

Chapter 1001

Once again. (1)

«Sir, Elder!»

With an urgent voice, Elder Songhwa, an elder of Wudang, asked with a pale face,

«How's the situation?»

«We are falling behind! No, we can't even catch our breath!»

«This, this is...»

Sweat dripped from his forehead.

‘Why did it have to be this place?’

He felt it. At this place, right between two mountains.

A presence that felt like it was stabbing his whole body with thousands of needles, a dense aura that constricted his breath.

«Sir, Elder! We need a plan...!»

Songhwa's fingers were trembling.

A plan? Of course, a plan was needed. The one responsible here was none other than Songhwa.

But what kind of plan could there be?

All available forces had been deployed here. Even the Wudang's top disciples brought from the main sect for any possible situation had been sent here.

Each of them were those who had mastered the Taeguk Hyegeom [태극혜검 — Taiji Wisdom Sword], elite among the elite, capable of performing the pride of the Wudang, the Yangui Geomjin [양의검진 — when they use two martial arts simultaneously]. However, even these individuals hadn't been able to stop the enemy's advance and were merely spilling blood without pause.

But better plan could be beyond this?

«If we lose here, our rear will be completely exposed! Elder!»

«I know!»

Songhwa raised his voice nervously.

The place they were guarding was the rearmost position of those advancing. If this place collapses, the escape route for those who entered Daesan [大山 — can be translated as Great Mountain] will be cut off. In that case, it was too predictable what would happen.

Even if they had to risk their lives, or rather, even more than their lives, they had to somehow stop it.

However...

‘What in the world can we do?’

Sweat began to flow from Songhwa's face like a rain.

The approaching force from the other side was not an opponent they could handle with just determination.

«What do you expect me to do to stop the bishop!»

Songhwa shouted out as he clenched the hilt of his sword.

From the beginning, no one had even heard of the possibility of a bishop coming to this place. If there had been even a slight thought about such a possibility, they wouldn't have received orders to defend the rear with only fifty people or so.

At that moment,

Kwaaaaah!

A tremendous black energy erupted from beyond the mountain.

As the overwhelming power surged forth, Songhwa unknowingly took five steps back.

However, there was no need to be ashamed. The other disciples around him were the same.

«Uh...»

Those are disasters. Beings that scrutinize Heavenly Demon up close, too fearsome to be mentioned.

«How can there be so many of them...»

If Heavenly Demon is something that humans cannot deal with, then those bishops were a substantial threat that could claw into their throats.

A swirl of black energy rushed like a blade. A groan of pain escaped from Songhwa's lips.

«Request reinforcements!»

«Elder!»

«Hurry, request reinforcements! Tell them that there are bishops here! We can't hold a single corner alone! Right now!»

«We've already requested reinforcements! But...»

Songhwa knew without hearing the rest of what was being said. The forces capable of opposing those bishops were not left behind in the main base. Where could you find those strong enough to engage bishops in battle and still have to sit in the offensive?

«Aaaah!»

At that moment, Songhwa's eyes clearly saw the image of a Wudang's disciple being torn to shreds. Literally crushed.

Engulfed by the black energy whirlwind, the disciples were reduced to pieces, and their fragments were scattered across dark mountains.

«Ah...»

Songhwa's jaw began to tremble involuntarily.

He couldn't hold it back. What can a human do against demons who aren't even human?

«Retreat...»

«Yes?»

Words that should never have left Songhwa's mouth slipped out. He immediately covered his mouth with both hands.

This was an unimaginable situation. If this place was breached, the extent of the damage was beyond imagination. If they hesitated to shed blood, they would have to repay every saved drop of blood with thousands more.

He knew. He knew!

But...

«Ugh.»

He was overcome by a sudden wave of nausea. Staying here meant death. Not just his own, but everyone's.

This was a futile death.

If their lives could change something, they could sacrifice their lives without hesitation. But what could they change with their lives here?

Even those who were dying! Even those who were on the verge of death! Even the lives of those who hadn't died yet! They couldn't stop the demons advance for even a moment!

Why should they continue these meaningless sacrifices?

«Aaaaaaaaah!»

In that moment, another life was lost in vain.

Kwaaaaaaa!

The raging whirlpool of demonic energy was still advancing towards this place. Slow but certain death was closing in on him.

Songhwa's eyes were filled with terror. No matter how much he was a Wudang's elder, his name was insignificant in front of the bishop. Perhaps that demon couldn't even perceive the difference between him and the first class disciples he was currently facing.

«Uh...»

The hand holding the sword trembled uncontrollably. He tried to draw the sword, but it seemed that his sword, which clung to the scabbard as if it had been glued, wouldn't come out today.

«Retreat...»

«What?»

Songhwa bit his lip with bloodshot eyes. The words he had suppressed once came out again.

«Retreat...»

It was at that moment.

«Elder! Elder!»

A joyful shout came from behind. When he looked back, someone was rushing towards this place with all their might.

«What... what is it?»

«He's here! He's here!»

«Him?!»

No names were mentioned. He hadn't even heard his alias. However, Songhwa immediately knew who the disciples were referring to when they said «he.»

There was no one else.

Among those facing the bishop, there was only one person who could bring hope.

«Every time I see you, you're as terrifying as ever.»

Songhwa turned his head sharply. Before he knew it, a man had sat down beside him, gazing beyond the mountains.

