

Chapter 1081

That's the duty of a true Taoist. (1)

«Oh, man. This time, it was really dangerous. We barely made it out alive, didn't we?»

Watching Chung Myung laugh at that statement, Baek Cheon blinked his eyes. He gazed at Chung Myung and said,

«Why?»

«...No. It's nothing.»

Baek Cheon kept his inner thoughts about Chung Myung's laughter, even in such a situation, to himself.

«But... Did Sapaeryeon really just leave like that?»

«Would they leave as a decoy?»

«No, I don't mean that...»

Baek Cheon turned his head slightly to look in the direction where Jang Ilso and his group had disappeared. Baek Cheon's eyes still held a subtle sense of unease.

«It seems like they left a bit too easily for that man.»

«Well, even for Jang Ilso, there was no other choice.»

A voice from the side caught Baek Cheon's attention. It was Im Sobyong, who had a meaningful smile on his face and waved his fully unfolded fan.

«Because the fire is on his heels.»

«...Fire?»

«Yes. More precisely, it's the fire he set himself.»

Seeing Baek Cheon's puzzled expression, Im Sobyong kindly explained.

«Jang Ilso was already devouring Surochae that the Black Dragon King abandoned. In that situation, losing Mangeum Daebu unexpectedly doubled his workload, and even that is an understatement.»

«Ah, I see. Do you think there might be a rebellion within Sapaeryeon?»

«Well, that's difficult. It's not like Surochae or Black Ghosts has lost their minds, right? A rebellion requires a clear focal point. But...»

Im Sobyong swiftly folded his fan with a snap.

«It could happen under different circumstances.»

«Different circumstances?»

«Yes, desertion.»

«Desertion?»

Even the other Hwasan's disciples, who were listening closely, seemed unsure. Im Sobyong smiled briefly.

«It may be hard for orthodox factions to understand, but members of evil sects, from the start, don't have such a strong sense of loyalty. Many of them don't even value their affiliation with the faction, and some are always ready to leave.»

«I see.»

«Holding and binding such individuals are the leader's way to establish his presence and take revenge on defectors. So, those who fear falling out of favor with the leader seize opportunities when the faction is in turmoil to escape.»

Baek Cheon nodded, understanding the point Im Sobyong was making.

«Indeed, from the orthodox faction's perspective, this situation seems unimaginable.»

«On the other hand, from our standpoint, it's hard to understand figures like Baek Cheon Dojang. In fact, Hwasan faction was already a ruined faction, and there was nothing to gain by staying there.»

«We weren't there to gain anything.»

Baek Cheon's firm response left Im Sobyong contemplative.

Perhaps this gap cannot be bridged even after days of conversation because it's not about right or wrong, but a matter of perspective.

Im Sobyong scratched his head with the fan.

«Anyway, Black Ghost Fortress also had many expectations from Mangeum Daebu's grip on power, so when the fact of Mangeum Daebu's death starts spreading, it will inevitably fall into great turmoil. People trying to take advantage or those who want to leave the faction will increase, so it'll be busy for Jang Ilso.»

«That's true.»

«That's why Jang Ilso will be busy. He wants to completely absorb Surochae and Black Ghost's forces down to the last speck of dust. He'll probably have no time to look elsewhere for a while. Since the area he needs to directly manage has grown several times.»

Only then did everyone nod in agreement.

«On the bright side, this might be a fortunate turn of events.»

«Fortunate?»

Im Sobyong seemed puzzled by that conclusion.

«Regardless, for a while, isn't this saying that Jang Ilso won't be able to act directly? As you mentioned, even Jang Ilso would find it challenging to completely control the forces of Black Ghost and Surochae, right?»

The concept of control, if placed under the feet, is not difficult for Jang Ilso. However, preventing those who depart and fully recovering their power is more challenging than one might think.

Even if one was the Paegun Jang Ilso, their feet might be bound for a while.

«Indeed. That's what it means. It's not incorrect.»

Im Sobyong said, nodding in agreement. At that moment, Baek Cheon gained strength from Yoon Jong's words.

«Moreover... anyway, Mangeum Daebu has died, and Black Dragon King has lost one arm, right? Since the number of absolute masters in evil sects was already lacking and was reduced by two, shouldn't it be seen as a huge loss for Sapaeryeon as well?»

«That's also true,»

Im Sobyong smiled.

«Certainly... even if you mobilize the power of all Maninbang and even the power of the Hao clan, you can't avoid experiencing confusion at the moment.»

«Indeed...»

«But Yoon Jong Dojang, do you truly understand the significance of that?»

«Yes?»

Yoon Jong was taken aback a bit. Im Sobyong spoke with a meaningful expression.

«Indeed... the Sapaeryeon will experience internal strife for a while. Considering Jang Ilso's nature, during that process, a lot of blood may flow. The overall strength of the Sapaeryeon may even decrease more than it is now.»

