

## Chapter 1237

Who has come? (2)

“I need to change into dry clothes!”

«No, I need to wash first!»

«No! We just need a dry place to shelter from the rain! As long as there’s a roof!»

«Food.»

«We have already eaten earlier, Sago»

«Food!»

«...»

Gwak Hwanso just stared blankly at the people bustling around him. Despite the cold rain relentlessly pounding their faces and the strong wind pushing against their bodies, he remained in a daze.

‘What are these people thinking...? Why did they come all the way here?’

No, that’s not the right way to think. He should be grateful just for them coming this far.

But... swimming through the raging typhoon to reach Hainan...

«Oh, why are you just standing there!»

«Probably because none of us are used to living in the warm south! We’re slow to burst!»

«Wow, your guest is getting soaked in the rain!»

«If this were Hwasan, someone would’ve been blown away by now!»

But why are these guys acting like this?

Just keeping their mouths shut and showing a bit of reverence or solemnity would help them exude an aura of nobility, but why do they have to resort to such negativity and ruin the atmosphere... Why...

«No! Do we have to keep waiting?»

What’s most disappointing to Gwak Hwanso is the fact that the person yelling and fussing over their wet hair stuck to their face is not someone from Hwasan.

‘That’s... Namgung Dowi, isn’t it?’

Despite living in Haenam, Gwak Hwanso couldn’t fail to recognize Namgung Dowi, the Mountain-Cutting Sword [단악검(斷岳劍)]. Their encounter at the martial arts competition had left a strong impression on him, enough to evoke a sense of fierce competition.

«...Do guests come here once a decade? Doesn’t he know how to guide us? Huh?»

«Dowi, calm down for now.»

«No, Hyeong! These bastards are...»

Fortunately, Gwak Hwanso didn’t have to intervene as Haenam’s Sect Leader, Geum Yangbaek, arrived, charging through the pouring rain, even his eyebrows fluttering in the wind.

Swearing on his honor, Gwak Hwanso had never seen Sect Leader run so quickly before.

«You, you said you came from Hwasan?»

Suddenly, Geum Yangbaek, who had abruptly stopped (almost slipping in the rain), widened his eyes and looked at the group standing in front of the gate.

‘Sect Leader...’

Gwak Hwanso sent a sympathetic glance towards Geum Yangbaek, who seemed to share his embarrassment. But then, in that moment...

«Excuse me, but may I ask if you are the Sect Leader of Haenam?»

With lightning speed, Baek Cheon, refined and composed, politely confronted Geum Yangbaek. Flustered, Geum Yangbaek hastily responded,

«I-I must gather my wits. I am Geum Yangbaek, the Sect Leader of Haenam!»

“I am Baek Cheon of Hwasan. I am currently acting as Vice Sect Leader representing the intention of Hwasan’s Sect Leader.»

It was an impeccable confrontation, as if drawn in a picture. Behind Baek Cheon, the individuals who had been fussing moments ago were now standing neatly, their garments adjusted, in perfect posture.

«Uh, well...»

In that moment of bewilderment, Gwak Hwanso pointed his finger. Looking at their expressions as if they were saying, ‘Is something wrong?’ with the underlying implication of ‘Are you trying to deceive us?’, a sense of enlightenment washed over him.

«Th-that scammer...»

In that moment, Geum Yangbaek turned sharply towards Gwak Hwanso, reprimanding him sternly.

«You! In front of our esteemed guests who have graced Haenam with their presence, what nonsense are you spouting? Have you lost your mind in the wind?»

«W-well, Sect Leader, it’s not...»

«What do you mean it’s not?!»

«T-those individuals, just a moment ago, were definitely...»

«Individuals? Have you truly lost your mind? Can’t you close your mouth this instant?»

«Huh...»

Feeling unjustly accused, Gwak Hwanso glanced around, looking for support. Surely, there were witnesses who had seen what happened earlier... but they all avoided his gaze, clearly signaling that they didn’t want to get involved and risk angering the Sect Leader.

‘Damn bastards...’

Tears welled up in Gwak Hwanso’s eyes. In a world where there was no one to trust, even those who had seemed to stand by him were now abandoning him to avoid Sect Leader’s wrath.

As Gwak Hwanso, feeling the harshness of the world keenly, met the gaze of Geum Yangbaek, the latter turned his head towards Baek Cheon.

«I apologize. The disciples were startled...»

«Don't worry about it.»

Baek Cheon smiled warmly, despite the pouring rain, radiating an unmatched warmth from his face.

«Given the circumstances you've been through, it's understandable that your nerves are on edge. Normally, we should have followed the proper procedures and informed the Sect Leader before coming to see you, but we were unaware of the situation in Haenam and came without upholding proper etiquette. Please forgive our rudeness.»

Gwak Hwanso was in awe of Baek Cheon's thoughtfulness.

«How can you be so considerate even in these circumstances? Just the fact that you got here through this storm to visit our sect is worthy of admiration.»

«Sect Leader, you're being deceived...»

«...»

With just a glance, Geum Yangbaek silenced Gwak Hwanso, then quickly regained his composure and cautiously asked Baek Cheon.

«Uh, well... more importantly...»

Despite starting to speak, he hesitated slightly. In truth, Baek Cheon appeared to be of an age where addressing him with deference wouldn't be unusual, but something from the earlier conversation caught him off guard. Eventually, he subtly changed his tone and asked Baek Cheon.

