

## Chapter 1127

Here. This is hell. (2)

«Significant?»

«Yes.»

Ho Gamyeong spoke with a rigid expression.

«Just from those executed today, they weren't mere lowlives. Many held decent positions within the Black Ghost or Surochae.»

«Is that so?»

Jang Ilso seemed indifferent, as if uninterested in such matters. Ho Gamyeong had anticipated this reaction. Yet, it was still his duty to voice his concerns.

«By removing such people... ultimately, it weakens our power.»

«Hmm.»

Jang Ilso glanced toward the door and muttered an unrelated remark.

«Though I said take your time, it wouldn't hurt to bring some wine first and then rest.»

«Lord Ryeonju...»

A sigh escaped from Ho Gamyeong's lips.

«I'm not unaware of Lord Ryeonju's thoughts. However... as you know, our situation isn't particularly favorable. It's not just the strength these individuals possess that's regrettable — it's the administrative voids that'll arise with their absence. It'll take quite a while to fill those gaps.»

Only then did Jang Ilso look directly at Ho Gamyeong. His pale eyes remained indifferent.

Ho Gamyeong swallowed hard and continued speaking.

«It's not my intention to oppose Ryeonju's wishes. I just wanted to inquire whether reducing the number of executions would be beneficial for the faction and the Lord»

«Hmm.»

«They are already filled with fear. If Lord Ryeonju shows mercy, they wouldn't dare oppose you again.»

«Gamyeong-ah, Gamyeong-ah.»

«Yes, Ryeonju?»

«It's something I always feel, you know.»

«Yes?»

Jang Ilso gave a peculiar smile, looking at Ho Gamyeong.

«You don't seem to fit well within Sapa, do you?»

«Uh... Yes?»

Startled by the absurd statement, Ho Gamyeong widened his eyes. If the notorious Ho Gamyeong wasn't a fit for Sapa, how would people react to such a statement?

Coming from the mouth of Paegun Jang Ilso, it was difficult to refute, but had it been uttered by anyone else, it would have been met with ridicule.

«Well...»

«That's how it is.»

Jang Ilso laughed softly.

«The one from the evil faction pleading for mercy and saying they wouldn't dare oppose again.»

«But that's...»

«I know.»

Jang Ilso chuckled before speaking,

«Once they experience fear, they might think twice before opposing again.»

«Yes, I...»

«However...»

Interrupting, Jang Ilso narrowed his eyes sharply.

«People, they're not as wise as you think. Most, when they learn a lesson, don't often reflect on it — instead, they tend to forget it rather quickly.»

«...»

«And then they twist it into something favorable for themselves. Those who opposed Jang Ilso were eventually released and survived, so wouldn't it be worth trying again?»

Ho Gamyong tightly sealed his lips.

«Yes. Humans are like that. Especially the breed called Sapa.»

Jang Ilso waved his hand dismissively, as if even the thought made him sick of this subject.

«Human beings easily forget kindness but never forget grudges. But there's something they never forget more than grudges. Do you know what it is?»

«...»

«It's fear.»

Jang Ilso's eyes sank grimly.

“Deeply ingrained terror, a fear of dying just by resisting, a fear of being better off dead than opposing. I fear that one can never defeat — that fear.”

“...”

“What moves people is precisely that profound fear.”

“Lord.”

Ho Gamyong looked at Jang Ilso silently before speaking. He knew asking was futile, but it was a pure curiosity about Jang Ilso that made him inquire.

«Do you not trust your subordinates?»

«What an amusing thing to say.»

Jang Ilso laughed.

«There's no one in this world to trust. You mean to say I should trust those vermin-like bastards? I'd rather trust those righteous clowns. At least they're not fickle. They're straightforward like cows.»

A sigh escaped from Ho Gamyong's lips. The answer felt oddly unsurprising, leaving him feeling frustrated.

«But, Lord, I didn't advise showing mercy to them. Aren't they the kind of assets we sometimes need to use?»

«Of course, that's also true. But if we leave only those who resemble humans, you'd be the only one left in this faction.»

Jang Ilso wore a peculiar smile.

«How about it? Shall we try again, just the two of us, as we did in those times of having nothing and being so desperate?»

As Jang Ilso brought up memories of the past, an uncommon smile appeared at the corner of Ho Gamyong's mouth.

“Honestly, it doesn't seem that bad, but... we can't go back, can we?”

“Yeah, that's right. It's a pity. Gamyong-ah, we've come too far.”

“But isn't that what you wanted, Ryeonju?”

“Of course.”

Jang Ilso doesn't dwell on regret. He doesn't yearn for the past. His gaze is always fixed on tomorrow, not yesterday, aiming for higher places beyond this realm.

It's peculiar.

Jang Ilso has gained so much. Many things that once felt like dreams, or even delusions, became reality, forcibly trodden under his feet. But his life isn't much different from the past. From a humble mercenary to a leader of Maninbang, and eventually to the ruler of Sapaeryeon, what changed for Jang Ilso was merely a slightly more lavish room and a slightly more expensive drink. These could have been achieved without becoming Ryeonju of Sapaeryeon.

