

Chapter 1241

That's all? (1)

«Gah... My stomach...»

Jo Geol grimaced, muttering under his breath. Perhaps yesterday's drinking had been too much, as his stomach wasn't feeling great.

«Haenam's folks really drink like ignorant fools.»

«They are probably saying the same thing on the other side.»

«Still, except for the feast with the Beast Palace Lord, I don't recall us ever getting wasted like this...»

«He was always an exception.»

Chung Myung, who had been drinking with Maeng So, was no different.

«Ugh...»

Jo Geol groaned as he loosened his baggage. Then, he carefully pulled out Hwasan's uniform that he had meticulously wrapped to prevent any damage during the journey.

«But why hold a meeting so early in the morning like this?»

«It's not early. It's late.»

«Huh?»

Yoon Jong spoke with a bitter expression.

«Even just giving us a night's rest shows Sect Leader's remarkable patience. If it were someone like you, could you stay silent and wait when outsiders come in a situation like this?»

«...I couldn't.»

«That's right.»

Yoon Jong nodded in agreement.

«Seeing the faces of those who drank recklessly, it seems they were feeling much more pressure than we had anticipated. Taking into account that they were considerate enough to accommodate us after such a long journey, we should be thankful. Let's not voice any unnecessary complaints.»

«Well, damn. Where did I say I had any complaints? It's not that I'm complaining, it's just that I don't feel like my hangover has fully kicked in yet, so I might look a bit under the weather for no reason.»

«...I agree with that.»

Yoon Jong chuckled. In truth, he couldn't quite remember how they even got to their lodgings. Well, considering they didn't even know this was their lodging, they must not have arrived on their own.

It was a spectacle, indeed. It was clear they didn't look like the guests who had come to Haenam for an important meeting.

But neither Yoon Jong nor Jo Geol seemed to have any regrets.

«What in the world was he thinking, drinking like that?»

«How should we know? We just go with the flow and adapt if it seems like the right thing to do.»

Sigh...

Yoon Jong shook his head wearily.

They say if you spend three years with a teacher, you start to understand their ways. But with Chung Myung, it had been over three years now, and reasons or propriety didn't seem all that important anymore. They just ended up nodding along, assuming there must be some reason behind it.

«We're late. Hurry up.»

«Wait, just a moment. Let me just...»

«Hurry up and put on your pants.»

«I'm all dressed, I am!»

Yoon Jong sighed and opened the door. As soon as they stepped outside, they saw people coming out of other rooms.

«Good morning, Young Lord Namgung.»

«Yoon Jong Sohyeop, did you well... uh... sleep... well...»

Yoon Jong looked at Namgung Dowi with a puzzled expression. His face, chiseled and handsome even to a man's eye, now looked crooked and sickly, as if he had been seriously ill.

«Uh... You don't look so good...»

«Well, what kind of person drinks this much... No, what kind...»

«Well, then maybe you should cut back a bit.»

«...Looks like I've already hit the limit.»

Yoon Jong tightly shut his eyes. Indeed, it seemed this gentleman was also starting to lose his composure.

«This is unbearable.»

«Sago. You need to walk properly.»

«I am walking properly.»

«Your step! Not that way, this way. Oh, Sago! I gave you the hangover remedy!»

Soso. Why on earth did Soso bring hangover remedy all the way to Haenam?

Everyone who came out seemed to be in a rather sorry state. Considering they had forcefully consumed an amount of alcohol that would normally be unbearable, it would be even more surprising if they were in good shape.

«Just a moment. What about Nokrim King?»

«...He can't get up. Seems like he needs to be moved to the infirmary instead of the conference hall.»

«...Is it serious? We should at least check his condition...»

«Yeah...»

Yoon Jong was about to head towards Im Sobyong's room when Namgung Dowi stopped him.

«It's probably best not to go in.»

«...Hmm.»

«Since we shouldn't cause any trouble for the lungs, we'll need to wash the bedding as soon as we return from the meeting.»

«...Hmm.»

Yoon Jong grimaced as he rubbed his face with a sense of despair.

'Like this...'

Would they be able to properly conduct the meeting?

«What about Sasuk?»

«Oh, right? He is normally not someone who's late...»

Right at that moment.

Creak.

One of the doors swung wide open, and Baek Cheon stepped out with a pace neither fast nor slow.

Swish.

With each step, the pure white robe gracefully swayed like waves.

Untouched by even a speck of dirt, with perfectly combed hair, and the white hero band on his forehead, it seemed to match his pristine white skin as if it had been meticulously powdered.

While others seemed to be half-dead or worse, Baek Cheon appeared even more neat and tidy than usual, if that was possible.

Click.

Stepping into the corridor with graceful strides, Baek Cheon scanned everyone with his sharp eyes before speaking.

«Have you all come out?»

The disciples of Hwasan began to murmur among themselves.

«...Isn't it really an illness at this point?»

«At this stage, we have to admit it's an illness...»

«That's the kind of person who becomes a Sect Leader of Hwasan.»

«...Agreed.»

The disciples of Hwasan nodded involuntarily, while the heads of other factions shuddered at the sight.

«Is he even human...?»

Especially Namgung Dowi, who was practically trembling. Surely Baek Cheon had drunk more than he had yesterday, so how could he maintain such a pristine appearance? This couldn't be explained simply by the resilience of his body.

«As guests and envoys, you are meeting the Sect Leader of Haenam. Therefore, let's not be lax in our demeanor...»

Baek Cheon trailed off, furrowing his brow. As his disapproving gaze fell upon them, the disciples responded with awkward apologies.

«...Sorry, Baek Cheon Sasuk.»

«Apologies for not looking our best.»

«We did our best, really.»

«Tsk.»

