

## Chapter 1273

A tiger inside a poisonous trap. (3)

«Hwasan Geomhyeop seems to be a force even the commander finds difficult to handle.»  
Ho Gamyong furrowed his brow slightly as he glanced at Goe Yang, who was openly mocking him.

«It looks like your mouth is still moving even after that.»

«Heuh...»

Goe Yang laughed without responding. Ho Gamyong shook his head slightly.

«It's unlikely Hwasan Geomhyeop would resort to such tactics.»

«Are you underestimating him?»

«No.»

Ho Gamyong replied calmly.

«He's not someone who needs to devise schemes to escape without casualties. That's the kind of plan someone like me, a little rat, would think of.»

«...A little rat?»

«That's right. And there's a rat just like me aboard that ship.»

«Nokrim King.»

«Yes.»

Goe Yang nodded, recalling that such tricks were often used by Nokrim.

«It leaves a bad taste in the mouth,»

he remarked, spitting out the blood pooling at the corner of his lips.

«What about them? Are they regretting leaving us behind?»

«Regret?»

«They probably expect us to pursue them immediately. But I feel like we have a bit of leeway.»

Goe Yang glanced briefly at Hainan Island.

«We need to make them pay for daring to leave us behind.»

«Impossible.»

Ho Gamyong cut him off decisively, as if there was nothing to consider. Goe Yang's eyebrows twitched slightly in displeasure.

«I have no reason to listen to you.»

«While you may understand Hwasan Geomhyeop a bit, it seems you still don't know much about Nokrim King.»

«Hmm?»

«Nokrim King is not that easygoing. He knows we have no choice but to chase after them.»

«Why is that?»

«Have you forgotten what's in Guangdong?»

At those words, Goe Yang momentarily fell silent. What's in Guangdong? That was a question that didn't need to be pondered. It was a matter of fact for them, even if others didn't understand.

«... The headquarters.»

«That's right.»

Across the sea lies the headquarters of Maninbang. And that place is currently empty. The remaining members were all brought along by Ho Gamyong.

«If they think we're falling behind, they won't hesitate to target the headquarters. Instead of burning Haenam, we'll end up losing the headquarters.»

«Are they fixating on such a trivial place?»

«It's not about the headquarters itself, but rather the fact that the warehouse there contains stockpiles of resources and provisions prepared for war against Gangbuk.»

Ho Gamyong spoke in a detached voice,

«If, amidst the slaughter of Haenam, the headquarters were to go up in flames, perhaps Ryeonju herself would test you. To see if a person can survive no matter what happens to them.»

Goe Yang fell silent. He feared nothing in the world, but Jang Ilso was a different matter. Just imagining his smile, while he slowly approached, sent shivers down Goe Hang's spine.

«... We need to hurry.»

«If you have time to talk, then move. Right now, that rat is probably praying we leave even a little later.»

«Understood.»

Without delay, Goe Yang turned and walked away. Ho Gamyong watched the retreating ship with cold eyes and muttered to himself.

«You seem to be poisoned too, Nokrim King.»

Ho Gamyong smirked. It was a strategy befitting Im Sobyong, but at the same time, it was a plan that was not like Im Sobyong at all.

In the realm of tactics, this plan was undeniably more like Im Sobyong. It was all about forcing the opponent's hand and extracting gains through their choices.

But strategically, this was far from Im Sobyong's usual schemes.

A skilled tactician like him would never engage in such reckless endeavors. Leading a group of mediocre fighters and repeating past battles might suffice for an average tactician, but leading the elite swordsmen of Cheonumaeng and disciples of Haenam to break through Gangnam — there was no mistaking the gravity of such decision.

In this situation, there was only one choice that Im Sobyong had to make: to leave Haenam without looking back.

Had he done so, Haenam might have gone up in flames, but the core of Cheonumaeng's forces could have survived. And even Im Sobyong knew that it would have been the most justifiable path.

