

Chapter 1126

Here. This is hell. (1)

Breathing became unbearably hard.

No, it's frightening to even breathe.

Countless people are arranged in a large square that can be described as vast rather than just big.

What's eerie is that even at a glance, the faces of these people, who clearly possess an extraordinary aura, are pale. In their visibly trembling hands, long and menacing spears are held.

Of course, everyone experiences moments of fear in life. However, the reason one cannot take this sight for granted is because these trembling people, just by their name alone, are the feared martial experts of Sapaeryeon, who can turn Gangnam into a land of terror.

«Rye-Ryeonju! P-please! Please spare...»

Crash!

The fierce strike that shot up into the sky mercilessly struck someone's neck. The severed head floated into the air.

Thud.

Crimson blood gushed out from the collapsed body, that fell like a straw stack.

The faces of those who witnessed this sight grew even paler.

They're all martial artists who belong to Sapa. Naturally, they have witnessed countless deaths. Yet, despite witnessing someone's demise now, there's hardly any excitement.

However, the scene unfolding before them right now was distinctly different from the 'deaths' they had witnessed until this moment.

«Next.»

With the chilling tone of Ho Gamyong's voice, the body, its warmth not yet drained, was dragged out like a rotting tree. Then, in its place, another person was pulled into like a cow in the slaughterhouse.

Eyes saturated with terror were prominent on that person's face. A desperate, miserable cry erupted spasmodically.

«Rye... Ryeonju! Lord Ryeonju! It's not me! I'm not the scum resisting the Lord! Ryeonju! Ryeonju! Please believe me, please! Noooo!»

The wail was almost unbearable to hear.

Likely, the person being brought in now had also ended numerous lives with their own hands. However, even such a person was no different from ordinary people when facing their own demise.

«Ryeonjuuuuu!»

Dragged into the vast square, the person lifted his trembling head to gaze upon the front of the arena.

«Hu... huuh....»

A sound of breath escaped involuntarily from their lips in that moment. Their terrified state did not fit in the least with the prestige and status they had amassed.

Yet, no one present could reproach that pitiful sight. Anyone here, seeing this scene, would react similarly to how this person did.

The newly constructed headquarters after the emergence of Sapaeryeon. The central part of the square was adorned with elegant white marble, reflecting the tastes of Jang Ilso in its grandeur.

When the sunlight poured down, the square sparkled like freshly fallen snow, an emblem symbolizing Sapaeryeon.

However, that dazzling marble was now entirely dyed deep crimson. The blood shed by those who died here flowed and continued to flow endlessly.

Who could maintain composure in the face of such a sight?

«Uhh...»

The nauseating smell of blood pricked at his nose. The man's pants instantly soaked through.

«Ryeonju, Lord Ryeonju! Please save me! If you spare me, I'll do anything! Anything at all!

It's all a misunderstanding! I've never once opposed the Lord! Please! Please spare me!

Ryeonjuuuu!»

Whether a cry or a scream, it was an urgent plea as the person looked up with desperation in their eyes.

His gaze crossed the blood-soaked ground, moving beyond to the square and up the tall stairs.

While the lower parts were entirely drenched in blood, as one ascended the stairs, gradually, a whitish hue appeared. Thus, finally, at the top of the stairs white marble shone as if sacred and bright.

The stark contrast seemed to define the difference between the person dragged here and the one positioned at the top of those magnificent steps.

At the pinnacle of the stairs sat a splendid, massive throne, and slanted upon it, a man.

«Rye... Ryeonju...»

A magnificent robe embroidered with a golden dragon. Beneath it, a snow-white hand lightly held a cup of liquor.

«Hmm.»

Raising the cup, the man with a languid expression gazed down at the pleading figure before him.

«Ryeonju, Lord Ryeonju!»

The man screamed as if glimpsing the final lifeline at the bottom of a cliff. However, Jang Ilso, seemingly losing interest, leaned back against the throne's backrest.

Instead, it was none other than Ho Gamyong who spoke.

«Execute.»

The chilling voice resounded eerily.

Those who flinched at the sound immediately sprang into action. They dragged the pleading man, pressing him against the execution block.

«Hii... Hiiiik!»

Swish!

In an instant, the razor-sharp blade severed the man's neck. His head shot up, blood spraying in all directions as his body crumpled to the ground.

Those who had watched the scene unfold without a single flinch swallowed hard.

The name of the just-beheaded man was Jo Pyo [趙慄]. One of the top commanders of the Black Ghosts, renowned for being akin to a demon.

However, this man, famous for his prowess, had his neck severed like a bug without even a proper resistance.

Just a month ago, could anyone have imagined such a scene?

The men here were never afraid of death. From the moment they chose to align themselves with Sapa, they accepted the fate of becoming tangled corpses on some battlefield.

Yet, such a sight, imagined as their final moment, never existed in their thoughts. It was natural that none among them envisioned their last moments being dragged here like criminals, unable to resist, and having their necks severed.

