

Chapter 1158

An Orthodox Sect abandoned by all Great Sects. (3)

No one easily opened their mouth. Even those who seemed about to speak up could only open and close their mouths shut, unable to utter a word.

The repercussions of Im Sobyong's words were profound.

«...The Southern Sea?...»

«Breaking through Gangnam?»

Everyone was astonished by the recklessness of Im Sobyong's plan.

Gangnam was, quite literally, the territory of Sapaeryeon. It had never been welcoming in the past, and now it was a land of tigers and dragons. Supporting a sect located at the southernmost end of such a place — was that realistically possible?

«How are we supposed to get a boat?»

«Can we support an island... it's not even in Gangbuk.»

Someone took notice of the location of Hainan Island, where Haenam sect was situated.

Haenam was a name familiar to them, but at the same time, it was an endlessly distant one.

While anyone claiming to be a martial artist had heard of Haenam, those who had actually visited Hainan Island were few and far between.

In a sense, Haenam sect, belonging to Gupailbang, felt more distant than any other sect.

«Wait a minute... originally, they should be the ones wanting our support for this to be possible. If we head to Gangnam without thinking and they reject us, we might truly end up isolated.»

«That would be the worst scenario.»

And then someone began to doubt whether they could trust the sect known as Haenam.

However, amidst their varying thoughts, there was one prevailing idea dominating their minds.

«Gupailbang...»

As Chung Myung spoke, everyone in the room turned their heads to look at him. Chung Myung, receiving the collective gaze, smiled enigmatically.

«Are you saying there's a faction that could be leaving Gupailbang?»

«Yes, that's correct.»

«And even entering Cheonumaeng by leaving Gupailbang voluntarily?»

«That's right.»

«Hmm.»

Chung Myung rested his chin on his palm and tapped his cheek with a thoughtful expression. However, despite the appearance of deep contemplation, the conclusion emerged faster than expected.

«Just thinking about it...»

The corners of Chung Myung's mouth twisted wickedly.

«It sends shivers down your spine, doesn't it?»

This was something one could not ignore without dwelling too much on the aftermath.

«As long as it's possible. Yes, if it really is possible, the repercussions would be tremendous.

It's an event that could turn the entire Central Plains upside down.»

The long and winding history of Gangho.

Within that long history, there had never been a faction that voluntarily relinquished its position in Gupailbang. No one within Gangho would have even considered the possibility of such an event.

The symbolic significance attached to the name Gupailbang was colossal. The goal of every major sect in Gangho was to either secure a position within Gupailbang or in the Five Great Families – an understatement, if anything.

Even among the disciples of Hwasan, some subtly yearned for the day they could return to Gupailbang. Of course, if it was under control of Shaolin, they would refuse this position even if it was free, but under different circumstances, very few would openly reject such an opportunity.

Thus, the name Gupailbang had long been a symbol of righteousness, safeguarding the Central Plains as the last bastion.

However, now...

«It seems like there are cracks in that sturdy facade.»

Chung Myung's smirk became even more sinister. If, against all odds, such an event were to occur, the name Gupailbang would no longer remain a symbol of righteousness for the major sects.

Indeed, if it really happens.

«Hmm.»

Tang Gunak, usually stiff with his expressions, wore a more serious expression than usual.

The gravity of the situation was evident, as it held significant meaning.

«If it unfolds as predicted by Nokrim King, it will undoubtedly... be an amazing event.»

As everyone nodded in agreement with those words, Tang Gunak added,

«Even Haenam alone is not to be underestimated. They are a significant force within Gupailbang. At least, um...»

Tang Gunak's words trailed off, but Namgung Dowi, keenly understanding his intent, completed the unfinished statement.

«The power they possess is so vast that it cannot be compared to Namgung clan, who lost more than half of its forces.»

«That wasn't the point I was making.»

«Don't worry, Lord Tang. The truth is the truth.»

Namgung Dowi's gaze remained unwavering. His eyes seemed to convey the message, 'What matters is not now, but the future.' Understanding this, Tang Gunak nodded.

«While comparing them to Namgung clan might be excessive, it's a fact that there aren't many sects in the world with such power. If we narrow it down to sects with the potential to ally with Chaonumaeng, it becomes even more apparent.»

«Even if we consider them as one of Gupailbang's sects?»

Tang Gunak nodded in response to Jo Geol's question.

«Though Haenam joined Gupailbang last, it cannot be said that their strength is the lowest among them. Compared to the sects like Kunlun, almost obliterated by Demonic Cult, Haenam is much more formidable.»

«Ah, I see. But why...»

«That's an obvious question.»

Chung Myung intervened, responding in place of Tang Gunak.

«Just because a sect is stronger than those within Gupailbang, you can't expel the existing sects, that goes against the principles of righteousness.»

«But didn't they expel us?»

«Kaaaah!»

As Chung Myung's eyes suddenly began to roll back, everyone focused on Jo Geol, blaming him for provoking Chung Myung. Normally, blaming Chung Myung for another fit caused by trivial matters would be justifiable, but in this case, it was clear that the instigator was at fault.

«Oh, no, I'm also from Hwasan, so I can say things like this, right?»

«Geol-ah, just shut up.»

