

Chapter 1233

So I heard that's true? (3)

«Da-Danju!»

“Why are you making such a fuss?”

“C-commander has arrived!”

«What? Already?»

Gwak Bo, the leader of Maninbang's Dongsimdan, went pale.

«Wasn't it supposed to take another two days?»

«I thought so too, but...»

Gwak Bo hastily looked outside. The ships designated for Hainin weren't fully prepared yet, and the arrival of the soldiers had been unexpectedly brought forward by two days.

«How... how are we going to manage this...»

Gwak Bo, still in shock, stared at the ships under construction.

«This is not the time for this! Where are commander and the forces now?»

«They entered the outskirts a little while ago!»

«Formation! Stop everything and get into formation! Commander is coming! What are you fools doing? I said, get into formation now!»

Panic ensued as the word 'commander' spread. Workers, bewildered, looked towards Gwak Bo's direction.

«The workforce! Continue working as you were! Don't stop!»

«Yes.»

The gathered warriors of Maninbang stood in tense lines, their faces taut with anticipation, their gaze fixed on the path leading from the forest.

Drip, drip.

Sweat rolled down the faces of some, not just from the scorching sun.

The Dongsimdan was responsible for the managing operations of Maninbang, akin to the military headquarters, and was directly under the command of Ho Gamyong. The sudden arrival of their superior put them all on edge.

«Stand up straight!»

«Yes!»

The sound of a dry throat clearing echoed sharply.

Soon, a group of warriors emerged from the bushes along the path.

Thud, thud, thud.

Ho Gamyong, leading the troops, approached the shore with not so fast steps.

Amidst the deathly silence, Ho Gamyong's gaze swept from left to right. Though his expression was inscrutable, his eyes missed nothing of the activity unfolding on the shore.

«We greet the commander!»

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The members of Dongsimdan, who had been standing in formation, simultaneously kneeled and paid their respects.

Maninbang, the dominant force not only in Guangdong but throughout Gangnam, now bowed before the only two figures worthy of such reverence within their ranks: the Ryeonju of Sapaeryeon Jang Ilso and the military commander Ho Gamyong.

Just by observing this scene, one could grasp how strong Ho Gamyong's position was within Maninbang.

Gwak Bo surreptitiously glanced at Ho Gamyong, still prostrated on the ground. However, deciphering thoughts from Ho Gamyong's perennially icy expression was no easy feat.

«Danju.»

Ho Gamyong's voice pierced through the air, startling Gwak Bo, who quickly bowed his head even lower. Beads of sweat adorned his forehead, dampened by nervous perspiration.

«Report.»

«Yes, commander! The procurement of ships heading to Hainan has been completed as instructed. However, due to recent unfavorable weather conditions, the construction of additional ships has not yet been completed.»

Gwak Bo halted there, keeping his head as still as possible while sneaking a glance upward to gauge Ho Gamyong's reaction. Then, hastily, he cast his gaze back down.

“Two days! The construction will be completed in two days!”

Thud.

At that moment, a faint sound reached Gwak Bo's ears. Recognizing it as the sound of footsteps crunching the sand on the white beach, Gwak Bo instinctively curled up and buried his head even deeper.

Thud.

Ho Gamyong's footsteps halted right in front of Gwak Bo's bowed head. Gwak Bo's back and face were drenched in sweat.

«Did you say two days?»

Gwak Bo, his face pale with fear, slowly lifted his head to meet Ho Gamyong's chilly gaze. It felt as if Ho Gamyong's gaze could pierce right through him.

«You have a talent for making things interesting with your words.»

«C-commander...»

«Don't repeat yourself, Danju. What did I instruct?»

«You... You said that you would lead the troops here in two days, and until then, we should prepare for the expedition to Hainan.»

«Indeed. I clearly said that.»

As Gwak Bo swallowed nervously, a cold voice echoed in his ear once more.

«So did you mean to finish the construction upon my arrival?»

“...”

“It seems that Dongsimdan has become quite lax in Ryeonju’s absence. Seeing how Danju, in his complacency, thought there would be no problem as long as he finished his work on time, I can’t help but feel disappointed.”

«P-Please spare me, commander!»

Gwak Bo begged, his head bowed even lower.

When people hear «Maninbang,» they often associate it with Jang Ilso’s name and his cruelty. But the truth is, the most feared figure within Maninbang is not Jang Ilso. To ordinary members, Jang Ilso is an ethereal figure, an object of admiration, rather than someone they have direct dealings with.

Furthermore, Jang Ilso doesn’t concern himself with trivial matters. As a result, most of the affairs within Maninbang are not reported to him. Instead, it’s Ho Gamyong who manages Maninbang on his behalf.

In other words, the one who has meticulously structured the highly efficient system of Maninbang is not Jang Ilso but rather Ho Gamyong. While enemies fear Jang Ilso, the members of Maninbang fear Ho Gamyong. The person who punishes them is not the enemy or Jang Ilso, but Ho Gamyong.

«Speak up.»

At that moment, Ho Gamyong’s voice pierced Gwak Bo’s ears once more.

«What would be an appropriate punishment for a Danju who failed to properly execute the orders from above?»

Gwak Bo bit his lips tightly.

If it had been someone else standing before him, he might have attempted excuses. However, Ho Gamyong was not the kind of person who entertained excuses. Every order issued by him was meticulously crafted, taking into account the capabilities of the executor, the circumstances, and even all possible variables that could arise. Therefore, no reason could serve as a valid excuse.

«According to the rules of the unit... um... for those who fail to execute even minor orders due to lack of ability, the penalty is demotion of rank and...»

«Ability?»

At that moment, Ho Gamyong’s voice sank even lower, tightening Gwak Bo’s heart.

