

Chapter 1213

Without a doubt. (3)

«Now, the question is how we're going to get to Haenam...»

Among the group, the one deemed to have a semblance of common sense, Tang Pae, subtly turned his head to look at Namgung Dowi.

Considering their names alone, those who have joined the journey to Haenam are individuals who could turn an entire province upside down and still have enough left over for others.

Namgung Dowi, the Young Lord and future head of Namgung clan; the Young Lord of the Tang clan; the lord of the Ice Palace; Nokrim King. And then there's Ogeom of Hwasan, considered the most formidable swordsmen of Gangho. Even Hye Yeon, who was once thought to be destined to lead Shaolin someday unless he tore up his robes and abdicated the monkhood, is among them.

Whether by reputation or actual ability, it's undeniable that they are remarkable individuals. But...

'Why is no one speaking up?'

Just the thought of having to discuss matters with one of them made Tang Pae's chest tight and cold sweat trickle down his back.

In the end, Namgung Dowi, being the most human like among them, was the one who caught Tang Pae's attention.

«What do you think?»

«Well, why are you asking me...»

Of course, Namgung Dowi was bewildered by Tang Pae's sudden question.

«Isn't it strange when you think about it? Going to Haenam is an incredibly important matter. Yet, isn't it absurd that we haven't discussed how we're going to get there until the day of departure?»

«Well, then why are you asking me...»

Tang Pae let out a deep sigh. Eventually, his gaze turned towards the person responsible for this matter.

«...Baek Cheon Dojang.»

«I was actually going to mention that aspect.»

At this, there was a glimmer of hope in Tang Pae's eyes as he looked at Baek Cheon. It implied that Baek Cheon had his own plans and intentions.

«Since there was someone who deliberated on that aspect, it seems prudent to heed their words. However...»

«However?»

«Well... um, that...»

Baek Cheon glanced nervously to one side.

«Say it again, you brat! What? Is the succession ceremony of Hwasan's Sect Leader meaningless?»

Slap! Slap!

«Are you some foul-mouthed comedian? Huh? A comedian? Huh?»

Slap! Slap!

Watching Im Sobyong's swollen lips, Baek Cheon sighed.

«Let's wait until the swelling goes down a bit.»

«.....»

Before that, may be you could stop him from being beaten any further. This guy...

«Well... um...»

Im Sobyong, rubbing his lips, hesitated to speak and stole a glance at Baek Cheon as if seeking permission.

Seeing this, everyone turned their heads slightly. Of course, while it's true that words can sting, and there's no excuse for mocking someone's pain...

Still, when you see someone like Noklim King being tossed like a rat and shedding tears, wouldn't it make everyone feel awkward?

No, leaving aside whether everyone here is even human...

Im Sobyong, his lips swollen, tried to say something but ended up contorting his face. His burst lips looked painful.

«Well... um... the reason I suggested not to discuss the plan before departure is because there's a risk of information leaking out.»

«...Don't you have too little trust in people?»

Im Sobyong shot a venomous glance at Tang Pae.

«What kind of reassuring nonsense is that? Do you think this is Sichuan? How many people come and go from Jangwon, starting from the water carriers to the workers! Do you think all those people are so loyal to Cheonumaeng that they wouldn't spill the plan even if they had a knife to their throats?»

«Well, that's not exactly...»

«You're making such remarks, but don't you realize everything will fall apart? Do you know how harsh Gangho is? That's why people who grew up in a greenhouse are like this!»

As Tang Pae got visibly sullen, Baek Cheon intervened with a bitter smile, coming to his defense.

«Pulling strings isn't necessarily a bad thing.»

«No, Baek Cheon Dojang...»

«Go on. Let's see if there's any spine left in this 'foul-mouthed comedian'.»

As Chung Myung growled, Im Sobyong shut his mouth somewhat obediently. While he might know how harsh Gangho could be, it wasn't as brutal as that bastard's fists.

Baek Cheon continued,

«But we also need to be cautious. The likelihood of information leaking to Sapaeryeon might not be high, but Gupailbang is bound to be less cautious.»

«Do we really need to worry about that too...»

«Oh, this bastard! He really can't understand a word!»

This time, Chung Myung glared at Tang Pae.

«Right now he is basically saying that The Great Baldie might hand over our information to Sapaeryeon! Our Vice Sect Leader!»

«...S-Surely he wouldn't go that far.»

«Surely? In the end, he was the kind of guy who didn't hesitate to do anything when it came to the same orthodox sect! Now, what can't he do when it came to the point of him saying we are not even an orthodox sect anymore!»

«But he's still a Buddhist monk, isn't he?»

«A monk? A Buddhist monk? If that baldie is a monk, then I'm Buddha! Where's there a Buddhist monk in Shaolin? Since when did those thugs, waving swords around and intimidating people, care about being Buddhist monks!»

«Chung Myung... Stop it. You're making monk Hye Yeon cry.»

Yoon Jong gently patted Hye Yeon's slumped shoulders.

«It's okay, it's okay. You've disrobed and left.»

«I haven't!»

«You haven't?»

«...»

Amid the awkward atmosphere, Im Sobyong cleared his throat and spoke up.

«Anyway, that's why they didn't let us talk separately inside. Since we need to depart, let's share the plan now.»

Snap!

