

## Chapter 1039

You'll find out soon enough. (4)

«Then, investigate.»

«Don't forget.»

The middle-aged man risen from his seat and looked down at Beop Jong with cold eyes. But instead of getting angry Beop Jong just smiled.

«We'll be watching how you all respond. If your actions don't match your eloquent tongues, all the privileges you've enjoyed so far will be revoked!»

The middle-aged man said firmly.

«You should pay the price as much as the treatment you've received until now. Do you understand what I'm saying, Abbot?»

«Of course.»

Beop Jong answered seriously, but he could sense the man's displeasure.

«Don't forget that the Emperor is angry.»

«...»

«One should pray that senility doesn't fall upon them with old age. A toothless tiger hardly worth anything.»

«...Amitabul.»

Beop Jong rose from his seat and closed his eyes. With a dissatisfied look in his eyes, the middle-aged man turned around.

Thud!

The door slammed shut. Only then did a deep sigh escape Beop Jong's lips.

Kiiiiiiik.

A little while later, the door opened cautiously, and Beop Gye entered with a stern expression.

«Abbot.»

«Come and sit.»

«Yes.»

Beop Gye sat down with a sense of unease and opened his mouth.

«What's the matter?»

«It's the same old story. Imperial Palace is taking this situation seriously, and they're demanding that we punish the Demonic Cult immediately.»

«...»

«And if we don't, they'll hold us responsible.»

«That's... «

Beop Gye sighed in astonishment, and Beop Jong chuckled. It was a mocking laughter unusual for a buddhist.

«The Imperial Palace has always been like this.»

In principle, within the country, they shouldn't be able to ignore martial arts sects. But in reality, they didn't impose sanctions on factions like the Shaolin or Wudang.

Is it because of the principle of non-interference in government affairs?

Not likely.

Externally, they claim that the government and the Murim do not interfere with each other, but that's impossible. It's just an excuse created by the government to avoid getting involved with the matters of Gangho.

The fundamental reason is that the presence of the Gangho Murim benefits them. While it may seem that government's influence extends to every corner of its territory, in reality, it doesn't work that way.

If it was possible, how would rebellions occur, and how would warlord exist?

Moreover, Imperial Palace's influence is highly limited to the south of the Yangtze River and not absolute to the north of it. Especially in terms of security, the government alone has its limitations.

So, from the government's perspective, the existence of Murim isn't all bad. At least for those who uphold justice, having orthodox martial factions around provides a certain level of security.

But...

«At times like this, I envy the Sapaeryeon.»

«Well, Abbot, what do you mean...?»

«Isn't that right?»

Beop Jong smiled softly.

«They're the ones who created this situation, but now they're laying the blame on us, who are innocent.»

In response to Beop Jong's words, Beop Gye hesitated for a moment and sighed.

The relationship between the government and the Murim is always like this. When there are no problems, they treat them like mere gangsters, but when issues arise, they place all the blame on them.

However, it's not the same for the unorthodox factions. From the beginning, they don't have a clear headquarters like the orthodox factions do. They emerge like poisonous mushrooms in places where the government's influence doesn't reach.

The vast Yangtze River, where the government's control cannot reach everywhere. Deep mountains that are difficult for human hands to touch. And the region of Gangnam with administrative gaps.

In all these places, Sapaeryeon has grown in influence. Unlike the orthodox factions that are close to the capital and can never escape the government's influence.

«Why not send the military directly if it's so urgent?»

«It seems that the situation in the north is not looking good.»

«Oh...»

«That's why it seems they can't mobilize the military right now. It appears that even the military near the capital is being transferred to the north. In such a situation, they probably can't afford to focus beyond the Yangtze River.»

As if he understood the situation, Beop Gye nodded.

It's as if troubles come all at once, and unfortunately, the situation is intertwined this way.

«So they're laying the blame on us.»

«That's right.»

Beop Jong let out a bitter smile. But Beop Gye still didn't seem entirely convinced.

«If they were going to be so sensitive to the matters of Gangho, wouldn't it have been better if we provided assistance to Sapaeryeon when they first sought out for it? If we had, the situation might not have reached this point.»

«What Imperial Palace expects from the Sapaeryeon is entirely different from the Demonic Cult.»

«...»

«Even if the Sapaeryeon is called "the evil" faction [Sa], they are people who operate within the laws of Gangho. Even if Jang Ilso was to control Gangho completely, would he dare to aim for the emperor's position?»

Beop Jong posed the question, tilting his head.

«Jang Ilso might be ambitious, but such a thing cannot happen. It's different from controlling Gangho through power alone. Governing a country is not something people like us can do.»

«That's right, Abbot.»

«But what about Magyo?»

Beop Jong let out a sigh with a stern expression.

«Magyo is a different case. They don't differentiate between commoners and the emperor. They don't follow the laws of the Murim or the palace's policies. Imperial Palace must have experienced that fact firsthand a hundred years ago.»

«I see...»

Unlike Gangho, which treats past events as just that, Imperial Palace keeps thorough records of everything. Records of Magyo's arising from a hundred years ago would still be vividly preserved.

«So, it's understandable that they're reacting so strongly.»

Beop Gye nodded now, as if he understood the situation properly.

«So, what will you do?»

«If that's the case, not yet.»

Beop Jong shook his head.

«If we cross the river just to push them away, we'll have to bear the consequences ourselves. Do you think they'll care about the damage we suffer?»

«But going against Imperial Palace's orders could lead to trouble.»

Beop Jong grinned.

«Don't worry. Maybe it's because they're in a hurry, but it seems that you made a mistake too.»

«A mistake, you say?»

