

Chapter 1205

So what's the difference? (5)

The overflowing alcohol swirled in the glass. Jang Ilso, who had been staring into the glass, raised his head with a deep sigh.

«Gone?»

«Yes, Ryeonju. He just left.»

«Tsk.»

Jang Ilso, with a slight frown, brought the glass to his lips, seemingly displeased.

«Weak as water. I had some hopes since he's someone recognized between the merchants, but...»

«... While I'd like to agree with you and play along, I must honestly say that it's impressive he regained his composure in just an hour.»

«Hmm?»

«I mean, considering how you treated him earlier.»

«Tsk tsk. Looks like you're starting to sugarcoat things too. No wonder those in power fall into corruption.»

Ho Gamyong smiled, hearing Jang Ilso's not-so-subtle criticism.

«Will you dismiss me then?»

«Nah.»

Jang Ilso shook his head with a slight groan.

«That wouldn't do. The one who is in charge of these merchants is as lowly as they come. Where on earth would I find someone to replace you?»

He took a slow breath and continued.

«Granted, he may seem weak hearted, but still, one would expect a merchant to have some wit...»

«It must have been difficult to understand.»

Ho Gamyong interjected lightly with a smile.

«To them, Ryeonju may not have appeared as anything other than a tyrant. But then, to see him suddenly offering aid to the common people by distributing his wealth, it's natural for them to find it strange, isn't it?»

«It's foolishness indeed.»

Jang Ilso, slightly clicking his tongue, uttered with a grimace.

«For a merchant who only pursues profit, not to understand what profit truly entails...»

“...”

«... And the rulers presenting benevolence and order is not because they are benevolent rulers, but because it's the most effective way to handle foolish commoners. If they had

understood that, they would not have reacted like that. Other people may not know, but merchants know that benevolence and order are beneficial. Shouldn't they know?»

Ho Gamyong sighed.

“It may be natural for you, Ryeonju, but it is not easy for ordinary people like us.”

«Seems like you're exaggerating. You, of all people, should have known that much.»

«...Indeed, I should have.»

Ho Gamyong laughed bitterly.

The reason rulers become tyrants isn't due to excessive greed — it's simply because they are foolish. A truly greedy king should become a perfect guardian of law and order. That's because it brings the king the most benefit.

If everyone in the world were to act solely based on their desires, disregarding law and order, they would fall into the chaos they deserve. Consequently, tremendous power and wealth are consumed to stabilize such chaos.

However, if people adhere to righteousness and respect order, the king can extract benefits from them without exerting any effort. To the point of cruelty, one might add.

“Even those arrogant orthodox bastards can be an example for them. An example of righteousness, order, and cooperation. Those who are accustomed to such things do not casually wield a sword against others even when starving to death themselves.”

“.....”

“Just as one tames a wolf into a dog with food, one enslaves people with righteousness.”

Jang Ilso laughed.

“Those self-righteous bastards even dare to call killing people with righteous reasons a means to do good. What reason do I have not to use their righteousness as a weapon?”

“You speak the truth, Ryeonju.”

If rumors spread that Sapaeryeon had relieved the commoners of their burdens while sacrificing all their goods stacked in the warehouse, the commoners of Gangnam would not easily rebel despite what the faction might do in the future.

Perhaps Jang Ilso might seem cruel to the people of Gangho, but to those unfamiliar with martial arts, he might appear remarkably merciful. And perhaps someday they might even turn hostile towards the orthodox factions to repay the kindness they received.

Whatever the outcome, it was never a loss for Jang Ilso or Sapaeryeon. If they could reap such immense benefits by using money and others, why hesitate?

«However...»

Ho Gamyong chuckled softly.

«It's a bit amusing. If things continue like this, it wouldn't be hard to guarantee that the day will come when you, Ryeonju, will be called the best governor in the world.»

«Hahaha!»

Jang Ilso burst into laughter.

«The greatest governor? Haha! That's not bad! Hahaha! Does that mean I'll become the chivalrous Lord of Guangdong [광동패협(廣東霸俠)]?»

Jang Ilso laughed heartily, knowing full well that such a possibility was unlikely to happen. In the first place, the difference between hypocrisy and righteousness was just a hair's breadth. If someone spent their whole life being hypocritical, only to die without ever admitting that their righteousness was hypocrisy, wouldn't they ultimately become a righteous person?

It didn't matter what Jang Ilso's intentions were while doing good. If those who benefited from his 'righteousness' began to praise him, perhaps he might truly be evaluated as the great righteous lord someday.

«Hahaha! Good one. Righteous... Righteous Lord, sounds nice?»

«It's not something to laugh about... It's half a joke, but it's also half serious.»

«Hmm?»

Jang Ilso raised an eyebrow, looking at Ho Gamyong. In response, Ho Gamyong spoke earnestly.

«If the meaning of being the righteous lord entails sacrificing what one possesses to help others, then it's not entirely wrong even now. No matter how sufficient Sapaeryeon's finances may seem, doesn't this endeavor incur astronomical funds?»

«Tsk. Always behaving like a worrywart.»

Jang Ilso furrowed his brow.

«Mangeum Daebu, just with the wealth that money-grubbing demon has amassed, isn't it enough to handle and have some leftovers?»