«Yes!»

As Jo Geol quickly cowered in a corner, Chung Myung clicked his tongue and continued.

«...Anyway! Even if you think hard about it, it's clear that there is no sect like Haenam.»

«That's true.»

Tang Gunak also completely agreed with this point.

«Power is important, of course. But more crucial than power is symbolism. A sect like Haenam, choosing Cheonumaeng over Gupailbang. Does anyone not understand the significance of that?»

The room fell silent as a graveyard. The sound of someone swallowing dry resonated like thunder.

«Of course... even if it's Haenam, it's just one sect in the end, so this declaration alone won't turn the world upside down. But at least...»

Tang Gunak's stern gaze swept across everyone in the room.

«The flow of a river can be diverted to some extent, undoubtedly.»

Chung Myung, with hands clasped behind his head, murmured thoughtfully.

«Namgung clan has already changed the perception by joining Cheonumaeng.»

«I agree.»

Tang Gunak casually flicked his finger, as if to gather everyone's attention.

«It might sound awkward for me to say this, but... in truth, it's a bit challenging to put Namgung clan and Five Great Families in the same category as Gupailbang. Of course, if it were Namgung clan with Namgung Hwang as the head of the clan, they could compete with any sect within Gupailbang. But... other clans are frankly hard to compare with Gupailbang. Even public perception doesn't put Five Great Families and Gupailbang in the same league.»
«That's true.»

«Thus, isn't there significance in this? Finally, Cheonumaeng, has grown beyond Five Great Families, and can now embrace even a sect from Gupailbang. Perhaps...»

A smile similar to Chung Myung's appeared on Tang Gunak's lips.

«There might be an opportunity for the Alliance to surpass the status of Gupailbang through this. It's a task that must be eventually accomplished by Cheonumaeng. However, at the same time, it's a goal that seemed too distant and difficult to consider.»

That statement was a final blow.

Surpassing Gupailbang.

For Cheonumaeng, it was a task that must be accomplished sooner or later. Yet, it was simultaneously a goal so distant that it was challenging to openly discuss.

However, unexpectedly, the thread of understanding began to unravel from an unforeseen place.

«... What happens if it really turns out that way?»

When Yoon Jong mumbled in bewilderment, Jo Geol snorted before responding.

«What happens? It's like seeing white steam rising from the bald head of the great Abbot. He will be just like a scorching hot rock!»

«... What if Beop Jong dies of going insane?»

«In that case, the verdict is practically set. The head of Shaolin might change as well.»

At that moment, Im Sobyong sharply struck his fan against his palm.

Everyone fell silent, turning their attention to Im Sobyong. His eloquence had not been weak before, but in this moment, his words surpassed even Tang Gunak's.

«That's not even close to the truth.»

«Huh?»

«Tsk tsk. Think carefully. What is the biggest difference between Gupailbang and Cheonumaeng?»

«The attitude?»

«... True, but...»

Im Sobyong sighed and continued,

«Why is Gupailbang called Gupailbang?»

«What kind of question is that?»

«Because only ten sects can hold that name. However, Cheonumaeng is not limited in the number of factions. Moreover, it doesn't necessarily have to be Great Sects.»

«Ah...»

«Until now, many sects have been careful not to offend Gupailbang, but the moment the status of Cheonumaeng surpasses Gupailbang! No, even when it becomes equal, perceptions will change.»

Shuaaah!

Im Sobyong unfolded his fan, partially covering his face as he laughed ominously.

«Rather than being an insignificant subordinate of Gupailbang, it's better to be a proud member of the mighty Cheonumaeng.»

«...»

«Besides, didn't I already prepare a remarkable trick for this occasion?»

«A trick, you say?»

«Nokrim! It's none other than Nokrim! If Cheonumaeng didn't have Nokrim, most factions wouldn't dare approach Cheonumaeng. Even if the Alliance claimed to accept everyone equally, they would have thought it was just talk. But now, aren't there even the members of Sapa in Cheonumaeng?»

«...»

«Then everyone will consider joining! Despite being a bit lacking in power, at least they might receive better treatment than those Sapa bastards, right?»

«Uh, Nokrim King...? It's not that what you're saying is wrong, but... can Nokrim King say such things?»

«If it's the truth, well, what can you do? It's not like I'm not treated as a human just because I was born in Sapa. If it's unfair, then I should have been born in Namgung clan.»

«But why have you been clinging to us from so long ago...»

«That's why!»

Im Sobyong raised his voice.

«Just one move! With just this one move, we can change the entire landscape of the Central Plains. And if this one move succeeds!»

His eyes emitted a bluish light.

«Cheonumaeng will have the minimum strength to face Sapaeryeon. If only this can succeed. Do you understand?»

Anyone who couldn't grasp the situation after hearing this didn't deserve to be present.

«It must be done.»

«It's something we have to do somehow.»

«Then who will go?»

At that moment, when everyone had pledged to ensure the success of this endeavor, a low voice reverberated.

«I'm against it.»

«Huh?»

Everyone's eyes widened in surprise. The reason for their astonishment was simple. The one opposing the plan, and seemingly determined to push against it more strongly than anyone else, was Chung Myung.