Death is not all the same.

This macabre feast of worthless deaths was enough to instill fear even in those who had resigned themselves to becoming fertilizer in a field.

«How tedious.»

Amidst this eerie ambiance, there was only one person untouched by fear.

Jang Ilso lightly sipped from the cup, then spoke.

«How many are left?»

«There are a total of 362 scheduled for today. Just a while ago, Jo Pyo was the 178th.»

«About half remaining.»

Jang Ilso sighed, leaning against the throne.

«If you find it dull, I'll take care of the rest of the executions.»

«No, that's not necessary.»

At Ho Gamyong's words, Jang Ilso subtly shook his head.

«After all, we used to eat from the same pot. Isn't it proper to at least witness their final moments? I'm someone with that level of consideration.»

«And...»

Jang Ilso slowly lowered his gaze, surveying the crowd filling the square. A satisfied smile appeared on his lips as he observed the terror-stricken faces.

«Originally, in such events, the higher-ups should participate. It'll make it more meaningful, won't it?»

«You are right, Ryeonju.»

Ho Gamyong glanced at Jang Ilso's complexion before hesitantly asking,

«Would hastening the executions a bit be...?»

«Tsk, Gamyong-ah.»

«Yes, Lord Ryeonju.»

«Though they're scoundrels who lived like rats and difficult criminals to spare, aren't they still human?»

«...»

«Hastening their deaths out of annoyance isn't proper conduct. Proceed as scheduled.»

«Yes, Ryeonju.»

Ho Gamyong reluctantly nodded.

Hmm. Hard to say. The fate of those slated for execution today won't change. And they themselves are aware they'll die today.

Continuing the executions at a leisurely pace seemed like extending their time alive, even if just for a little.

Yet, looking at it differently, it merely prolonged the time these people spent trembling in despair, awaiting their deaths.

'Pitiable.'

Ho Gamyong didn't particularly harbor compassion for anyone, but he couldn't withhold sympathy for those trembling in fear, waiting for their turn.

However, that's all it was. In reality, it was an inevitable outcome. From the moment they harbored ill intentions towards Sapaeryeon, their fate had been sealed.

«Continue the executions.»

«Yes!»

At Ho Gamyong's command, the executioners swiftly began their task. Another traitor was dragged out.

Jang Ilso nonchalantly observed the scene, raising his cup.

«What a splendid sight.»

One life vanished, and one glass of liquor emptied once more.

One life, and yet another life.

The executions, entwined with blood, continued until the sun hung low, painting the world in twilight hues over the western mountains.

Oddly enough, on this day, the crimson glow seemed to stain even the pristine white marble where Jang Ilso sat.

«Hmm.»

Jang Ilso, in his white attire, gazed silently at his drink. Watching the undisturbed calmness within the glass seemed to calm his slightly agitated mind.

Raising his head, Jang Ilso's gaze shifted towards a servant standing beside the bed.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed.

«Why are you trembling so?»

«Rye... Ryeonju...»

The servant, already pale, now seemed almost bluish.

«Feeling unwell? Go and rest.»

«Oh, no, Lord Ryeonju! How could I dare...»

«Tsk.»

Jang Ilso clicked his tongue. Unlike his earlier gaze upon the people below the stairs, his glance softened considerably.

«Then, fetch me a stronger drink. It seems the bloody odor is so overpowering that I can't smell a thing.»

«I-I will, Lord Ryeonju!»

«No rush. Take your time.»

The servant, visibly shaken, hurriedly dashed outside, and Jang Ilso smiled softly to himself.

«Why are those kids so afraid of me?»

In truth, he did wonder.

There were plenty of tyrants ready to kill or torment lowly servants. However, Jang Ilso had never killed a servant unskilled in martial arts, never coveted their bodies, nor did he torment them on a whim. On the contrary, he had even paid them handsomely if they had to stop their work.

Yet, despite this, their gaze towards him remained steeped in fear, which he found quite amusing.

«What do these lowly ones understand? They find it hard just to look.»

«Tsk, again with that.»

Jang Ilso sighed lightly.

«They aren't lowly. Why do you keep saying that about the ones who are doing their jobs well?»

«...»

«The term 'lowly' isn't for such people. It's for those who act out of place, occupy seats beyond their station, and behave like pigs.»

«I will keep that in mind.»

«Don't just say it — try to understand, Gamyong-ah.»

Jang Ilso gave a slight reprimand, but Ho Gamyong addressed him without a change in expression.

«Ryeonju.»

«Speak.»

«... Will you continue the executions tomorrow as well?»

«There's still about two days left, isn't there?»

«That's the plan.»

«Then so be it. Ah, it's so frustrating to sit around all day... I suppose that's what comes with the position of Ryeonju.»

«The losses are too significant, Ryeonju.»

Upon hearing this, Jang Ilso suddenly revealed a deep smile.

His face, illuminated by the flickering torch, appeared extremely wicked.