«Didn't they say that all the military is being withdrawn to the north? Even if we slightly deviate from their orders, they won't be able to do anything to us for a while.»

«Oh...»

«As long as we resolve this issue not too late, they won't scrutinize what's happening now. There's no need to rush frantically.»

Beop Gye nodded quietly. But deep down, he felt a slight unease.

Leaving aside the feasibility, if Imperial Palace is urgently requesting assistance, isn't it the duty of a subject to follow their wishes?

But he couldn't bring himself to voice this thought.

«How is the situation progressing?»

«They are still staying in Hangzhou. They will probably start moving to another location soon.»

The weight on Beop Gye's heart was evident in his response.

The fact that Magyo's movements are slower than expected is a cause for concern. This means they are thoroughly destroying the city of Hangzhou. Considering how many people might have fallen victim to Demonic Arts... It kept Beop Gye up at night, making eating feel like chewing on sand.

«The Sapaeryeon must be in a bind too.»

A small smile crept onto Beop Jong's lips. In this situation, that smile on Abbot's face looked so unfamiliar to Beop Gye's eyes.

«Abbot, what about the support from other factions?»

«There will probably be contact soon.»

«Isn't it too late? It's not just any enemy, it's Magyo! Why are they dragging their feet like this?»

«Don't they have quite a distance to cover? Even if we prepare and send reinforcements right away, it'll take time.»

Beop Gye's expression gradually hardened.

Isn't Beop Jong's reaction too similar to what it was when they requested support due to Sapaeryeon not too long ago?

'Perhaps...'

A disturbing thought briefly crossed Beop Gye's mind, but he quickly brushed it aside. It was not something he should even consider.

Seeing Beop Gye like that, Beop Jong smiled faintly.

«You seem to be deep in thought.»

«No, Abbot. I'm just...»

«Beop Gye.»

«Yes, Abbot.»

«Not knowing is sometimes comfortable.»

«...»

«But sometimes it's an undeniable fact. The duty of someone who understands first is to show the harsh reality to those who choose to turn a blind eye to things they shouldn't.»  
Beop Gye, who didn't quite grasp Beop Jong's words, remained silent. Beop Jong explained further.

«The reason the position of Shaolin is not as influential as it used to be is very simple. People no longer need the Shaolin.»

«Abbot?»

«When there's a formidable enemy, there's a need for someone to follow. But when there's no longer an enemy, they tend to think about their own gains.»

Beop Jong's voice was calm and solemn.

«Soon, all people will understand. They will come to know who has been preserving peace in Gangho, who has been upholding the traditions of the orthodox factions. When that time comes, they will understand why the Shaolin is the Shaolin.»

«But, Abbot... if it happens that way...»

«It's something we must bear.»

Beop Jong quietly recited his disapproval.

«The role of those guarding the outer walls in contact with external forces is not to stop the enemy. It's to risk their lives to report the enemy's intrusion, to prevent greater harm.»

«That's...»

Beop Jong said firmly,

«How can you not consider such sacrifices noble? It's the same. Sometimes, you have to endure things to prevent greater harm.»

Beop Gye bowed deeply.

«Why are you telling me this?»

«Because it's something you need to know.»

The gaze Beop Jong directed at him was icy.

«Bearing responsibility can be harsh at times. You can't simply go forward with a righteous heart alone. Even if others don't know, you need to understand this.»

Instead of answering, Beop Gye bit his lip. Today, Beop Jong seemed like someone he didn't know. He looked so different.

«In the end, even the Imperial Palace will have no choice but to rely on us. Not just the Palace, but other factions, and even...»

Beop Jong's eyes gleamed with cold determination.

But in that moment, Beop Gye found his voice.

«One thing, Abbot. Didn't you mention it? Imperial Palace remembers the history from a hundred years ago.»

«... What's the problem with that?»

«So, if they truly feel the danger of Magyo, won't they look for Hwasan, not Shaolin?»

Beop Jong's face froze in an instant.

«Is that...?»

Feeling his anger, Beop Gye bowed deeply.

«Is today's Hwasan the same as it was in the past?»

«I'm sorry, Abbot.»

«This...»

Beop Jong bit his lip, containing his anger as he spoke, his voice slightly agitated.

«What is Cheonumaeng doing right now?»

«They haven't shown any movement, Abbot.»

«That's right... It should be that way. They have no other choice. Their righteousness is something they'll shout about only when their calculations say it's safe.»

A cold smirk appeared on Beop Jong's lips.

But in that moment, Beop Gye, who had been watching his leader's reactions, spoke up quietly.

«However, there's... It's not certain, but there are reports that around ten people, including Hwasan Geomhyeop, crossed the river last night. It's not confirmed yet...»

Clink!

Beop Gye, who was carefully choosing his words, was startled when Beop Jong's suddenly lifted his head.

The writing desk that had been in front of Beop Jong lay shattered, scattered in pieces as he paced back and forth.

«Well, Abbot.»

«Who did you say?»

«T-That... It's Hwasan Geomhyeop. Members of Hwasan. About ten individuals...»

«Check again immediately. Right now!»

«...»

«What are you waiting for? Can't you hear me?»

«Yes, yes, Abbot! I'll verify it right away!»

Beop Gye rushed out in a panic.

Watching his retreating figure with a fierce gaze, Beop Jong bit his lip until it bled.

'Hwasan Geomhyeop.'

Beop Jong knew it was an excessive reaction. What could just about ten people do in a situation like this?

However... the moment he heard those words, an indescribable sense of unease surged within him.

“He crossed the river?”

Coldness flowed from Beop Jong’s eyes.

The praying beads lay spread out on the cold, stone floor, gradually chilling.