

Chapter 1255

To fight! And to survive! (5)

The blue water surged in the sea.

The small dots emerging beyond the horizon gradually increased in size.

It might not be a particularly remarkable scene to debate about, but the disciples of Haenam sect watching it felt a pressure that took their breath away.

At that moment, they could tell, being people who lived by the sea.

Something about the approaching fleet was different from what they had seen before.

«Sapaeryeon...»

A voice, akin to a whimper, escaped from someone's lips.

Just a moment ago, those who had been bustling around came to a halt, standing still as they stared blankly at the approaching ships.

Though they had been burning with the resolve to throw themselves against Sapaeryeon, as they looked at the approaching fleet with their own eyes, an inevitable sense of despair and fear swept over them.

Fear is contagious.

Especially in situations like this, it tends to spread faster than anything else. At the moment when someone standing on the coast found themselves unwittingly stepping back.

«I see those bastards so often, glad to see them again.»

Chung Myung's deep, somber voice pierced their ears.

«...Even so, it's strange that Sapa bastards seem happy to see us.»

«We've seen them too often.»

«Indeed, Sasuk. We've grown tired of the sight from the Yangtze River, but seeing it again from afar feels unsettling. At this point, it almost feels like Sapa bastards are constantly traveling by ships.»

«...That's true, but...»

Chung Myung chuckled.

«Anyway, those guys never learn. After suffering like that, they still get back on the ship?»

«How else would they come to the island?»

«They'd have to swim!»

«...Chung Myung-ah. Not everyone in the world thinks like you.»

«It's not about thinking alike. It's about being rational!»

«Even if the world loses its rationality, that doesn't make it rational...»

Those who overheard the conversation looked at Chung Myung and the disciples of Hwasan with new eyes.

Seeing them calmly accept a situation that was nothing short of terrifying naturally brought a single name to their minds.

Maehwado.

Yes, that's the name.

«Come to think of it...»

Maehwado, the remote island on the Yangtze River that was surrounded by the forces of Surochae.

Hwasan boldly stormed onto the island without a moment of hesitation and rescued Namgung clan, who was drowning in despair. And with that achievement alone, they built an unwavering reputation.

Upon careful consideration, there are some similarities between that situation and the current one, aren't there?

Of course, the circumstances aren't entirely the same. The victory over Sapaeryeon on Maehwado was Hwasan's doing, but now these disciples of Hwasan are merely few, and it's Haenam who must stand against the enemy.

However...

One thing is certain: in situations like this, there's no one more trustworthy than the disciples of Hwasan.

Thinking of this fact eased the minds of those who remembered it, unlike before.

Furthermore...

«Should we just attack as soon as they land?»

«If that's your plan, why bother making one in the first place! This bastard!»

«I know, but seeing them just gets on my nerves. These guys have no fear.»

«No. Don't they not even know we're here?»

«They don't? If they don't know then they deserve a beating!»

«...Please, just stop.»

As they looked upon Sapaeryeon's fleet, they found themselves feeling angry, while Cheonumaeng's group was joking around.

They were the children of the sea, accustomed to fighting against the ocean.

Though they may not have the same skill, they prided themselves on their courage, which could rival any sect in the world.

Yet, to show a momentary flicker of fear upon seeing the enemy, how humiliating is that?

«If you're going to attack as soon as they land, then please let us join in.»

«Huh?»

When Chung Myung turned to look back, Gwak Hwanso grinned and said.

«Considering the grudges piled up against Sapaeryeon, there's probably nowhere with worse emotions than ours.»

Chung Myung chuckled upon hearing that statement.

«You have no fear. What if you end up biting the dust?»

«If we were afraid of dying, we wouldn't be here in the first place.»

«Oh?»

At Gwak Hwanso's words, the expressions of the disciples from Haenam hardened.

It was true.

From the outset, everyone who came here was prepared to sacrifice their lives.

So why suddenly show fear now?

«...Come to think of it, maybe it's better for us to attack and die than to just keep being chased and die.»

«It might feel more satisfying that way.»

«I have so many grievances piled up, I'd love to stick a sword in those bastards' throats...»

«Are you serious?»

With each voice, their confidence grew.

It wasn't because they had forgotten their fear. Death was still terrifying, and Sapaeryeon was still intimidating.

However, just because there's nothing that changes even if you're afraid, doesn't mean you should be consumed by that fear. Understanding this fact, everyone strives to muster up courage, even if it's not there.

Seeing this, Chung Myung finally smiled.

«I get the feeling, but... for now...»

Chung Myung, whose complexion had changed drastically, looked at Im Sobyong with a sad gaze.

«Even the person who schemed up the plan had some sincerity... So, for now, we should stick to the plan.»

«...I truly appreciate that.»

Im Sobyong forced a smile, hiding the turmoil in his mind.

«Gwak Daehyeop, are the preparations all set?»

Gwak Hwanso quickly assessed the situation and nodded.

«There are about two ships left, but they're currently in progress, so they'll be done soon.»

«Hurry up, please. And remove all but the minimum personnel currently on the coast to the designated location. It won't do us any good if they notice a crowd gathering on the coast.»