Yet, there could have been only one reason why Im Sobyong made such a decision. Those who manipulate the world with their minds inevitably find themselves led by something other than their intellect.

It was bizarre that the most rational individuals were often drawn to the most irrational ones, but it was a phenomenon that had repeated itself tirelessly.

As Im Sobyong got intoxicated by the poison known as “Hwasan Geomhyeop”, there seemed to be no alternative for him. Any plan not chosen by the follower was futile to consider, as it would be meaningless to lay out strategies that would not be implemented. All he could do was to do his best within the provided limits.

From that perspective, Im Sobyong’s plan undoubtedly had its merits. But...

“In exchange, Hwasan Geomhyeop will surely perish.”

That would be the price.

Even if it meant losing everything else, even if it meant sacrificing himself as the punishment for killing Hwasan Geomhyeop, he would ensure that this bastard never returned alive from Gangnam.

That was the only way to alleviate the unbearable anxiety that had plagued Ho Gamyong since the moment he first encountered him.

“Bring Jeon Seoeung!”

“Yes!”

Ho Gamyong was about to turn around but hesitated.

‘But rather than that...’

He muttered as he scanned the miserable scene at the coastline.

«Hwasan Geomhyeop...»

Wasn’t it truly absurd to call one with such ruthless hands, enough to make even the Sapa shiver in terror?

«I suppose ‘Maehwa Geomgwi\*’ would be more fitting.»

With a light sneer, Ho Gamyong turned his body without hesitation.

He casually brushed aside the blood flowing like the waves.

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«Throw it!»

«Urrachaaa!»

Jo Geol tore off the deck and hurled it with all his might. The wooden plank spun fiercely as it cut across the surface of the water. And then, Chung Myung leaped into the air, stepping on that very plank.

«Eutcha!»

With each throw of the planks by Jo Geol and Yoon Jong, Chung Myung followed suit, gradually nearing the ship.

Eventually, after stepping on the last plank and making a big leap, Chung Myung landed on the deck.

Thud!

With a dull thud, red blood splattered onto the deck.

«Chung Myung-ah!»

«You okay...»

The disciples of Hwasan, who were about to rush forward like the wind, involuntarily flinched and stopped. The murderous aura emanating from Chung Myung made even them shrink back.

‘Chung Myung...’

Yoon Jong bit his lip.

A chilling aura emanated from Chung Myung’s eyes, so terrifying that one could believe he had crawled straight out of hell.

It felt like the sword in his hand would fly at them the moment they approached even a little closer. Despite knowing it wouldn’t, they couldn’t bring themselves to step forward willingly.

In that moment when everyone stood still, only one person continued walking towards Chung Myung.

«Chung Myung.»

At that, Chung Myung’s gaze sharply turned in that direction. The hand holding the sword trembled.

«Are you okay?»

With that single question, the tension in Chung Myung’s eyes slowly eased. He lowered the sword he had been holding, looking blankly at Yu Iseol, who had approached closely.

«...Of course.»

«You are hurt.»

«Not a big deal.»

Chung Myung shrugged, shaking off the tension, and sheathed his sword in its scabbard.

«Chung Myung!»

«Sahyeong! You’re injured!»

Other disciples of Hwasan also rushed forward, shouting.

Namgung Dowi quietly exhaled the breath he had been holding.

His entire body was drenched in cold sweat in an instant. It was just a brief confrontation, lasting only long enough for a single breath to be taken, but the pressure he felt from it was beyond imagination.

‘This is Hwasan Geomhyeop...’

Chung Myung he knew was always a person filled with composure. Even if his sword was relentlessly ruthless, Chung Myung himself always remained vigilant, observing his surroundings even in tense situations. At least that’s what Namgung Dowi had observed about Chung Myung.

What shocked Namgung Dowi was not Maninbang, who had driven Hwasan Geomhyeop to such extremes.

