

Chapter 1121

If a friend calls, of course, you should come. (1)

“Wh-what’s that sound?”

“It sounds like a tiger’s roar?”

“No... it sounds more like a cow’s moo?”

“Cow or tiger, why all of a sudden?”

The members of Nokrim and Namgung’s swordsmen had no clue about the situation and blinked in confusion.

However, the members of Tangga and Hwasan seemed to have a hunch. They exclaimed in unison,

“Ah!”

and turned their heads abruptly.

“No way?”

Without waiting for anyone to say anything, the members of Tangga and Hwasan rushed towards the door. Namgung and Nokrim, caught up in the atmosphere, also started running. As Baek Cheon forcefully opened the door and stepped out, his eyes were met with a spectacle even more dazzling than what he had anticipated... no, more splendid than what he had imagined.

It was a procession — a long line stretching along the riverbank. The problem was that the procession wasn’t only made up of people.

“Wow...”

“This is amazing.”

“Is that a tiger?”

“That’s a snake, isn’t it?”

“...Then what on earth is that?”

It was a sight of various creatures. From a tiger that seemed as big as a house, fierce-looking leopards, to a massive snake that seemed capable of swallowing a person whole...

Roaaaarr!

A mysterious giant creature, its elongated trunk raised high, emitting thunderous cries.

“What... what’s that?”

“A monster?”

“You fools. That’s an elephant.”

“An elephant?”

“Yes! An elephant!”

“Whoa? This is the first time I’ve seen one for real. Elephants look like that?”

Just seeing such massive animals for the first time was astounding enough. But the shock was even greater when robust looking men walking with them were added to the picture. And it looked like they were not afraid of the beasts at all.

Faced with such a rare spectacle, everyone instinctively widened their eyes in amazement. Where else would one see such a sight?

Especially Namgung Dowi, who was witnessing this sight for the first time, couldn't help but be astonished.

“What... what is this exactly?”

Tang Pae smiled bitterly as he helped Namgung Dowi.

“These are the warriors of Nanman Beast Palace.”

“Ah...”

Namgung Dowi nodded, as if finally understanding. He had heard about the people of Nanman Beast Palace handling ferocious beasts. Yet, there was a vast difference between knowing it theoretically and witnessing it firsthand.

“So, they are allies?”

“Yes. They are also part of Cheonumaeng.”

Tang Pae smiled slightly.

«Beast Palace is a faction that's been with Cheonumaeng from the beginning, before Namgung or Nokrim.»

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that, apart from Hwasan, Tangga was the most familiar with the Beast Palace, mainly due to frequent interactions during the Yunnan tea trade. So, their assessment was naturally influenced by a sense of goodwill.

«However...»

Boooo!

Hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo!

«But... do they usually travel with such a menagerie of beasts?»

«...»

«Having met many others on the way here... it's a bit unusual to be walking around with them in broad daylight, isn't it?»

«Well... um...»

Tang Pae scratched the back of his head with an awkward expression. Adapting to such a sight for the first time wouldn't be easy.

«Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't... Recently, they haven't been bringing them along much. But this time, they've brought quite a few.»

Namgung Dowi blinked as he observed the beasts approaching in harmony with the people. Each of them had an extraordinary aura. Although Namgung Dowi wasn't particularly knowledgeable about animals, there was something distinct about these creatures that set them apart from ordinary beasts.

‘Are they all spirit beasts?’

Indeed, even in Yunnan, a place distinct from the Central Plains, it wouldn't be common to encounter enormous tigers roaming around like this. In such circumstances, how on earth would people live their lives?

Even in Yunnan, it was evident that those beasts were indeed extraordinary creatures. As the tiger confidently strode at the forefront of the crowd, it bared its fearsome fangs towards Namgung Dowi and his clan members as though awaiting their arrival.

Growl, growl, growl.

As the distinct low growl of the tiger echoed, shivers ran down the spines of those who heard it. That howl stimulated a primal fear within people.