«Yes!»

As Gwak Hwanso swiftly gave the orders, the disciples on the coast dashed to the rear.

«Footprints!»

At that moment, Im Sobyong exclaimed sharply.

«Erase the footprints! Footprints! Do you want the whole world to know that people were swarming here?»

Startled by his words, the disciples of Haenam hastily wiped away the footprints scattered on the coast.

«Tsk.»

Im Sobyong clicked his tongue, clearly displeased.

Just as a small hole could cause a carefully constructed dam to collapse, he knew that it was these minor details that could undermine their strategy.

«Move!»

«Yes!»

Im Sobyong quickly checked the status of the ships and the coast.

«Are you sure they'll land on this side? We've prepared everything here, but it'll be meaningless if they suddenly go to another side.»

«It must be Ho Gamyong.»

«What?»

In response to the somewhat unexpected answer, Namgung Dowi tilted his head.

«This is something that must be handled without fail even from the perspective of Maninbang. It would be preferable if Jang Ilso could come in person, but since Jang Ilso cannot leave the main base of Sapaeryeon, Ho Gamyong must have come in person.»

Im Sobyong continued as if it was not a matter of concern.

«Jang Ilso may be unpredictable at times, but Ho Gamyong is a person who only pursues practical interests. He might not know we're here. But there's no need for them to escalate the situation when they're only targeting Haenam. They will definitely land here.»

Namgung Dowi looked at Im Sobyong with a blank expression.

It was not the logic but the conviction in his words that bewildered Namgung Dowi.

While he was usually difficult to understand, there were times when Im Sobyong displayed an intimidating presence that could not be refuted.

'This is the dignity that a leader of a sect possesses.'

Namgung Dowi nodded involuntarily. Though he disliked Im Sobyong, he acknowledged this aspect. Indeed, Im Sobyong was not someone easily underestimated...

«Then what if they land somewhere else?»

«We'll have to flee! Without looking back!»

Im Sobyong's face contorted with determination.

«If they landed elsewhere, it means they were well aware of our presence here and came prepared. If we clumsily resist, we'll just end up losing our heads. Let's get moving!»

«Well, even so, if there are still people left behind, us leaving them...»

«No, what nonsense are you talking about! Whether it's Haenam or elsewhere, what do I care! I need to survive first.»

No.

It seems there was a misunderstanding. There's nothing to learn from such an individual. Fortunately or unfortunately, from afar, the approaching fleet showed no signs of changing direction, heading straight toward the coastline.

«Preparations are complete!»

Im Sobyong checked the coastline one last time with sharp eyes.

«Alright!»

Im Sobyong made a decisive gesture, giving the signal.

«Head to the predetermined location! Remember, under no circumstances move first! Got it?»

«Yes!»

Under Gwak Hwanso's lead, the disciples of Haenam dashed with all their might towards the bushes beyond the coastline.

«Let's move too!»

«Got it.»

Baek Cheon turned his head to take in the approaching fleet with his own eyes before shaking his head.

'We've done all we could.'

Now, all that's left is to move according to the plan already laid out. It's always best to respond to minor variables as they come.

«Let's go!»

«Yes!»

With pounding footsteps, the disciples of Hwasan leaped over the bushes and dashed towards the mountain ridge connected to the coastline, following the plan they had devised.

Watching Baek Cheon's back as he led the way, Jo Geol shook his head slightly.

«It seems like Sasuk has a lot of tricks up his sleeve.»

«It certainly looked that way to me too.»

«I was worried my legs might give out.»

«That's why.»

There's no way they wouldn't be tense. Both Sapaeryeon and Maninbang remain intimidating and threatening entities to them. While there was usually confidence fighting alongside Hwasan, the current situation requires them to fight in coordination with Haenam, with whom they've never once fought before. How could they not feel nervous?

However, the reason Baek Cheon had to engage in pointless banter with Chung Myung was because it was evident that the disciples of Haenam would be even more fearful and tense than them.

People tend to gauge their own demeanor based on the attitude of those leading them.

Therefore, Baek Cheon couldn't afford to appear too tense. At least outwardly, he had to seem relaxed.

Jo Geol and Yoon Jong fully understood Baek Cheon's mindset. They knew just how hard he was trying right now.

«Over here!»

«Yes!»

The running figures hid themselves in the deeply hollowed terrain indicated by Im Sobyong. Though there was still some distance to go, the heightened tension caused them to hunker down, with only their heads slightly raised, watching the approaching ships.

«...They're big.»

«Yeah. Just like we saw before.»

Ships they had seen once already. But the feeling when those ships docked on the shore and when they approached was entirely different. The bows of the ships protruded sharply like swords aimed at them.

«Sasuk.»

«Yeah.»

Baek Cheon nodded.

«They're coming.»

At that moment when Chung Myung's eyes sank, Sapaeryeon's fleet finally reached the coast where they were, cutting through the rough currents.

Splash!

The sound of a large anchor plunging into the water changed the atmosphere of the coast.

The battlefield was now set.