

## Chapter 1144

Did you bring it? (3)

“Did you see it yesterday?”

“What?”

“That... the place where Cheonumaeng’s members reside, Jangwon, you know?”

«Oh, that. Why bring up that story now? It’s already become a legend around here.»

The listener burst into a hollow laugh. As he rightly mentioned, the Jangwon area, where Hwasan resided, had gained significant notoriety in Gugang.

«Don’t even mention it. Apparently, Mister Jang fell ill again.»

«Again?»

«What do you mean, ‘again’? I told that man to hire more people, but he didn’t listen.»

«He didn’t listen, that man. People were hired, but those hired couldn’t last three days and ran away!»

«That’s true.»

«Oh, that gentleman fell ill again. He’s really draining his wealth this way.»

«Well, is wealth the issue? First and foremost, people need to survive.»

«Tsk tsk tsk. I’d rather die than earn that much.»

The person they discussed was none other than the proprietor of the largest food provider in the region. Hwasan had approached him for sourcing food, which brought both prosperity and trouble to him simultaneously.

«Seriously, what’s with the amount of food they are consuming?»

«Aren’t they martial artists who use their bodies? They’re bound to eat more than ordinary folks.»

«Still, that much? The amount those people consume could feed an entire village. It doesn’t even seem like there are that many people there...»

«Who knows? How would we know how the martial artists from Gangho live?»

There was no need for any external activities. Just the enormous quantity of meat and grains entering Jangwon was enough to make it a local sensation.

«And Mister Yu fell ill too.»

«Why Mister Yu? He has nothing to do with supplying food.»

«Ah, this person keeps saying ignorant things. What does Mister Yu do? Doesn’t he specialize in hay?»

«Is that so?»

«They said there are many beasts from Yunnan in Jangwon, consuming an insane amount of grass. So, Mister Yu recruited a lot of laborers last time... Wait a minute? At least twenty were hired back then. Fell ill?»

«Twenty? It's been over thirty. Among them, half are currently bedridden. Day and night, they've been cutting grass, turning the mountains around Jangwon into a barren land.»

«A... Hah... wow.»

The listener shook their head in disbelief. The more they heard, the more bizarre it all seemed.

«Even though they eat so well, why are these people always so disheveled whenever they pass by? I thought Cheonumang had accepted the Beggars Sect.»

«Haha, that's right. I heard they train more intensely than they eat.»

The speaker shook their head in disbelief.

«I thought those prestigious faction members were like sacred cranes in the sky, unreachable. But after seeing them train, I no longer envy them.»

«Envy them! Even if they offered me free admission, I'd run away. Who does that sort of thing?»

«True.»

No matter how hard the prominent martial artists from Gangho tried to approach the commoners, the gap remained uncrossable. It was challenging to shake off the aversion towards those who carried swords even during ordinary times.

While they might understand that these individuals were good people, the fear of being struck down by a blade at any moment was something anyone would inevitably have, being human.

Yet, Cheonumaeng was unexpectedly narrowing the distance between these martial artists and the common folk.

«They said they hired a large number of laborers this time.»

«Seriously. They brought in about thirty new laborers this time. Besides that, they hired people to manage Jangwon and tend to the animals.»

«Heh, quite something.»

“Thank goodness. How fortunate it is! Remember how many struggled half-starving because they couldn't venture out due to the ridiculous amount of bandits running amok? Now, aren't those people all going to that Jangwon to work and earn wages? Thanks to that, even Gugang has a bit of breathing room.”

“But... Is Cheonumaeng really that wealthy? I've heard that from food to hay, and even people's wages, it doesn't seem like a cheap affair.”

“Tsk tsk. Oh, you. Cheonumaeng is naturally rich. With all those prominent factions gathered, would they lack money?”

“Well, that's true, but...”

“It's not as costly as you might think.”

“What do you mean?”

The speaker giggled.

“Well, friend, let’s speak frankly. Hasn’t Cheonumaeng done so much for us? They saved Gugang from being ruined by pirates. Didn’t they also prevent those demonic bastards from Gangnam from invading?”

“What nonsense are you talking about? Who in Gugang wouldn’t feel grateful towards Cheonumaeng? Where’d you get that idea? Even the people from the basin of the Yangtze river who were stranded in the desolate land were rescued, weren’t they?”

“Right, right. But even after receiving wages for work and selling goods for full payment, who’s the one taking advantage of the situation?”

“So?”

“People working there have agreed to receive only half their wages, and both Mister Jang and Mister Yu are selling items without leaving any profit aside from labor wages.”

“Oh? Really? Crafty folks. So, what’s the issue? Are they fond of Hwasan?”

“Fond of it? Not quite, it caused an uproar.”

“... Why another uproar?”

“Seems that Sect Leader Hyun Jong, the head of Hwasan, had a fit, complaining that they weren’t being paid properly. He demanded full wages after finishing their work.”

“Oh... So, it was the Sect Leader of Hwasan?”

“Indeed. That’s very much like Sect Leader of Hwasan.”

“What, what did they say?”

“They probably said that if they received full wages, they’d be targeted by others in Gugang. Technically, not an entirely incorrect statement. Even I wouldn’t have stayed silent if it were me.”