«Why is someone lacking in ability sitting in the position of a Danju?»

«C-commander...»

«And is it really due to lack of ability that this happened?»

Gwak Bo couldn’t bring himself to say anything.

«While other units are confronting enemies in other places, those left behind in the rear were enjoying themselves as if they were kings. If you had been determined, the matter could have been resolved days ago.»

«...»

«Bring it.»

«Yes!»

Ho Gamyong's aide, who had been ominously silent in the background, took out a scroll from within his robes and extended it towards Ho Gamyong.

With indifferent gaze, Ho Gamyong accepted it and unfolded the scroll. Without a word, after confirming the contents, he casually tossed the scroll in front of Gwak Bo.

«Verify.»

«This... this is...»

As Ho Gamyong glanced down without any explanation, Gwak Bo picked up the scroll tremblingly and read the detailed daily account of what he had done while Jang Ilso and Ho Gamyong were absent.

His complexion turned deathly pale in an instant.

The scroll contained information that couldn't have been gathered overnight. It meant that while Ho Gamyong was urgently heading towards the Yangtze River, he had placed Gwak Bo, who remained in the rear, under surveillance.

«Any comments?»

«C-commander...»

«Was it enjoyable?»

A faint distortion appeared at the corner of Ho Gamyong's mouth. To others, it might have seemed like a frown, but to Ho Gamyong, it was a smile.

«Even as our forces are spilling blood on the front lines, those left behind in the rear are frolicking around, neglecting their duty to provide support.»

“Please, spare me!”

Gwak Bo pleaded desperately, pressing his forehead firmly to the ground. He knew there was no room for excuses, if he hoped to save his life, he had to admit to everything and beg for mercy.

Ho Gamyong looked at Gwak Bo with an emotionless expression.

«I don't particularly dislike someone like you. It's perhaps excessive to expect more from one who was born that way.»

“...”

«But I, too, am a military commander of Maninbang. As you know, our leader detests nothing more than a swine who fattens himself on the blood of his comrades to fill his own belly.»

«Jang Gan.»

«Yes, commander.»

«His martial arts will be destroyed, and after being disciplined, he will serve six months of hard labor.»

«Yes!»

«All his assets accumulated so far will be seized.»

«Yes!»

Gwak Bo, still prostrated on the ground, cried out,

«Thank you for your mercy, commander!»

It might seem like a harsh punishment, given the circumstances of not completing the task on time. Yet, Gwak Bo considered himself fortunate, knowing that the decree from Ho Gamyong was surprisingly lenient.

However, his relief shattered when Ho Gamyong's voice continued coldly,

«And when his labor is finished and he returns, cut the tendons of his useless legs.»

«Commander!»

Shocked by the chilling words, Gwak Bo stared at Ho Gamyong with disbelief. Ho Gamyong continued with icy tone,

«With excess energy lingering, he might engage in futile activities. If he can't walk on his own, he'll focus on his duties.»

«Commander! Commander! I was wrong! Please! Please, not that! Commander!»

«Carry out the order.»

«Yes.»

The men standing behind Ho Gamyong seized Gwak Bo, who was crying out in agony, and dragged him away.

A desperate scream echoed along the coast, but Ho Gamyong didn't even glance in that direction.

«Who's second in charge?»

«T-that would be me, commander.»

«Ensure the ship construction proceeds without delay.»

«Yes! B-but it will take another two days...»

«You clearly don't understand. I mean to construct it properly. Merely meeting the deadline won't suffice. Double-check everything from the beginning and bring me a solid plan. If any issues arise with the ship, you'll be in a situation where you'd rather die but won't be able to.»

«I-I will keep that in mind.»

Ho Gamyong's gaze briefly shifted to the workers, who were now tense with their hammering movements.

«Let's go to the headquarters.»

«Yes, commander!»

As Ho Gamyong turned, Jang Gan quickly followed suit.

«Commander, if you wish to set an example, perhaps just killing him would be...»

«It's unnecessary.»

Ho Gamyong cut in as if he had no intention of listening further.

«There's no need to kill someone if they have any usefulness. Killing them off is momentarily satisfying. The crucial thing is to utilize even such individuals properly to benefit the faction.»

«I...apologize for my ignorance.»

Ho Gamyong moved on without a response.

‘I now understand the concerns about the rear lines.’

Danju of the unit, who knows better than anyone who Jang Ilso is and who Ho Gamyong is, still lashes out as soon as their gazes shift away. So, how much more would those beneath them be inclined?

If even a little unrest occurs in Haenam, there will be those who join in or seize the opportunity to benefit themselves.

‘So, we need to handle it firmly.’

Ho Gamyong subtly turned his head to gaze at the distant Hainan island.

«Hmm?»

«...Why are you doing it?»

After silently observing the sea with his eyes narrowed, Ho Gamyong shook his head slightly.

«No, it’s probably the fish. Looks like my eyes got tired.»

«Yes, commander.»

«Summon the laborers.»

«Uh...yes?»

«A typhoon is about to hit soon.»

At the unexpected remark, Jang Gan glanced out to the distant sea. Indeed, the waves had grown quite high, and there were dark clouds gathering in the distance. The weather in the Southern Sea was notoriously unpredictable.

«The schedule might be delayed.»

«It’s an expected variable.»

Ho Gamyong remarked indifferently.

«Properly manage the ships under construction. It seems like it won’t be just an ordinary typhoon.»

«Yes, I’ll keep that in mind!»

Rumble!

In the distance, thunder rumbled faintly. Ho Gamyong chuckled.

«From Haenam’s perspective, they probably hope this typhoon never ends.»

The smile on his lips was chillingly cold.