Yet Jang Ilso devours everything greedily, like a demon pursuing desire itself.

“So, shouldn't we find a way to make use of even such people? It's better to have a rusty knife than nothing at all.”

Jang Ilso placed the white liquor glass at an eye level and spoke calmly.

“Gamyong-ah.”

“Yes, Ryeonju.”

“Power is like a sword, isn't it?”

«...Did you say a sword?»

“Yes, that's right. Do you know what's crucial when forging a renowned blade?”

“...Using good steel?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“But if you only have inferior steel, wouldn't it be fundamental to make use of that?”

“Of course. But surprisingly, the most important thing in crafting a renowned blade isn’t the material.”

“Then?”

“Not being greedy.”

Ho Gamyong furrowed his brow slightly. Understanding Jang Ilso’s words wasn’t easy.

“Let’s say you have one piece of quality steel for forging a sword and a little extra. How would you go about making a sword with that?”

“Well, I would... use one piece for the blade and the leftover for the hilt. Or mix them for the scabbard...”

“That’s right, it seems so.”

Jang Ilso nodded as if agreeing that the previous statement wasn’t wrong. However, what followed from his lips diverged somewhat from Ho Gamyong’s expectations.

«It means you’d ruin the sword.»

«...Pardon?»

Jang Ilso laughed softly, seeming amused.

«If you put another piece of steel into the hilt, it changes the sword’s weight. It deviates from the ideal weight. Mixing an extra piece into the scabbard meant for protecting the blade makes it harder than necessary. Then the edge gets damaged.»

Ho Gamyong remained silent.

«The best approach is to make the sword from one piece of steel and discard the extra. Well, you could sell it too.»

Jang Ilso flipped the bottle of alcohol upside down. Frowning at the falling droplet of liquor, he sighed and continued speaking.

«But most people can’t discard that extra piece. Those who use it for the scabbard or the hilt are better off. However, most people, do you know what they do?»

«I’m not sure.»

«They cram that spare piece into the blade.»

«...”

«It only adds to the cost but turns into nothing more than junk worse than a cheap iron sword. Yet, people swing it around as if it were an exceptional blade. They wield it without realizing it diminishes their true skills. Or maybe they do know but can’t let go of their greed.»

A sigh escaped Ho Gamyong’s lips.

“So they are extra iron.”

“That’s what it is.”

Jang Ilso stood up slowly.

“That’s greed. Once you realize something’s utterly useless and difficult to sell, you should just toss it away. But people can’t do that. They believe that even such steel might come in handy someday.”

Ho Gamyong listened quietly.

“Influence is like that spare steel. You can’t just forget about it. Its mere existence has the power to control me. Do you understand?”

“Ryeonju.”

“I don’t need the kind of extra baggage that makes me unstable. Power must fit into my hand perfectly like a renowned sword. Waving around a blade full of impurities and improperly sharpened, acting like a clown... Those who act recklessly and arbitrarily need to be eliminated, whether by cutting their throats or setting them on fire, to get rid of them completely.”

A mischievous, eerie smile formed at the corner of Jang Ilso’s lips.

“Amidst all that, it’s like giving a good lesson to the remaining ones, ultimately obtaining a high price for it, wouldn’t you say?”

In the end, Ho Gamyong nodded.

The enemy was strong. Yet, that’s precisely why Ho Gamyong attempted to somehow grow Sapaeryeon. But Jang Ilso had different intentions.

However, following Jang Ilso’s will was the only way to go. He was the one moving this force, not Ho Gamyong.

“Gamyong-ah.”

“Yes, Ryeonju.”

“The wars we’ll face ahead will have a different nature from what we’ve known. We’ll have to confront multiple enemies in different places.”

Ho Gamyong nodded silently. That was a fact he was already well aware of.

“Whenever that happens, if those fools move around as they please, we’ll be defeated even in wars we should win.”

Ho Gamyong nodded.

It was a well-known truth.

“So, first, we have to turn them into dogs rather than people. Like dogs that bark when they’re told to bark and wag their tails when they’re told to wag. Those who refuse to become dogs should die as humans. That... is true mercy. Do you understand?”

“Can they truly become your dogs, Ryeonju?”

Jang Ilso’s face seemed to express curiosity.

“Well, if they come to understand that defying me and not following my orders leads to more fearful consequences than dying at the hands of the enemy... Humanity vanishes.”

“...”

“It’ll take a long time. We’ll have to go through a tedious process. But once everything is finished...”

Jang Ilso’s gaze fixed on the ceiling, or perhaps it was directed beyond, towards something great.

“Finally, I will obtain the qualification to hold the world in my hands.”

Ho Gamyong's hand trembled slightly. Was there a time in the past when Jang Ilso ever said such words?

"If that is the case, I will simply comply."

If that's what needs to be done. Even if it drenches the whole of Gangnam, not just Sapaeryeon, in blood.

"Very well."

A burning desire filled Jang Ilso's eyes. At the same time, Ho Gamyong's heart burned fiercely.

Then, as if he remembered something, Jang Ilso said,

"Before that, go and fetch some alcohol."

"..."

"We should change the mood..."

"..."

A sigh escaped from Ho Gamyong's lips.