

Chapter 1084

That's the duty of a true Taoist. (4)

Her throat felt tight and dry, like scratched by something rough. Her body was hot like fluttering flames, sinking somewhere deep.

Amidst the endless unsettling darkness, a strange sensation emerged – cool, but at the same time warm and gentle.

‘Ah...’

A woman slowly opened her eyes. As her heavy eyelids lifted, a slightly dim ceiling and someone holding her hand came into view.

‘Who...’

A young man with a fair complexion appeared. Despite a momentary alertness in her hazy consciousness, it eased as soon as his black Taoist robe came into sight.

‘A Taoist...’

Vague memories surfaced. The sound of Taoist Doho being chanted echoed faintly in her foggy consciousness.

‘Ah...’

As she opened her mouth to speak, a clear voice penetrated her ears. It was a young female Taoist monk with her hair braided into two buns.

“Are you awake?”

It was peculiar. Even though she clearly hadn't seen this approaching female Taoist before, the sight of the Taoist robe reassured her. After all, one who wears such attire doesn't harm others.

«How is it?»

The man who had been checking her pulse spoke.

«It has stabilized a lot.»

“Then, please step back and rest. Sahyeong's body isn't in the best condition.”

“It's okay.”

“... Well, I don't listen to some gibberish, even if it is Sahyeong saying there's no need for rest.”

“I'm okay. I can endure that much.”

“Sure, do as you wish. Just know that Sect Leader and the Elders will hear about this in all details.”

While the two engaged in banter, the woman, lost in thought, suddenly shivered, recalling something.

“Ah... our chi-...!”

“Oh my, get a hold of yourself!”

The woman with braided hair rushed to the side, then returned holding something wrapped in a thick blanket.

“The child is doing well.”

With trembling hands, the woman took the child into her arms. After confirming the peaceful face visible through the blanket, peace settled on her face.

“Ah...”

Her hand gently stroked the child’s cheek.

“He fell asleep from exhaustion. Don’t worry — he’s healthy. He cried loudly after waking up a while ago.”

“Thank you... truly, thank you.”

“You are welcome.”

The woman, filled with relief and joy, was about to say something when the door was suddenly slammed open.

«Are you awake?»

Immediately, a bunch of men in black uniforms rushed in. The woman looked at them in surprise.

Similarly dressed in black robes, they were also Taoist monks. Despite the swords at their waists, they didn’t seem threatening, perhaps due to their attire and the concern evident on their faces.

«Quiet, all of you! There’s a patient here!»

«Yes...»

«Sorry...»

«We just wanted...»

As the woman with braided hair shouted, the approaching men lowered their shoulders and bowed their heads. Their pitiful demeanor eased the woman’s mind.

«But where is this...»

«Oh, this is inside a ship.»

«A ship?»

The woman with braided hair, Tang Soso, smiled brightly in response.

«Yes. Since Hangzhou seems to be an impossible place to stay, we temporarily arranged this. We’re heading to Gangbuk now.»

The woman gazed at the ceiling with a momentarily frozen expression.

The moment she heard the word «Hangzhou», vivid memories of that hellish scene flashed in her mind. Overwhelmed by the impending fear, her body involuntarily tensed and stiffened. Then, the Taoist beside her, with a reassuring grip, sent a cool and gentle energy through her body.

The energy streamed through, pushing back the fear once again.

«Ah... I see.»

The woman didn't ask further. What has happened to Hangzhou? What has happened to other people? Because she has already known.

«You all...»

«We are Taoists from Hwasan Sect.»

Baek Cheon, standing just behind Tang Soso, spoke a bit slowly. He seemed to make an effort not to sound too threatening.

«Hwasan...»

«Yes, a sect on a mountain in Shaanxi.»

Baek Cheon glanced at his fellow disciples and calmly continued.

“Though he may look like this, surprisingly, he is a Taoist. Don't worry — he's not a bad person.”

“...Is it okay to say that just based on someone's appearance?”

“Geol-a.”

“Why? You don't even feel bad for Sajils...”

“It's still allowed for your Sasuk.”

The moment Jo Geol, who was momentarily speechless, raised his eyes to see Baek Cheon's face. Then, with a dark expression, he mumbled something incomprehensible. Whether it's about the dirty world or whatever.

«Now, you don't need to worry. The Demonic Cult, who attacked Hangzhou, have all withdrawn.»

«... You saved me...»

«We were lucky.»

After hearing the composed voice, the woman fell silent for a moment. Soon, tears welled up in her eyes.

«... Thank you...»

As her trembling voice emerged, everyone held their breath.

«... Thank you... really, thank you...»

The disciples of Hwasan, who couldn't figure out what to say, looked silently at the woman. Then, from the back, Un Geom, who had been observing the situation, smiled and spoke.

«As a Taoist, it's only natural to do what needs to be done. We apologize for being so late.»

«No... Just thank you.»

With a sniffle, Jo Geol turned his attention to the child in the woman's arms.

«That kid looks quite smart. It's like seeing my childhood.»

Criticism echoed from all directions.

