

Chapter 1030

But please understand (5)

«A problem, you say?»

Hyun Jong tried to mask the uneasiness building in his chest and asked as calmly as possible.

«Yes, my lord.»

«What kind...»

Beop Jong slowly lowered his head, taking his time.

«But first, we should sort out the situation.»

«Yes, Abbot.»

«As you know, Magyo has taken control of Hangzhou. Based on the information we obtained through Beggars Sect, Magyo is not only slaughtering Black Ghost Fortress's members but also the common people there.»

Hyun Jong clenched his lips. While he had suspected this to some extent, hearing it from Beop Jong added another layer of gravity to the situation.

«Is this information reliable?»

«It's the news we received a short while ago from the beggars. They don't have a complete understanding of the situation in Hangzhou, but it appears that a brutal massacre is indeed taking place.»

«How should we address this...»

Hyun Jong sighed with a heavy heart.

People die even during moments of hesitation — Chung Myung's words were true.

«What's the scale of the enemy forces?»

«We're not certain. As you know, Beggar Sect is part of the Gupailbang, and they mostly withdrew three years ago.»

«That's true.»

Even the common beggars are under the influence of Beggars Sect, so there should be no problem in getting the message across. However, there might be a difference between direct confirmation from the Beggars Sect and what we hear.

«My lord.»

«Yes, Abbot. Please go on.»

«As you know, Magyo's takeover is a matter that all Gangho should address. Didn't our ancestors unite their strength to face Magyo regardless of their affiliation?»

Hyun Jong nodded heavily.

«Especially you, Sect Leader of Hwasan, must be well aware of how devastating Magyo's presence is.»

«Of course.»

Beop Jong raised his cup to his lips for a moment, as if his throat was dry.

«As you know, I've been keeping an eye on Magyo's followers. They are beings that never truly disappear, even if they retreat.»

This statement was one that even Hyun Jong couldn't deny. Wasn't it Beop Jong who, at a time when Hwasan was living as though Magyo didn't exist, asked them to go to the Northern Sea to track them down?

Although his trust in the Beop Jong of that time had waned considerably, at least it couldn't be denied that he had been vigilant against Magyo.

«Now that they have revealed Demonic Arts, I intend to do everything I can to uproot Magyo. That is a duty that all Gangho should naturally bear as those living in this land.»

Hyun Jong nodded emphatically.

Throughout the journey to this point, Hyun Jong had been filled with worries. Given his many disagreements with Beop Jong, it was hard to dispel the lingering unease. However, at least when it came to Magyo, it seemed that their intentions were not so different.

Hyun Jong let out a relieved sigh.

«That's why I must express my gratitude, my lord.»

At that moment, Beop Jong bowed deeply to Hyun Jong. It was a gesture of personal thanks, a matter of private etiquette, not as the leader of Shaolin.

«Why, why are you doing this, Abbot?»

Baffled by Beop Jong's gesture, Hyun Jong looked up, and Beop Jong smiled gently.

«No matter how well I express it, I cannot deny that there is a certain awkwardness between us, my lord.»

«Well...»

«For the hard steps you've taken, it's for the safety of Gangho and the lives of the common people. As a Buddhist and a fellow martial artist, there is nothing I can do but express my gratitude for your decision.»

» Please, Abbot, there's no need for this. It's a matter of cause, isn't it?»

Beop Jong shook his head in disapproval. He closed his eyes and chanted prayers, then he looked at Hyun Jong with a deep, penetrating gaze.

«I'm saying this sincerely, my lord.»

«Yes.»

«Based on the information I've gathered, I plan to request assistance from various martial arts sects across the Central Plains, including Gupailbang. The strength of those here alone may not be sufficient, so gathering strength as soon as possible is important.»

«Cheonumaeng will actively cooperate as well.»

Hyun Jong's resolute response prompted Beop Jong to speak with a solemn voice.

«However, there is an issue I mentioned earlier.»

«Yes, please go on.»

«To reiterate, this is a matter that can't be delayed. We don't have the luxury to nitpick or measure various aspects. To save the common people and suppress Magyo's momentum,

someone needs to head to Gangnam immediately. Waiting and observing will result in too much damage. I can't fathom that Sapaeryeon will do anything for the common people.»

«I see.»

That was also a valid point.

«But, my lord.»

«Yes, Abbot.»

«As you know, currently, Shaolin cannot cross the river.»

«...Excuse me?»

At that moment, Hyun Jong's expression changed abruptly.

«The curse-bound pact of the Yangtze treaty hasn't fully lost its effect. Therefore, Gupailbang is in no position to cross that river to confront Magyo.»

«Oh, Abbot, what's this...»

Hyun Jong looked at Beop Jong with a bewildered expression.

«Now is not the time to argue about such an agreement!»

«Of course, I feel the same way. But, my lord, it's not our place to decide, is it?»

Beop Jong sighed deeply.

«Even if their leader, Jang Ilso, was to be someone like you, willing to set aside his ego for the greater good, he will try to gain some advantage through this pact one way or another. And, more importantly, will there even be effective dialogue with him?»