That statement was undoubtedly true. Saying that the Black Ghost Fortress was the wealthiest organization in the world was no exaggeration. The money they amassed from salt smuggling alone was enough to make even Ho Gamyong, who managed the finances of the massive group known as Maninbang, turn pale.

However...

«Ryeonju. This ordeal is colossal. While we may endure for now, there will ultimately be limits to enduring while using the amassed wealth.»

«No need to worry.»

Despite Ho Gamyong's concerns, Jang Ilso waved his hand dismissively, as if it were of no concern.

«So, spend every penny without leaving a single coin behind, and use it all to purchase grain and goods.»

«Ryeonju, if we do that...»

«Tsk, Gamyong-ah. Don't be frustratingly obstinate, just think about it.»

Jang Ilso slowly rose from his seat. Then, he approached Ho Gamyong step by step.

«What is money?»

«... Yes?»

«And what about gold?»

«Well...»

Ho Gamyong, who had been about to respond, eventually fell silent. At that moment, a meaningful smile formed at the corners of Jang Ilso's lips.

«That's right. Do you understand? Money, in and of itself, is nothing. Its value is created by people. Without a promise between people, money is just useless paper, and gold is nothing more than a lump of soft metal that can't even make a single sword.»

«...»

«What significance does gold hold for someone starving to death? No matter how much gold fills a treasure chest, it's worthless to someone starving. Isn't even a single grain of rice more valuable to them?»

«... Yes, that's true.»

«Soon... Yes, it will come soon.»

A grim expression flashed across Jang Ilso's face.

«In an era where a bowl of rice to fill a hungry stomach is more important than piles of accumulated money, and when rusted iron capable of being forged into a sword is more precious than gold, which flows like a river!»

As Ho Gamyong looked at Jang Ilso, he forgot even to breathe.

Jang Ilso slowly ran his finger across his blood-red lips.

«When that time comes, what was believed to be right will be buried in the ground, and what was esteemed as supreme evil will rise to the heavens.»

With a devilish smile, he muttered in a low, ominous voice.

«That era... The era that will consume everything the world has built... is imminent...»

A fierce blue light emanated from Jang Ilso's eyes.

«It will begin with my hands.»

Ho Gamyong trembled.

For most, the word 'stability' symbolizes peace. But for this man, stability means something else entirely. The sole reason he seeks stability is to focus solely on breaking and killing his enemies, without worrying about being attacked from the back.

What Jang Ilso pursues seems to be the supreme righteousness. Yet, the outcome of these righteous deeds ultimately leads to extreme evil. What should we call the act of pursuing an extremely righteous path that ultimately constructs a regime of extreme brutality?

No, there is no need to name it anything.

'Because it's meaningless.'

Jang Ilso does not distinguish between good and evil. Whether it's good or evil, he simply acts without hesitation to fulfill his desires.

If he needs to use righteousness to gain the world, he will gladly do so, and he won't hesitate to commit heinous crimes if necessary.

What he pursues is simply desire. Desire burning so black, that it can be considered pure.

Jang Ilso, who had wiped all the anger from his face as if it had never been there, lightly placed his hand on Ho Gamyong's shoulder.

«What's needed then is something that can't be obtained with mere wealth. So... shouldn't we use it all up before that wealth becomes nothing but useless scraps of paper?»

«...I understand.»

«Good.»

Tap. Tap.

Jang Ilso lightly tapped Ho Gamyong's shoulder and turned away. He approached the table and picked up a glass. With a single gulp, he downed the alcohol in it and said,

«In that sense...»

«...Yes?»

Jang Ilso spoke without turning his head.

«It's becoming quite annoying. I lack the patience to keep the sword behind my back.»

«You speak of Haenam?»

Understanding immediately, Ho Gamyong nodded.

«Don't worry. Just now, I received news that the relationship between Gupailbang and Cheonumaeng has reached an irreversible point.»

«Hmm?»

«In that case, they won't move easily, keeping each other in check. Haenam will truly be isolated. I will take care of it.»

«You?»

«If Ryeonju were to personally intervene in a place like Haenam, my reputation wouldn't survive. Please entrust it to me.»

«Hmm...»

Jang Ilso let out a slight snort and lifted his head slowly. He leisurely nodded.

«That's fine. Do as you wish.»

«Thank you.»

When Ho Gamyong, who had deeply bowed, slowly raised his head, Jang Ilso had already lost his interest in him and was gazing out the window. He was still, as if deeply lost in thought.

To avoid disrupting Jang Ilso's thoughts, Ho Gamyong left the room as quietly as possible. Once he was far enough, he picked up his pace slightly.

'Haenam...'

Ho Gamyong's eyes glinted coldly.

Until now, he just left it alone so as not to give those encamped on the Yangtze River a reason to move. In truth, with Sapaeryeon's power, they could have swept away Haenam at any time.

'It's time to repay the humiliation we received at Maehwado.'

This wasn't just about revenge against orthodox sects.

It was about showing all those who dared to oppose Sapaeryeon what exactly the followers of Sapaeryeon were capable of.

«In the Sapa's way.»

With a chilly smile, Ho Gamyong quickened his pace. A strange excitement began to emanate from his every step.