

## Chapter 1020

What did you just say? (5)

Yang Gon[楊坤], the head of the Heukgwibo [黑鬼堡 — Black Ghost Fortress] branch in Hangzhou, turned his head slightly.

‘I think I heard something.’

He thought he faintly heard the sound of an artillery strike in the distance, but he soon turned his head away. He didn’t have the capacity to pay attention to even the slightest details now.

‘My head is starting to ache.’

As long as the Sapaeryeon’s Ryeonju held control over the Yangtze region, the Black Ghost Fortress would eventually have to make a decision, sooner or later. The choice made by their leader would determine whether they would bow their heads and submit to the powerful Maninbang or engage in a risky struggle.

‘No, perhaps not.’

In reality, life rarely flows in such an extreme manner. It’s possible that they would maintain the facade of being Sapaeryeon while still harboring enmity, keeping a reasonable distance from each other.

Perhaps that’s the most realistic prediction.

‘The more I think about it, the more my head hurts.’

Yang Gon let out a deep sigh.

To be honest, he didn’t particularly want to get involved in shaking up the power balance in Gangho. Managing Hangzhou well and occasionally tracking down the Hao clan’s members hiding in the alleys was enough to make his head spin.

Yang Gon was one of those wise individuals who knew that being content with knowing their place and living accordingly was the path to success in life. However, unfortunately, those who joined organizations like his didn’t often have the luxury of making choices.

‘I wonder what the boss will decide...’

Yang Gon muttered to himself.

In reality, the current power dynamics in Gangho might not be that important. What mattered to Mangeum Deabu, the boss, was which choice would benefit the Black Ghost the most.

But Yang Gon found it difficult to predict which option would bring more wealth to the Black Ghost in the long run.

«Phew.»

Eventually, he shook his head.

He hoped that whatever choice was made, it wouldn’t lead to a violent bloodshed. After all, he was approaching the twilight of his life, and he had no intention of rushing into battle and chaos at this age.

With that thought in mind, as Yang Gon was about to stamp his approval on a document, the door burst open, and a person with a pale face rushed in.

«Chief... Chief!»

«What's the matter?»

Yang Gon frowned, adopting a somewhat cold expression.

“Some people have appeared in the central area of Hangzhou. These crazy folks are indiscriminately killing people of all ages and genders right now.»

«What?»

Yang Gon stood up abruptly.

No matter how much of a Sapa they might be, brutal activities within his territory needed to be stopped. Furthermore, Mangeum Daebu understood the simple truth that people were equivalent to money. If people, who were essentially money, were dying in the area controlled by the Black Ghost, it would become Yang Gon's responsibility as the chief of Hangzhou.

«Which crazy people dare to cause trouble in here?»

Flames flickered in Yang Gon's eyes.

Those who had made a living in Gangho wouldn't dare to stir up trouble in Hangzhou.

Causing an incident within the Black Ghost Fortress's territory meant declaring them as an enemy. However, there were sometimes younglings who didn't understand the delicate balance of power in Gangho and engaged in such actions.

«Gather everyone.»

«What? A-all of them?»

«Yes.»

Yang Gon said in a cold tone.

«I felt like the atmosphere was already getting lax lately. We need to rein them in once.»

«All right!»

«Move!»

«Yes!»

A sigh escaped from Yang Gon's lips as the men rushed outside.

«Tsk.»

He scratched his head with a weary expression, different from moments ago.

‘Some youngsters again.’

In reality, he wasn't particularly angry, even though he had issued orders with a show of anger. Hangzhou merely attracted these youngsters who mistakenly believed they were powerful, like bees swarming a flower. It was a familiar task, and he knew that once they sorted things out, everything would return to normal. However, the issue of his inner feelings being revealed to his subordinates was a separate matter.

He was skilled at separating his inner thoughts from his outward appearance.

‘I might as well restore some discipline after a while.’

With that in mind, Yang Gon casually left.

«Sir...»

«...»

«Sir, what in the world...»

Yang Gon stared at the scene before him with a bewildered expression.

The moment he realized something was amiss was when he encountered a fleeing crowd gripped by terror.

Hangzhou was a city of pleasure. Consequently, incidents of varying scale were a common occurrence. Altercations on the streets, arguments, and a few people dying were considered part of the entertainment that one could simply observe.

However, Yang Gon, the branch chief of Hangzhou, swore that he had never witnessed the people here in such a state of fear in all his time here.

He was momentarily surprised but quickly resolved himself. He had promised never to be startled, no matter what happened before his eyes, and to respond calmly. However...

His resolute determination melted away when he faced the situation in Hangzhou. His hands were shaking.

«Is this... what...?»

Yang Gon's hands trembled as he beheld the scene of utter devastation before him.

Everything in front of him was crushed and destroyed. The trees, the buildings, the ground, and even the people who had been there. They were all mixed within the ruins of destroyed buildings.

Amid the debris of the ruined buildings, people who had been alive just moments ago were now jumbled and mixed. The people had been torn apart along with the buildings, as if swept away by a ferocious hurricane.

«Ugh!»

Someone made a retching sound nearby. They were the Sapa, people accustomed to death and violence. There was no revulsion toward killing. Yang Gon, too, had killed so many people in his rise to this position that he had lost count.

But...