Now Hyun Jong's gaze at Beop Jong was confused.

«If Jang Ilso didn't intend to seek assistance from the Gupailbang, why would he bother reporting the news about Magyo?»

«It's difficult to guess his intentions. After all, the one in question is Jang Ilso, isn't it?»

«That...»

Hyun Jong bit his lip. This is a dilemma. He knows the situation that Shaolin and he himself are in. That's why saying, 'Jang Il So knows the situation, so try to negotiate,' isn't an option.

But not saying it...

It was at that moment.

«Well.»

Beop Jong, in a subtle tone, broached the main topic.

«I apologize, but I believe I must make a difficult request of you, my lord.»

Hyun Jong clenched his fist unconsciously.

He had a sense of what Beop Jong was about to say. He wanted to leave this place right now. However, Beop Jong's words dug into his ears with a nonchalant demeanor, not giving Hyun Jong the chance to get up.

«As far as I know, Cheonumaeng isn't bound by the Gangnam treaty.»

«Abbot.»

«I request this of you, Alliance Leader.»

Beop Jong bowed his head to Hyun Jong once again.

«For the suffering common people in Gangnam, for their lives, difficult as it may be, can Cheonumaeng cross the river and confront Magyo first?»

Hyun Jong, his fist so tight that his fingernails dug into his palm, glared at Beop Jong with eyes burning.

«May I ask one thing?»

«Please go ahead.»

«...The request you're making... Is it truly for the sake of the common people in Gangnam, or is it to push Cheonumaeng into the jaws of death?»

«Of course, it's the former.»

Beop Jong replied without hesitation, as if he had no doubt. Hyun Jong bit his lip so hard it almost bled.

«Is that your... I mean, Shaolin's intention?»

«Yes.»

«Really!»

Hyun Jong raised his voice.

«Is it truly Shaolin's intention?»

Beop Jong remained silent. Hyun Jong spoke with force.

«I thought we were simply taking different paths. Of course, there were times when we were frustrated, and times when we were angry, but I thought it was because we looked at the world with different eyes! It was because we had different ways of protecting the world!»

Beop Jong listened in silence.

«I believed that our hearts for the common people were the same. That's what Shaolin is all about! That's what it should be about! But is that really Shaolin's intention? Really?»

Beop Jong looked at Hyun Jong with a strange expression. His following words were enough to take the wind out of Hyun Jong's sails.

«This Buddhist monk finds it difficult to fathom why the Alliance Leader seem so displeased.»

«What are you saying now...»

«That day!»

Beop Jong's resolute voice cut off Hyun Jong's words.

«On the day we faced each other at the Yangtze river, did you not clearly say to me, my lord, that Cheonumaeng would act on what they believe is right?»

Hyun Jong fell silent.

«Although it was a bitter thing to say, on another note, I admired it. I know how difficult those words are. But...»

Beop Jong smiled as he continued.

«Now it seems that what Cheonumaeng calls 'righteousness' changes its meaning depending on the situation.»

«Abbot!»

Unable to contain his anger any longer, Hyun Jong stood up abruptly. In response, Beop Jong spoke with a cold tone.

«Fifteen days.»

Hyun Jong remained silent.

«There are fifteen days left until the Yangtze non-aggression treaty expires. From this moment onward.»

Hyun Jong still said nothing.

«The moment that time ends, Gupailbang, the Odaesega, and the rest will cross the river to hold Magyo accountable for their deeds. So, my lord, you simply have to choose. Whether to cross the river first, or...»

Beop Jong's cold gaze swept over Hyun Jong.

«Wait here for Gupailbang and Odaesega to move.»

While Hyun Jong's anger flared, Beop Jong remained calm, casually lifting his teacup that had just started to cool. His face, despite the anger simmering beneath the surface, was astonishingly composed.

«My lord, I'm also curious.»

Hyun Jong was at a loss for words.

«I wonder if what Cheonumaeng calls 'morals' and 'righteousness' is something that stands even when they have to endure everything, or if it's just a shallow trick that comes out only when it's convenient.»

«Right now, that...»

Beop Jong reached out and lightly pressed on Hyun Jong's teacup. The lukewarm tea suddenly bubbled up vigorously.

«Of course, I hope that Cheonumaeng is a place that truly sticks to their principles. That's my heartfelt wish.»

Hyun Jong gazed at Beop Jong in silence. Devoid of any trust or confidence in the Abbot.

Beop Jong continued,

«I'll share the information we receive from the Beggars Sect. If necessary, we will provide everything you need, including supplies.»

The two men's gazes clashed in the void.

«Please make a wise decision.»

In Hyun Jong's eyes, there was a profound mix of hatred and anger which didn't fit a Taoist.

«I will go.»

«Yes, please investigate.»

Hyun Jong immediately turned to leave, walking in long strides, he swung the door open.

As he took a step outside, he heard Beop Jong's soft voice from behind,

«Please convey my regards to Hwasan Geomhyeop as well.»

Hyun Jong left without a response. The door slammed shut.

In the empty room, Beop Jong's lips curved into a mysterious smile.

«People are truly interesting.»

His mumbled words of resentment filled the still room.