Namgung Dowi swallowed dryly. Those standing by his side flinched, taking a step back.

Growl, growl, growl!

Observing their reactions, the tiger intensified its stance, slightly tensing its neck, as if about to swallow and crush the Yangtze River whole, then roared ferociously.

Roar, roar, roar, roar!

An aura that shook the atmosphere, a roar so tremendous that it instinctively made even those familiar with the Beast Palace grip the hilt of their swords.

Growl, growl, growl.

As the tiger glared at everyone with its amber eyes, readying for another roar.

Tip-tap, Tip-tap.

Amidst the disciples of Hwasan, something swiftly darted out with little footsteps.

“Huh?”

Namgung Dowi's eyes quivered.

What darted out was a creature he was also familiar with. It was none other than the snowy white weasel in Hwasan's uniform he had seen several times before.

Swiftly moving forward, the weasel arrived right in front of the large tiger, standing on its two feet with a straightened posture.

“Hey...!”

Momentarily flustered, Namgung Dowi instinctively reached out his hand.

Of course, he knew the weasel was also a spiritual beast, but the size difference between the weasel and the tiger was too extreme. The weasel, at best, was only the size of something one could place around a person's neck as a scarf, while the tiger in front of it was clearly much larger than most cattle.

With the small weasel blocking the way in front of such a tiger, how could one not be astonished?

Growl, growl, growl.

Merely looking at the weasel standing before him, made the tiger to bare its menacing fangs. It seemed ready to tear the small creature apart in an instant.

Emitting a clear sense of enmity through its eyes, the tiger lowered its body as if starting a hunt, its stiff fur bristling on the ends. Its appearance was more monstrous than tiger-like, resembling a demon lurking somewhere in the netherworld.

Roar, roar, roar, roar!

Finally, as the tiger let out a colossal roar shaking one's very innards, the white weasel, showing signs of discomfort as it tapped its tail on the ground, soared into the air. Swiftly twisting its hind legs, it struck the tiger's jaw with a swift, slicing motion.

Swoosh!

The tiger, struck by the white weasel's hind leg, like a fired projectile, rebounded and bounced off the ground, springing up like a startled cat.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

Namgung Dowi's eyes bulged forward.

"Whoa..."

After launching the tiger with a single blow, the white weasel swiftly spat on the ground before rhythmically thumping its hind legs.

'That...'

That figure from behind... where have they seen that before? That... no, wait.

Just before that...

Do weasels even spit like that? Is it really appropriate to call that a weasel? Can it be called that?

The tiger, pushed into the ground, struggled and rose to its feet.

Kiiiiieeee!

At the moment a terrifying sound tore from Baek Ah's mouth. Rushing forward like lightning, the tiger quickly prostrated itself in front of the white weasel.

Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.

Baek Ah clicked his tongue and made a very distinct sound, raised his front paw, which was so tiny and insignificant compared to a tiger. And then he tapped the tiger's cheeks.

It felt as though an inner voice whispered, 'Where are your manners.'

Whether it was only Namgung Dowi who heard that concealed voice or not, the house sized tiger lowered its head overtly with a sullen expression. It was a scene where even a three-year-old could understand who was stronger.

Having swiftly subdued the tiger, Baek Ah blinked and glanced at the other beasts behind it. The creatures that had been so magnificent just a moment ago swiftly averted their eyes and tucked their tails, cowering.

"Euhahaha!"

At that moment, a hearty laughter erupted. Shortly after, a man twice the size of an average warrior stepped forward.

"That fellow has become more ferocious. I thought sending him to Domun [도문*] would improve his temper a bit."

Namgung Dowi flinched momentarily as he looked at the man. It was the first time he had seen someone who exuded such an imposing presence just from their appearance.

“Palace Lord!”

However, disciples from both Hwasan and the Tang clan reacted with respect upon seeing Maeng So, the Lord of the Beast Palace.

‘The Lord? That person?’