“Did you say... Vice Sect Leader?”

“Yes.”

Baek Cheon nodded with a gentle smile.

“It may seem unusual, but that's the case. I have been delegated the authority by the Sect Leader of Hwasan, serving as the Vice Sect Leader and also as a special envoy of Cheonumaeng to request a meeting with the Sect Leader of Haenam.”

A chill ran down Geum Yangbaek's spine, perhaps intensified by the cold rain.

‘Vice Sect Leader.’

It was a title one rarely heard.

Usually, the position of Acting Sect Leader or Vice Sect Leader was assumed temporarily by the successor to the current Sect Leader before formally taking over the role. It was a common practice in the royal courts or in family clans, but in Gangho, it was extremely rare. The reason was simple: power vacuums due to the decline or illness of those in power were uncommon in Gangho.

In Gangho, where strength often increased with age rather than diminishing, why would there be a need for a «Vice Sect Leader» position?

Nevertheless, the fact that they had created this role and appointed someone to it, sending them to Haenam, must signify how important they considered their mission.

‘It means they regard us highly!’

His fingertips trembled involuntarily. Come to think of it, everyone standing behind Baek Cheon seemed extraordinary in their own right.

“Then, are the others also from Hwasan...”

It was a question about whether they were all people from Hwasan. Sensing the hint, the people waiting in the back all stepped forward to introduce themselves.

“I am Namgung Dowi, the Young Lord of Namgung clan. Currently, I am temporarily assuming the position of the family head on behalf of my late father.”

“I am Tang Pae, the Young Lord of Sichuan Tang Clan. I am here on behalf of the family head.”

“I am Seol Sobaek, the Lord of the Northern Sea Ice Palace!”

In an instant, Geum Yangbaek, engulfed in shock, widened his eyes.

‘Hwasan, Namgung, Tang, and even the Ice Palace?’

Each name was as prestigious as the next. Even if one of them had visited Haenam alone, there could be no negligence in their reception.

Yet, individuals with such prestige and authority had collectively visited Haenam, even piercing through this raging typhoon.

Geum Yangbaek’s lips quivered. Of course, it wasn’t due to the cold. No matter how cold the rain, it couldn’t penetrate his body, that had learned martial arts.

“Thank...”

Geum Yangbaek forced his trembling lips to open. Unsure of what to say, he uttered the most appropriate words first.

«Thank you for visiting Haenam...»

Baek Cheon was about to respond with a warm smile when voices from behind them grew louder.

«Th-this atmosphere... it’s nice, but... cough... could we find a place to avoid the rain before I drop dead?»

«Shut your mouth, you Sapa bastard.»

«I... I feel like I’m really going to die... cough... cough...»

«It’s okay, it’s okay. Losing one Sapa scoundrel won’t change anything.»

«...Are you even human?»

Im Sobyong glared, pale as a corpse, then spat blood. Baek Cheon glanced at him briefly with an expression of helplessness before clearing his throat and speaking.

«I’m sorry, but if it wouldn’t be impolite, could we first find a place to shelter from the rain? Everyone’s stamina is greatly depleted from swimming across the sea...»

Geum Yangbaek suddenly snapped back to his senses.

«I-I can’t believe this breach of etiquette! What are you all doing? Quickly, escort our esteemed guests to the guesthouse! Hurry!»

«Yes!»

Geum Yangbaek bowed deeply.

«We'll discuss the details later. For now, it's best for you to rest a bit.»

«We appreciate your consideration. Then, if you'll excuse us.»

«We'll escort you this way!»

Lee Jayang, keenly observant, stepped forward and guided the visitors. Haenam's disciples, who had been staring blankly at the situation, finally snapped out of their daze and followed behind them like escorts.

Only two people remained, Geum Yangbaek and Gwak Hwanso, staring at the group heading towards the guesthouse with bewildered faces.

'Is this a dream?'

Gwak Hwanso lightly tapped his cheek. But he didn't need to confirm it by hitting herself — the rain drenching him and the chill in the air made it clear that this was reality.

'Are these really the special envoys of Cheonumaeng visiting Haenam?'

And those who are so prominent?

In Haenam... In Haenam, where a typhoon is raging... uh?

"...Sect Leader"

«Hmm?»

Gwak Hwanso spoke with a bewildered expression.

«Um... It's about what was said earlier.»

«Speak.»

«Just a while ago... Did Baek Cheon Dojang... or rather, Vice Sect Leader, mention crossing the sea?»

«...I believe so.»

«Now?»

Rumble!

Gwak Hwanso and Geum Yangbaek simultaneously looked up at the distant sky. The fierce storm and pouring lightnings were clearly visible.

For a moment, a profound silence fell between them.

They knew the sea well. As people who understood how the sea behaved in such storms, they couldn't help but imagine what the ocean would look like with waves crashing violently.

Thinking about the immense waves that must be crashing only a short distance away, they awkwardly chuckled at each other.

«It seems we misunderstood.»

«Yeah, that must be it, right? Haha... Unless we've lost our minds.»

«Haha... Yeah.»

«...Well...»

They remembered the words they heard many times from far away across the sea.

Hwasan is a sect that lives like there is no tomorrow.

It was then that they truly felt the weight of its meaning.