. It was a battlefield where lives were at stake. Could it really be possible to ensure that a person who had lost their reason and rampaged due to his mind being consumed by demonic energy didn't hit a specific place?

«It might just be a coincidence.»

«...That's possible.»

Neither Chung Myung nor Im Sobyong said more. Perhaps the answer would forever remain unknown. The only one who could provide the answer was no longer in this world. Chung Myung's eyes, focused on the front, were dark.

This was a question that couldn't be answered. Chung Myung didn't know that there were people there. With formidable enemies like Danjagang and Heavenly Executioner in front of them, Chung Myung was not strong enough to divert his attention to other places.

As Im Sobyong said, all of this might just be a coincidence.

But if... if it was really one in a thousand, one in a million chance, what Chung Myung thought...

'Even if it's the Demonic Cult... are they still human?'

It was something he didn't want to think about. Even if he knew, he had to forget.

«Therefore... it's something that must be done,»

Chung Myung murmured resolutely, his words barely audible. Im Sobyong glanced at him, not comprehending anything he said, but Chung Myung paid him no attention. His mind was already consumed by a different presence.

'Heavenly Demon.'

No matter how much knowledge one acquires, even when embracing a doctrine or undergoing indoctrination, humans remain inherently skeptical creatures. They can never fully rid themselves of the nagging doubts and the small voice of conscience within their hearts.

That's why the concept of the Heavenly Demon was so terrifying, as he could turn even the most rational beings into blind fanatics.

'At any cost... even if it means risking everything I have,'

Chung Myung resolved with determination, lips trembling.

A world where the Heavenly Demon regains power should never be allowed to exist again, not if they wanted to avoid the eternal cycle of suffering.

As if Chung Myung had made up his mind, he forcefully pushed Im Sobyong once more. And so, after another long and exhausting journey that continued into the night, the disciples of Hwasan finally arrived at the Yangtze river. Their exhausted bodies barely made it, but

what they saw on the riverbank left them in awe — a massive ship standing there, its allegiance unmistakable.

They stood in silence, gazing at the ship, words escaping them as they exchanged bewildered glances.

«Is it an enemies' ship?»

«It seems to be theirs.»

«But it looks empty inside.»

«Why is it here?»

Chung Myung walked out from the midst of the dumbfounded group, looked at the empty ship and chuckled.

«Him and his rotten personality, that Jang Ilso bastard.»

Yoon Jong spoke in amazement,

«I can't believe it, they left it empty.»

«When do you think they prepared this?»

«I don't know. Does it matter?»

Chung Myung nodded towards the ship.

«Looks like we're going to take a ride. Get on.»

«This... this ship?»

«It's an enemy ship, isn't it?»

«So, are we supposed to swim this with these people?»

The disciples of Hwasan exchanged uncertain glances before reluctantly nodding.

«Seems like we have no other choice. Let's board.»

«Yes, Sasukjo.»

After Un Geom's words, without saying more, the disciples of Hwasan reluctantly boarded the empty ship. After raising the anchor and unfurling the folded sails, the ship began to slowly move along the river.

«...It's been a long journey.»

«Indeed.»

Leaning against the railing as if they were about to collapse, they gazed at the distant riverbank with eyes filled with complex emotions. It had been less than two days, but it felt like several months had passed.

As they silently watched Gangnam move away, the sound of a child's crying reached their ears.

«...Looks like he woke up.»

Tang Soso comforted the child in her arms and tried to soothe him. The child's small hand tightly grasped her thumb. Observing this scene, everyone couldn't help but smile faintly.

Baek Cheon, still fixed on the scene, spoke.

«Next time...»

«Yes, Sasuk.»

Yoon Jong responded calmly.

«Next time will be different.»

The ones who looked at each other silently once again gazed at the child in Tang Soso's arms.

A single ship sailed quietly across the red river, painted crimson by the setting sun.

* 사가(私家)

私 — in this context I think it's personal/private;

家 — home/household/family.

It can refer to some kind of noble families abiding by the laws of the Emperor also.