Upon hearing those words, everyone swallowed hard. Such changes always come with bloodshed because those who seek to maintain the existing order inevitably resist change. However... Jang Ilso is not the kind of person who will negotiate with those who oppose him. He will thoroughly crush them and ensure they never revolt against him again, just as he demonstrated at the Yangtze River.

«After all this is over, the Sapaeryeon will be completely transformed from what it has been until now. The Sapaeryeon, which has existed as a loose alliance, will disappear from the world. And in its place, a united and unwavering Sapaeryeon will emerge under Jang Ilso's command.»

This is truly a manifestation of the unity of all under heaven. Of course, it will have a symbolic name, and they won't use the name «Maninbang» but you get the idea.

It seemed like the scent of blood started to fill the air.

«As long as even the Hao clan's leader submits to Jang Ilso, there will be no one left to stop him. At most, it will take half a year. Within that time, Jang Ilso will consolidate all the Sapa under his rule. And then...»

Everyone knew what the next words would be.

«Jang Ilso will undoubtedly set his sights on the next prey. He is someone who knows no satisfaction.»

The notion of at least half a year was etched into everyone's hearts. Those present here had been closely observing who Jang Ilso was.

Danjagang and Heavenly Executioner, the two Bishops, had undoubtedly displayed unimaginable power. However, what remained in the minds of those present here was unmistakably Jang Ilso, no matter what anyone said.

«Perhaps cooperation...»

«No.»

Before Yoon Jong's words, which were still testing the waters, could even finish, a resolute voice cut through.

«There will be no such thing.»

Everyone turned to look at Chung Myung.

«Jang Ilso is Jang Ilso. In the end, he's just a Sapa bastard. Cooperation with someone like him is impossible from the start.»

«But this time it was possible.»

«Because our interests aligned. However, they won't cooperate with us to stop the Demonic Cult, especially if that guy is leading the Sapa.»

Yoon Jong sighed.

He didn't know all the reasons why Chung Myung spoke so definitively, but if that guy was so confident, then his words must be true. He had always been like that.

«Half a year...»

Chung Myung muttered quietly. His eyes were dark and sunken. In fact, half a year was not a long time. He knew just how short that time really was.

«Alright.»

He lifted his head and looked at the other disciples.

«For now, let's head back. Sect Leader must be worried. We can say what we want later.»

«Yeah, okay.»

«Understood.»

The disciples of Hwasan nodded in agreement. There were still many questions they wanted to ask, but this was Gangnam. It wasn't a place where they could have a relaxed conversation. They could have their discussions after leaving Gangnam.

«Well, then...»

«Just wait a moment.»

«Yes?»

Chung Myung paused and turned to the one who spoke. Un Geom looked at him with a serious expression.

«What's the matter, Sasukjo?»

Un Geom stared at the desolate land of Hangzhou for a moment before speaking.

«I wonder if it's right to say such things to you in this situation. So, consider this not as an order from a superior, but just my opinion, and answer.»

«Yes, Sasukjo. Please speak.»

«I can't help but feel uneasy about leaving like this.»

«Yes...?»

Baek Cheon asked with a puzzled expression. Un Geom replied with a bitter tone.

«Haven't too many people died? Even those who had nothing to do with Gangho and were just living their lives.»

A moment of stillness passed, and everyone was taken aback by those words. They had been swept away by a sense of relief for having survived consecutive crises, momentarily forgetting what had happened here.

«I understand that the situation is far from ideal. Perhaps speaking my mind may lead to putting you in danger again because of my greed. However... if it's possible, I would like to offer even a simple memorial service here for those who unjustly lost their lives. Are you okay with that?»

Baek Cheon closed his eyes tightly. He occasionally forgets. That they were Taoists before they were martial artists. And what should be done before winning.

‘Sasuk.’

While everyone had forgotten, Un Geom was the one who didn't. Every time this happened, Baek Cheon felt once again how far he was from following in the footsteps of his Sasuk.

«I'm fine with...»

«We must do it!»

Before Baek Cheon could finish his sentence, Chung Myung responded firmly.

«We may have been too weak and inadequate to save the people here, but at the very least, we should offer solace to their souls. That's the duty of a true Taoist.»

Im Sobyong, who had been watching the situation as they were returning, opened his mouth with an uneasy expression.

«Over here...? This is Gangnam, and we still don't know how the Sapaeryeon will react...»

«We must do it.»

«You idiot, forgetful bastard. You almost went away without doing this. You would've regretted it.»

«That's right.»

«But where should we start? It seems like we need to get going quickly.»

«First, we need a location.»

«Hey, can you hear me? Hey there?»

Hwasan's disciples began to shake Im Sobyong, leaving him out, even Hye Yeon raised his voice with a bewildered expression.

«I'll help too, Sijus!»

«You don't know how to conduct a Taoist memorial service.»

«I'll do anything if it helps. Just promise that after it's over, you'll allow me to recite a sutra for them!»

«Of course, that's only fair.»

Watching the frenzied members of the orthodox factions working together, Im Sobyong looked up at the sky with a soulless gaze.

‘Perhaps Jang Ilso is more sane than these people?’

Truly, it was not an easy issue to judge.