“Hehehe... That’s quite amusing. Begging not to be paid.”

“The Sect Leader absolutely refused, but it seems he couldn’t crush the people’s spirits. They said they won’t work unless they’re paid the right amount, but for those who urgently need the work... What else could they do? Even that esteemed individual has situations beyond his control.”

“Perhaps we can say our Gugang residents triumphed over the esteemed Sect Leader?”

“In a manner of speaking.”

The two chuckled as they looked at each other.

As Cheonumaeng, including Hwasan, began to settle in Yangtze river region, the dying city began to come alive. With numerous major martial art sects residing here, even minor crimes and incidents seemed to vanish as if melting away like snow.

“However, why bring up such an obvious story?”

“Oh, my. I let it slip. So, you haven’t seen it?”

“What have I supposedly not seen since earlier? Is something happening in that manor?”

“No, for the past few days, strange lights have been emanating from that manor only at night. Really, you haven’t seen it?”

“I’m one to fall asleep as soon as the sun sets...”

“Tsk, tsk, tsk. Tonight, you must see it. I’ve been observing for days, and as the night deepens, a dazzling purple light suddenly flashes from there. It seems otherworldly, emitting a thick scent along with that light... I’ve never witnessed such a sight in my life.”

“Is it real?”

“Would I waste my time lying after having a good meal? You should confirm it tonight.”

“True. If it’s real, it’s truly astonishing. What on earth could be happening in that estate? A purple light emitting a fragrance...”

A man who had been nodding slightly suddenly slapped his thigh.

«By any chance... isn’t it someone from Hwasan who has achieved enlightenment?»

«Oh, come on, man! No matter how remarkable those people over there are, attaining enlightenment isn’t exactly an easy task, is it?»

“No, no. I mean, honestly, who in this world could possibly attain enlightenment? Isn’t it an act reserved only for those who possess the characteristics of a true hermit monk?”

“What does that have to do with this?”

“Think about it. Would that Wudang’s Sect Leader, even consider such a thing? Would that cursed Abbot from Shaolin attain liberation?”

“...”

“Other than Hwasan’s Hyun Jong, is there anyone else in this world known as a true Taoist monk? Even if they announced his ‘enlightenment’ tomorrow, I wouldn’t be the least bit surprised...”

“Well, it’s true that Sect Leader Hyun Jong is a remarkable person, but that’s a different matter...”

“What? Are you disrespecting Sect Leader Hyun Jong right now?”

As these words spilled out, passersby turned their heads toward them.

“Who?”

“Who dares disrespect Sect Leader Hyun Jong?”

“Which lunatic dares to speak ill of him?”

With fierce glares, several men began to approach aggressively, rolling up their sleeves.

Startled by their appearance, the man exclaimed in terror.

“No! No, it’s not true! There’s been a misunderstanding! How could that be possible! Hyun Jong of Mount Hwasan is undoubtedly the most remarkable figure in the world! I swear! I swear!”

Amidst his desperate cries to avoid punishment, the acclaimed Hyun Jong, whom they praised, was literally on the verge of enlightenment.

«Mmmph.»

With a thud, Hyun Jong collapsed onto the ground.

«Sect Leader, are you all right?»

«Mmm...»

Groaning continuously, a dark hue tainted Hyun Jong's pallid lips. Beside him, Hyun Sang and Hyun Young lay lifeless.

«Why did I... seek wealth and honor...»

«Here, Sect Leader! Water!»

«Mmm...»

The groans persisted from Hyun Jong's lips.

‘For what... reason have I needlessly increased my internal strength...’

That cunning bastard would occasionally force him to take his elixirs, thinking about his well-being. Yet, this scoundrel cleverly made use of it here!

«It's already been five days...»

«...It's almost done.»

Nodding, Hyun Jong gazed at the door from which billowed a continuous stream of white vapor.

In that moment,

Flash!

A dazzling purple light burst through the firmly closed doors.

«It's done!»

Simultaneously, a loud voice from inside was barely subsiding when someone forcefully kicked the door open and stepped out.

Thud!

«Ugh!»

Hyun Jong stared blankly at the figure emerging through the door. The person carried a massive bundle on their back, appearing larger than them, emitting purple vapor from their mouth.

«After practicing making Jasodan for a few times, my skills have improved! I thought all Jasodan were the same.»

«Mmm... Chung Myung. Is it done?»

At Hyun Jong's question, Chung Myung patted the bundle on his back.

«It's perfect! This time, Jasodan will be much more effective. Hehe!»

«...Well, that's a relief.»

You have ground up those old men for five whole days, it better be effective... damned scoundrel.

«Hehehe. Let's see how they react even after taking this. They're all done for, these rascals!»

Chuckling, Chung Myung quickly leaped away.

«Chung, Chung Myung...»

Hyun Jong, half extending his hand, weakly lowered it as he blankly watched Chung Myung's disappearing figure. Then, he turned his head to glance at the elders.

«...You all worked hard.»

«...Damn it.»

“ ... ”

Faint curses rang, accompanied by a subtle fragrance of Jasodan spreading softly in the air.