What had he done in the past was 'murder.' Yang Gon recognized the people he killed as 'humans.' That was the difference. However, what was this spectacle?

Collapsed walls and roofs, pillars and piles of earth had mixed and mashed something that had once been alive. Could this truly be referred to as 'murder'?

'No...'

This is a disaster.

It's an occurrence that only beings without emotions can bring about, sweeping away the living and non-living without distinction.

Thud. Thud.

Droplets of dark crimson blood fell from the hand of a corpse jutting out from the debris. Yang Gon, overwhelmed by a growing sense of nausea, tightly shut his mouth. The night world of Hangzhou.

If one were to look down from the sky, this expansive land would be consumed by a dark area amidst flickering light, as if a beast had torn through it.

Distinguishing between beasts and humans. Yang Gon thought of that as light. Beasts couldn't produce light like humans.

The darkness had settled heavily here. It meant that there were no more humans in this place. "Who are these crazy ones...?"

The sound of someone's moaning-like words shook Yang Gon back to reality.

Right. Someone had caused this insane sight. This meant that the perpetrator wasn't too far from here.

That thought sent shivers down his spine.

'What should I do?'

Should he escape? Or should he attack?

A logical decision would be to find and attack the responsible party. After all, he was the branch head of Hangzhou, responsible for this place.

However, in the face of this utterly catastrophic scene, even the most obvious judgments were clouded by doubt.

Could a human create such a spectacle? Could someone with human intentions do that?

And if he were to attack such an entity...

«District Head!»

Someone shouted, snapping Yang Gon out of his thoughts.

«Th-there...»

And thus, Yang Gon saw it.

A world all grey up and tainted with ashes. Except for the distant glimmers of light, this space had been consumed by thick darkness. From the far end of that realm someone slowly approached adorned in blood-red clothes.

Yang Gon could intuitively sense it.

That man.

The perpetrator, the calamity behind all of this.

Steadily, the man in red approached, and Yang Gon, as if entranced, watched him.

In an instinctive response, Yang Gon took a step back, colliding with the person behind him.

Retreating in fear upon seeing the enemy is a disgrace. But right now, Yang Gon had no mental strength to worry about his pride.

His face was growing paler with each moment. Despite overcoming numerous crises and reaching this position, he had no idea how to deal with this situation.

The only thing he could do was to invoke the authority of the most powerful entity he knew.

«D-Do you know that this is the territory of the Black Ghost Fortress?»

As he shouted, the man who had been walking slowly came to a halt. He slowly raised his head. When Yang Gon met his bloodshot eyes, he felt his heart twinge in pain.

«...Black Ghost?»

The man muttered carelessly.

«There was such a place...»

«Y-You...!»

«It doesn't matter.»

Just as Yang Gon was about to say more, the man indifferently cut him off.

«Regardless of your affiliation, gender, or age... those things doesn't matter. What's important is that you're alive right now.»

Yang Gon was momentarily lost for words. The man spoke with a low, relentless voice.

«It seems like you are quite well-known... well, that's fortunate.»

Suddenly, someone called out to Yang Gon, almost like a scream.

«D-District Head!»

Startled, Yang Gon looked around. A group of people in black attire had encircled them.

«Slaughter them all.»

The moment the man's words echoed, a terrifying and suffocating energy surged from all directions. It felt less like human aura and more like something primal, akin to ravenous beasts.

With relentless and suffocating force, the crowd, cloaked in demonic energy, rushed towards Yang Gon and his subordinates.

«Ah! Ah!»

In an instant, they were overwhelmed by the onslaught. Watching them, the man in crimson attire slowly turned away.

At that moment, one of the hulking figures, entirely covered in black, knelt before the man. He lowered his head deeply, as if he couldn't even bear to meet the man's gaze.

«Bishop.»

«...What is it?»

«Do you intend to continue further?»

The cold gaze of the one called «Bishop» was poured down onto the bowing figure.

«If you have any dissatisfaction, you may leave now. I won't take your life.»

«Dissatisfaction? I have none. I am but a follower of Your Eminence. However... as the divine prophecy dictates, shouldn't we await the Rebirth while hidden from sight, according to the sacred teachings?»

«Are you going to repeat the same tiresome old-fashioned words of the Church elders?»

«I was only...»

«Foolish talk.»

The Bishop's words cut sharply.

«If you truly believe that He, the Almighty One, can find us, even when we hide ourselves, then why did we allow his destiny to fall into the hands of those unbelievers?»

«That...»

The man couldn't provide a satisfying response. No matter what he said, it would likely violate the doctrine, and his standing was not high enough to easily escape the label of a heretic.

«Do not doubt!»

The bishop's crimson eyes exuded an almost feverish intensity.

«If you truly consider yourself one of His faithful servants, then it is only natural to make our existence known to Him!»

«...»

«Kill everything you see, again and again. So that the world can know of our existence here. The blood of those you have slain, the sacrifices you have made will become a single torch we offer to Him. Only then can we truly hope for His return.»

«I shall obey.»

The Bishop turned, his robes fluttering.

The Church endures and endures. Those who live shall die, and those newly born shall grow old.

He could not bear it anymore.

'If He has truly been reborn, He will surely respond to our call.'

Certainly.

That was the duty of a 'God[신].'