He was astonished by Yu Iseol's nonchalant approach to Chung Myung, who was emitting terrifying murderous intent.

'How can she be so calm?'

Even Namgung Dowi, who had kept his distance, felt a momentary urge to draw his sword. No, to be honest, it wasn't about drawing his sword — it was about wanting to throw himself off the deck.

But how could someone approach a person exuding such an aura without drawing their sword? If that Chung Myung had swung his sword, someone would have been decapitated in an instant.

'This isn't normal...'

Could it be that the other disciples of Hwasan couldn't approach Chung Myung because they didn't trust him? No one would have expected Chung Myung to actually swing his sword at them. But even so, the body stiffens. It's a natural reaction and survival instinct for someone facing unexpected danger.

For anyone with even a shred of self-preservation, it was something they would never do.

«Take it off! You're injured!»

«...Are you out of your mind?»

«What nonsense! I need to see the wound, so take off your clothes!»

«Why are you yelling like that!»

As usual, when Chung Myung began his customary banter with Tang Soso, Baek Cheon approached him with a large bucket.

«Chung Myung.»

«Yeah?»

When Chung Myung looked up, Baek Cheon extended the bucket he was holding.

«...Just wash up for now. You look terrible.»

It wasn't because he was dirty. It's just that seeing someone covered in blood like a demon, no matter where or when, wasn't pleasant. Especially when there were others around besides them.

Only then did Chung Myung glance around.

The disciples of Haenam, who were unable to muster the courage to approach this side, were visible. Even Geum Yangbaek, the Sect Leader of Haenam, looked pale and only stared in this direction, unable to come closer to speak.

«Tsk.»

Suddenly realizing that this world was different from the past, Chung Myung accepted the bucket Baek Cheon offered.

Without hesitation, he immediately flipped it over his head.

Sigh.

Water poured out, washing away the blood that had covered Chung Myung's entire body. He wasn't completely clean with just one go, but it certainly looked much better.

In that moment, Baek Cheon's eyes quickly scanned Chung Myung's body. The clothing covering Chung Myung's leg was visibly soaking wet.

«Your leg...»

«Hmm?»

Chung Myung glanced at his leg as if it was of little importance. Between the long slit in his clothing, a deep wound was revealed.

«It's nothing.»

«Are you poisoned?»

Baek Cheon's face stiffened.

After washing away someone else's blood, Chung Myung's own blood became visible. Its color was dark and murky. Baek Cheon clenched his lips tightly.

«Soso... Poison...»

«It's fine.»

Chung Myung shook his head and stretched his hand forward. As his hand slowly turned black, crimson Samadhi True Fire [삼매진화(三昧眞火)] burned from his fingertips.

Simultaneously, a sharp scent pierced the air, spreading in all directions.

«It's not a very potent poison.»

«You...»

«Don't worry. I tore apart his torso in exchange for taking a blow to the leg.»

Baek Cheon bit his lip in silence.

‘I misjudged.’

It wasn't underestimating the opponent. But as long as the main force of Maninbang was in Yangtze region, he didn't think there would be anyone here capable of facing Chung Myung. That careless judgment could have led to irreversible consequences.

«Chung Myun. I...»

«Sasuk.»

«Yeah?»

«We don't have time to chat leisurely. Move. Those bastards will be chasing us soon.»

«...»

«Aren't you going to move?»

A deep sigh escaped from Baek Cheon's lips.

«Yeah. You're right.»

«Then pick up the pace.»

«Okay.»

As Baek Cheon moved to give orders, Chung Myung glanced back at the coast.

‘Maninbang...’

It's more relentless than he thought. But there's no choice. This isn't something he did because he could, but because he had to.

‘We must escape.’

Chung Myung's eyes emitted a cold aura.

And Yu Iseol quietly watched Chung Myung like that, with indifferent eyes that revealed nothing of what she was thinking.

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\* 매화검귀 — Plum Blossom Sword Demon. Or ghost/evil spirit etc.