«Insulting a child!»

«Is that something a martial artist should say? This arrogant rich kid!»

«Big mouth!»

Although Jo Geol, a child from a well-off family, wore a very unjust expression, unfortunately, Hwasan was a ruthless faction that didn't care about individual grievances.

«No, look! This cheek here...»

When Jo Geol pressed the child's cheek with his index finger, the child suddenly burst into tears.

«Uh, uh? I didn't mean to...»

«But this bastard is really something!»

In the end, Yoon Jong's fist ruthlessly turned Jo Geol's chin away. Jo Geol, in the midst of it, couldn't even scream in case the child got frightened and staggered out.

«Looks like he's hungry.»

«Oh...»

The child's mother turned her gaze toward the disciples of Hwasan, holding the crying child.

«Can we help with something?»

«What should we do?»

«Just tell us what to do!»

Everyone blurted out confused words. There was a pulsating vein on Tang Soso's forehead.

«Sahyeongs.»

«Huh?»

«...Because the child needs to be breastfed. Go out immediately.»

«Yes!»

The men of Hwasan rushed out without looking back. Chung Myung also got up and went out with them.

«Anyway...»

Tang Soso clicked her tongue, shook her head, and tightly closed the door. In the meantime, the woman breastfeeding her child slowly stroked the child's cheek. Tang Soso spoke in a voice that had softened like a previous conversation was just a lie.

«We'll prepare the rice soon, so please wait a bit.»

«But it might be a bother...»

«No bother at all. It's perfectly fine. Don't worry. Our Sahyeongs may be a bit stupid, but they're capable.»

Tang Soso added with a slight smile.

«People are all good too. Falling for their kindness...»

The woman looked silently at Tang Soso. Tang Soso's gaze toward the closed door was warm. It was clear how much she cherished and liked them.

‘It's a good place.’

Just through that relationship, it felt like everyone here was warm.

Then, suddenly, the woman hesitated and spoke with a darkened face.

«We, where should we go now...»

«Huh? Oh!»

Tang Soso turned to the woman and explained.

«It seems like Hangzhou has become an impossible place to live. We're planning to relocate people to a safer place. Do you have somewhere you can trust and rely on?»

The woman shook her head with a helpless and sorrowful expression.

Those who work the land typically gather in one place to live. If they can't return to Hangzhou, it means she and her child have no place to settle in this vast Central Plains.

«Well... relying on a village by the Yangtze River could be an option, but...»

Tang Soso scratched her cheek. Raising a child alone outside your hometown is a tremendously challenging task. It's risky too.

«If you have nowhere to go, you might consider Sichuan or Shaanxi. In Sichuan, there's a village being built by the Tangga, and Hwaeum village in Shaanxi is genuinely a pleasant place to live. People are kind there.»

The woman's face stiffened. Sichuan and Shaanxi. She had only heard the names and didn't know where they were. The sudden worry about going to such places and living alone with a child overwhelmed her.

But at that moment, someone tightly held her hand.

When she turned her head, the woman who had been there for who knows how long was holding her hand with an expressionless face. A calm voice came out of her mouth.

«It's okay.»

«...»

«These places are good.»

A blank face, an appearance that might seem a bit intimidating due to its cold impression, but the warmth in the hand she held strangely made her feel relieved.

Yu Iseol, who wasn't accustomed to dealing with people, was desperate to reassure the woman.

Tang Soso smiled at Yu Iseol's efforts and interjected cheerfully.

«Yes, that's right. You don't need to worry too much. Our Sect Leader will take care of things somehow. Just relax and take care of yourself, no need to worry.»

«... Yes.»

The woman's hand holding the child tightened.

The firm grip seemed to convey a promise: no matter what happens, this child will be protected. Yu Iseol released her hand, standing up.

Tang Soso spoke again,

«Take a break. We'll bring the rice soon.»

«... Thank you.»

She quietly led Yu Iseol out of the cabin. Just before the door closed, Yu Iseol nervously asked Tang Soso,

«Is she really okay?»

«Yes. Thanks to Chung Myung Sahyeong's excessive interference.»

«... «

«Anyway, he's unstoppable. Even if his body is a mess, he won't stop even if I keep nagging. That's just how he is.»

«Because he's that kind of person. Usually.»

«Yes, he is. I know that... but...»

Tang Soso let out a deep sigh. While she understood his concerns, she wished he could comprehend that other people are worried about him too. It wouldn't be easy, of course.

«The child...»

«The child is fine, really. Don't worry.»

Yu Iseol nodded slightly and gazed at the rippling Yangtze River. After a while, she spoke in a soft voice.

«My mother...»

«...»

«Did she look at me with such eyes?»

Tang Soso reached out quietly, gently holding Yu Iseol's hand.

«She probably did.»

«...»

«Definitely.»

Yu Iseol nodded slowly. After a brief silence, she asked,

«How do you make rice?»

«...I'll do it.»

«I asked how to make it.»

«I'll do it.»

In response to Tang Soso's gentle yet firm answer, Yu Iseol slightly pouted her lips.