Im Sobyong pulled out a small map from his sleeve and spread it out on the ground.

«How many types of maps do we have?»

«We have different sizes prepared! Even a small one. Want one?»

«... No, thank you.»

At this point, it seemed more like a hobby than preparation.

«There's a point we need to agree on first.»

«What is it?»

«The most crucial aspect of choosing the route to Hainan island is whether we have a place to rely on in that area.»

Everyone tilted their heads at his words.

Im Sobyong carefully explained the situation.

«As you know, it's best to move with the minimum number of people in situations like this. However, convincing Haenam with just the minimum isn't feasible. So, inevitably, more than

ten people are heading to Haenam... With the increase in numbers, the risk of being discovered also increases.»

«Mm.»

Everyone nodded at his words.

«So, it's best for us to move to areas with cooperative allies who can help conceal our movements until the very last moment. Taking this into account, we have three options. The first is the sea route.»

«The sea route, you say?»

«Yes.»

Im Sobyong pointed to one side of the map.

«We'll take boats along the Yangtze River towards Zhejiang, then head to Haenam. Utilizing Anhui and Zhejiang will be a significant help in concealing our movements, as there are still many of Namgung clan's people in those areas. Concealing the fact that we traveled to Haenam by boat should be possible.»

«Indeed...»

Namgung Dowi also nodded as if it was feasible.

«The best thing about this route is that we can conceal our movements most effectively and, most importantly, utilize the sea route. There's no place in Gangnam untouched by Sapaeryeon, but the sea route is different. They don't even fish themselves, so they won't likely come out to the sea.»

Upon hearing his words, everyone nodded in agreement. Indeed, even if it's Sapaeryeon, they wouldn't have control over the sea routes.

«So, if we can procure a proper boat and prepare adequately, we can safely reach Haenam. The downside is...»

«It will take a long time, won't it?»

«Yes, that's correct.»

Im Sobyong immediately nodded in agreement with Baek Cheon's words.

It's already a long journey, and having to take a longer route isn't ideal. Moreover, it's challenging to increase speed with manpower alone.

«That won't work.»

«We can't afford to be slow.»

«And there's also the risk of being stranded halfway along Gangnam's coast if there are any issues with the boat.»

At first glance, it seemed like a good option, but upon closer inspection, there were many issues.

«For now, let's leave the sea route. What about the other option?»

«It's this way.»

Im Sobyong's finger traced another line on the map.

«It's a route that bypasses the land route. First, we enter Sichuan, then head to Yunnan, and finally arrive at Linyi, where we take a boat to Hainan island. I've mentioned this before.»

«Yes.»

«This option isn't bad either. The problem is... there's a lot of surveillance along the route to Sichuan and Yunnan.»

«Hmm.»

In response to his words, Tang Pae nodded vigorously.

While Tangga might be referred to as the king of Sichuan, it's merely a formal title. The areas where Tang clan holds significant influence are in the northern regions, including Sichuan and Chengdu, while the southern regions where Emei and Qingcheng are located have stronger influence from Gupailbang.

Moreover, Yunnan is not only home to the Nanman Beast Palace but also Diancang. It would be challenging to hide one's movements perfectly.

«Even if we manage to pass through all that safely, it's not easy to find a boat to Hainan from Linyi, where we do not even know if the Southern Sea Sun Palace will help out. It could potentially stir up unnecessary turmoil.»

Up to this point, it's a discussion that has happened before.

However, upon reconsideration, each option has its pros and cons, making it difficult to come to a conclusion about which one is right. It's because reaching the destination is not the only concern.

«Nokrim King.»

Baek Cheon looked straight at Im Sobyong as he spoke.

«You mentioned three options, right?»

«Yes.»

«Then what is the third option you have in mind?»

Baek Cheon looked at Im Sobyong with a meaningful gaze. Based on his experience with Im Sobyong so far, there's a high probability that the third option he hasn't spoke of is the most realistic one in his eyes.

Receiving that gaze, Im Sobyong chuckled.

«Yes. Allow me to answer. The third option I have in mind is...»

Im Sobyong's finger pressed firmly on a spot on the map. It was the mouth of the river where they were currently located.

«Here.»

As his finger pressed down on the spot, it seemed as though he was going to tear the map apart.

Everyone widened their eyes at the line created by the tip of his finger.

«...Are you out of your mind?»

«Are you serious?»

«I knew this bastard would show his true colors eventually! How much did Jang Ilso offer you, you Sapa scoundrel!»

«...Let's not cross the line.»

Amidst the explosive reactions, Im Sobyong smiled.

«Why are you all so surprised? Surely these prominent individuals aren't afraid, are they?»

In response to his playful question, Baek Cheon's face twisted.

The reactions were inevitable. In fact, not reacting would have been more surprising. This was because the last line drawn by Im Sobyong connected the mouth of the Yangtze river and Hainan in a straight line — the shortest distance piercing through the lands controlled by Sapaeryeon.

«The sea route seems preferable.»

«No, I think the route through Yunnan is more realistic.»

«Let's just go anywhere. As long as it's not the third option!»

As they instinctively sought consensus, a chilling voice echoed in their ears.

«Hoohoo?»

«That's quite...»

«...»

«...»

«...tempting, isn't it?»

All heads turned, and eventually, an indescribable sense of despair shadowed their faces.

Chung Myung... was smiling.