Baek Cheon clicked his tongue at the awkward expressions of the disciples, clearly displeased. Though inwardly feeling unfairly treated, seeing Baek Cheon's demeanor somehow stifled any complaints they might have voiced.

«What about Chung Myung?»

«I'm not sure. Haven't seen him. Can't imagine he'd be too drunk to get up.»

«Not in his room?»

«No, he's not.»

«Then where could he be?»

Baek Cheon nodded as if he had a guess.

«Let's go.»

“What about Chung Myung?”

“He'll come on his own.»

Baek Cheon scanned the people in front of him before speaking again.

«Once again, each one of you here represents all those in Cheonumaeng. When you speak, think twice, and always remember how you appear to them.»

«Um... Is that directed at everyone?»

«Let's go.»

«Sasuk? But, when you said that, why did you only look at me... Sasuk?»

Ignoring Jo Geol's complaints, Baek Cheon walked down the hallway. As others couldn't see his face, a brief sigh escaped his lips. There was a hint of tension in the air.

It was his first task as Vice Sect Leader of Hwasan. Regardless of the outcome, he needed to display the demeanor befitting a representative of Hwasan and a special envoy of Cheonumaeng.

He descended the stairs with a stern expression. And...

«Hehehe. Look at this guy's face!»

«Ah, please go.»

«Yeah, what's the point of being so arrogant when you can't even drink?»

«I can't drink?! My nickname is Southern Sea Soju King!»

«What, is this neighborhood only for minnows?»

«No, but seriously!»

«Oh my. I would've bitten my tongue and died if I'd boasted and then been humiliated. But he's holding his head high as he walks out.»

«No one won! It's a tie, it's a tie!»

«If the one who waited tied with the one who came from afar, it's practically a win for the latter.»

«Ugh.»

Gwak Hwanso's grim face turned red and blue.

Chung Myung, who had been teasing him, turned his gaze towards the stairs when he heard footsteps. Then, upon seeing Baek Cheon descending the stairs, he smirked.

«And look at that. Our Vice Sect Leader is perfectly fine, unlike everyone else who's dying.»

«Really.»

«Wow. That gentleman drank even more than me yesterday.»

«Daesahyeong, admit it. We lost this one.»

«...Our Daesahyeong looks somewhat like him too.»

«Who was the last guy just now? Who is he?»

Watching Chung Myung enjoying himself with the disciples from Haenam and teasing Gwak Hwanso, Baek Cheon shook his head helplessly.

'Can't stop him anyway.'

The atmosphere here should have been incredibly serious. It was the day when the future of Haenam and Cheonumaeng was being determined, and the disciples here were well aware of that fact.

But the drinking session from yesterday and Chung Myung's early arrival had completely relaxed the atmosphere.

Baek Cheon felt some of the tension drain from his shoulders. He had been about to say something, but he couldn't help but laugh.

«Chung Myung-ah.»

«Yeah?»

«...Come here.»

«What did I do wrong?»

«...Please, just shut up.»

«This is so unfair!»

As Baek Cheon gestured, Yoon Jong and Jo Geol rushed over, grabbing Chung Myung's arms and dragging him back.

«No! I didn't say anything wrong! He started it first, why only me? Ugh! Ugh!»

Tang Soso skillfully covered Chung Myung's mouth with a cloth and bound it tightly, causing Baek Cheon to sigh deeply before turning to Gwak Hanso.

«Sorry about that. Well, as you know... it's just that he's always been like that...»

«You must have had a hard time.»

«Even three days of talking wouldn't be enough.»

Baek Cheon looked at Gwak Hwanso with a strange expression.

«But, you seem a bit...?»

«I'm naturally dark-skinned.»

«It doesn't seem like it... Could it be a hangover?»

«No, I'm naturally dark-skinned. Haenam's people are naturally dark because of the sunlight!»

«Ah, then that's fortunate. I was surprised to hear you only had that much and thought it might have affected your health. But I guess that wouldn't happen, right?»

«Just keep walking.»

«Pardon?»

«Oh, nothing.»

As Baek Cheon chuckled, Gwak Hwanso chuckled along and immediately straightened up, facing Baek Cheon.

«I'm Gwak Hwanso, the great disciple of Haenam. Since Sect Leader wishes to see you, please follow me. I'll guide you.»

«Of course.»

Gwak Hwanso, now serious, turned around. Waiting nearby, the disciples of Haenam exuded a strong aura as they surrounded the group.

«The typhoon hasn't completely subsided yet, so please excuse any inconvenience on the way.»

«As long as we avoid the gusty winds, we'll be fine. Don't worry about it.»

Gwak Hwanso smiled as if pleased with the response.

«Open it.»

«Yes!»

The doors of the hall swung wide open.

Baek Cheon's eyes narrowed slightly. The typhoon was still raging outside. However, the disciples of Haenam paid no heed to the fierce winds and stood arranged on both sides of the path, waiting for them to pass.

«I'm not asking for much,»

Gwak Hwanso said in a serious tone.

«It's not a show off strength or a threat. Whatever the outcome of the conversation with Sect Leader will be, it doesn't matter. We just show the minimum respect to those who have come all the way to Haenam, risking their lives, without anyone asking them to.»

Baek Cheon's expression stiffened slightly.

«So please, come with me.»

Gwak Hwanso led the way into the raging storm. Baek Cheon nodded in agreement and followed closely behind him.

The disciples of Haenam, who had been standing there for a while, their clothes soaked through, silently drew their swords and raised them in reverence to the group heading towards the main pavilion.

Only the sound of rain could be heard, engulfing them in a silent tribute, devoid of any thunderous cheers.

Walking amidst this scene, the members of Cheonumaeng were greeted by the dignified figure of the main hall and the golden statue that stood before it.

Baek Cheon quietly squeezed the rainwater accumulated in his palm.