With disheveled hair, black attire, and a white embroidered green robe draped over it all—no, putting all those details aside, the overwhelming presence alone made it easy to guess who this person was.

«Ah, Amjon*...»

Amjon Tang Bo. A reaper from the Tang family who sometimes causes more fear than the Demonic Cult, even to those on his own side.

With a cold smile, he stared in the direction of the bishop.

«Are you in charge here?»

Without turning his head, Amjon asked, and Songhwa nodded vigorously.

«Y-Yes, Amjon!»

«Let the kids go.»

«What?»

As Songhwa asked in confusion, Tang Bo furrowed his brows.

«No, forget it. Even if this fool tries to save us, we won't accept it.»

«What does that mean...»

It was at that moment.

Thud.

Songhwa's heart sank as she heard footsteps behind him.

Amjon Tang Bo was, of course, a grandmaster beyond reach. Known as the supreme master of the past hundred years of the Tang family, he was the living embodiment of mastery.

But if the opponent was the Bishop, even Amjon's name couldn't shine. If Amjon had come, his disciples wouldn't have looked so pale.

In other words...

Songhwa turned his trembling gaze and stared blankly at the person approaching them.

Black attire. A crimson plum blossom pattern etched on his chest.

His hair was tied roughly at the back but fell messily in front. Yet, it wasn't his attire that caught Songhwa's attention.

His eyes.

It was the chilling gaze visible between his fallen bangs.

Songhwa unconsciously muttered.

«Mae...hwageomjon.»

That's right. There was only one person who could face that demon-like Bishop, and their only chantable name was this one.

Thud. Thud.

Maehwa Geomjon [Plum Blossom Sword Sovereign] Chung Myung stood before him and opened his mouth.

«What's the situation?»

In response to his chilling voice, Songhwa quickly regained his composure and answered.

«W-We are engaging with the Bishop in delaying tactics, but our strength is not enough.

Maehwa Geomjon!»

A wind like sound escaped from Tang Bo's mouth upon hearing his words.

«Delaying tactics? What nonsense are you talking about?»

«Um... yes?»

At that moment, Chung Myung seized Songhwa by the collar and pulled him close.

Songhwa froze in place, unable to even scream.

«You.»

«...»

«Are you the Wudang elder?»

Songhwa quickly nodded his head.

«Y-Yes...»

«But what are you doing here?»

«...»

A sinister aura flowed from Chung Myung's eyes.

«Why are you just watching that while your disciples are dying over there, you worthless piece of shit?»

«...»

Songhwa remained frozen, unable to make a sound.

It felt like an enraged beast was sinking its teeth into his throat, ready to rip it apart if he moved even a bit. The fear constricted his throat.

«If you don't have a plan, then at least step up and fight with us. Are you watching your disciples die from behind because you're afraid to risk your own life?»

«I-I...»

«You idiot!»

Thwack!

Chung Myung hit Songhwa's chin.

Songhwa, his voice choked with screams, couldn't bring himself to raise his head and trembled faintly. Chung Myung glanced at him as if he was a worm, then turned and walked forward.

Tang Bo clenched his teeth.

«You should be grateful to those kids. If it weren't for them being in danger, it wouldn't have ended like this.»

Tang Bo mocked Songhwa and quickly followed Chung Myung ahead.

«Ah, hyung-nim! Let's go together. What's the hurry!»

Maehwa Geomjon and Amjon.

Both of them advanced fearlessly toward the raging demonic energy.

Whether sensing their presence or not, the black energy became even more frenzied.

However, instead of hesitating, the two of them smiled mockingly as they observed the spectacle.

«Is he alone?»

«It seems like he brought about twenty with him.»

«Then he's alone.»

«...Indeed.»

Sshrrk.

Chung Myung slowly drew the Plum Blossom Sword. A tension spread throughout his body, and it sent shivers down his spine. The Bishop's power was so intense that even his body felt like it was sending a warning.

«...Heavenly Executioner [천살(天殺)]?»

«Delirious Spirit [광혼(狂魂)]?»

«Doesn't matter. He's a dead man anyway.»

Chung Myung, lowering his sword, said with a solemn tone.

«When we killed the last one, were you unconscious for two week?»

«Don't talk nonsense. It was just one week!»

«That's what I mean. This time, if you even make a peep, you're dead. So don't interfere and stay behind.»

«Your arm nearly fell off last time, and I fixed it for you. Seems like you've completely forgotten that, haven't you? I'm worried you might lose more than just an arm this time, perhaps your neck, and that would be a real concern.»

Chung Myung chuckled.

As the distance closed between them, the grip on the plum blossom sword in his hand tightened.

«Well, I guess there's no other way. Let's start by cutting that bastard's throat and then we can have a chat.»

Tang Bo, who had pulled a dagger from his sleeve, nodded with a grin.

«I agree with that.»

Simultaneously, the two of them struck the ground. Two streaks of black and green meteors shot into the storm of demonic energy.

That day, another bishop met his end at the outskirts of Daesan.

*Tang Bo — Amjon 암존(暗尊)

• 暗 (Àn) — This character means “dark/darkness” or “secret/hidden.”

• 尊 (Zūn) — This character means “respect” or “reverence.”

Together, 暗尊 could possibly mean Dark Sovereign or Dark Lord, as 매화검존(梅花劍尊)
— Chung Myung's title — has the same 尊 hanja.