Tension arose in Namgung Dowi’s eyes. Indeed, the Lord of the Beast Palace. That aura was no joke.

At that moment, a loud voice came from behind.

“Well, why did you bring all these creatures along?”

Glancing at Chung Myung, who walked with a frown on his face, Maeng So laughed.

“Please, understand. Didn’t you ask me to bring every capable individual here?”

“Are you saying they are worth using?”

“No. The ones that are useful are the others. Even if they are spirit beasts, in the end, aren’t they all beasts? If there’s no one to control those back at Yunnan, trouble might arise, right? That’s why they had to be brought along, don’t you agree?”

“Mm.”

“Don’t look at them with such eyes. It’s not like I brought all of them. I just picked out the fierce and ill-tempered ones among the pack.”

“...Fierce and ill-tempered?”

“Huh?”

“These?”

With a smirk Chung Myung gestured with his chin. Maeng So turned his gaze towards the direction he pointed at.

Thunk!

When Baek Ah lifted a tiny front paw to point in one direction, the beasts from the Beast Palace obediently trudged there. Their once imposing aura seemed visibly subdued.

“...It’s common to have natural enemies.”

Even Maeng So appeared surprised at this sight, letting out a loud laugh.

“Though it didn’t seem like this to such an extent before. What in the world did you do to Baek Ah? Seems like he’s gotten several times stronger than the last time I saw him.”

He refrained from mentioning that his temperament seemed several times more ruthless now.

Chung Myung responded nonchalantly,

“I didn’t do much. Just made him understand that playing around could turn into an expensive scarf.”

“... Well done.”

“Me?”

“No, him.”

“... ”

Maeng So shook his head. Who would have imagined that someone could handle spirit beasts better than the Beast Palace members?

With a single gesture, Baek Ah herded all the beasts into the warehouse, and then hurriedly approached Chung Myung.

Leaning back with both arms around his waist, Baek Ah stretched out his belly in front of him.

“What?”

Thud! Thud!

Baek Ah tapped the ground with his tail, making Chung Myung chuckle.

“Yeah, yeah. Well done.”

Kii!

Nodding slightly, Baek Ah swiftly climbed onto Chung Myung’s shoulder, resting on one side. Chung Myung glanced at Baek Ah and gently poked his black nose with his index finger.

“Instead.”

Kii?

“If these punks cause trouble from now on, it’ll be on you.”

...

“Do well.”

Baek Ah, looking dejected, weakly slumped on Chung Myung’s shoulder.

All who witnessed this bizarre situation shook their heads in disbelief.

‘Is it the humans who are amazing or the beasts?’

‘In any case, there’s absolutely no logic to what’s happening here.’

‘Don’t overthink. Just accept it.’

Chung Myung smiled as he looked at Maeng So.

“It must have been quite a task bringing all those beasts here. You arrived earlier than expected after coming from afar. Thank you for the trouble.”

“You’re saying all the right things.”

Maeng So grinned broadly. Despite his imposing appearance, his smile was unexpectedly gentle and warm.

“If a friend calls, of course, you should come.”

At that statement, Chung Myung laughed.

“Now that I’ve met a friend, it’s time for a drink after so long.”

“Euhahaha! I knew you’d say that, so I brought all Dowonhyang liquor [도원향(桃原香) — peach orchard fragrance].”

“Oh? That’s an amazing liquor! Kkeu! We’ll have a great time after so long!”

Despite being slightly smaller than a large beast — Maeng So, and being slightly smaller than an ordinary person — Chung Myung, they managed to put their arms around each other’s shoulders and walked inside, laughing.

Namgung Dowi, standing there in a daze, asked with a bewildered expression,
“Are they normally this friendly with each other?”

“...Surprisingly, yes.”

“...”

Namgung Dowi contemplated again. It was truly remarkable how someone with such a bad personality could possess such good social skills.

*As I've understood he is referring to the part of the Central Plains he sent Baek Ah to in terminology that is not commonly used now in South Korea. You can google it and read if you are interested.