

Chapter 1230

I don't know. (5)

'An enemy?'

If someone happened to see Cheonumaeng's group, what should they do? If they were civilians, perhaps they could be easily persuaded to keep quiet. But what if they were members of Sapaeryeon or remnants of Demonic Cult?

'Eradicate them!'

They must be killed and eliminated without fail. A surge of power naturally flowed through his entire body.

At that moment,

«What are you staring at?»

«Over there, over there.»

«What?»

«Oh!»

Jo Geol, looking frustrated, hurriedly walked to one side and pointed to something protruding from the ground.

«This, this! Can't you see it?»

«Oh, this...»

Yoon Jong's face, which had been tense, suddenly relaxed.

«We almost lost our nerve!»

What Jo Geol had discovered wasn't a person, but a sword buried in the ground with only its handle sticking out.

«Isn't it amazing? It must have been a hundred years, yet the sword still remains.»

Jo Geol pulled on the handle of the sword stuck in the ground. He furrowed, because it didn't come out as easily as he thought.

«What's holding it? This... Argh!»

«Hey, you might break it that way!»

«No, I think it's almost out if I just...»

As Jo Geol exerted more force on the sword, the ground around it suddenly shook, and something large unexpectedly rose from the ground.

«Huh?»

«What is this?»

For a moment, everyone stood still, dumbfounded by the sight.

Silence fell.

It wasn't particularly remarkable. It wasn't as if they had stumbled upon a rare treasure.

What was revealed were simply pieces of corroded metal. Once they might have been swords, or maybe daggers, or perhaps spears.

They were tangled together like fragments of a nine-section whip and were pulled out all at once. The weapons, faded and heavily corroded to the point where their original forms were barely recognizable, seemed to have lost their value as weapons. Yet strangely, they held everyone's gaze in this place, refusing to let go.

«What kind of weapons are these...?»

Jo Geol scratched the back of his head awkwardly. Considering that these weapons might have been lost here and forgotten, Jo Geol glanced down.

But when he saw the hole from which the weapons were pulled out, his expression hardened.

«Uh...»

Yoon Jong asked in a slightly tense voice,

«What's wrong now?»

«Sahyeong... here...»

«What?»

Approaching, Yoon Jong followed Jo Geol's gaze towards the grim-looking hole in the ground. Yoon Jong's reaction mirrored Jo Geol's.

«This...»

Yoon Jong reached out his hand as if in pain, then began to carefully dig around the hole. Not downwards, but widening it around the edges.

Those who were watching, unsure of what he was doing and unable to understand his actions, soon grasped the meaning behind it. A heavy silence descended.

As the hole widened, something became starkly visible.

Weapons buried not too deep in the earth, covered in layers of accumulated dust of the years, along with scattered human bones around them.

No matter how much they dug and dug wider, new weapons and bones continued to emerge endlessly.

«Sago...»

When Tang Soso's hand trembled faintly, Yu Iseol silently grabbed her shoulder tightly.

After digging around for a while, Yoon Jong's hand eventually stopped.

He realized that this would never end. There was no sense of how much further they would need to dig to find all the bones and weapons buried here.

Yoon Jong looked with a blank expression at the pit he had dug.

Despite the width of the pit, filled to the brim with weapons and bones, even with a crowd of people, there was no end to digging in sight.

«This place...»

As the scene before them fully registered, a chill ran down their spines.

Just moments ago, they had only seen green fields and jagged peaks. Even if they didn't know it was the stronghold of Demonic Cult, they might have thought it was an exceptionally peaceful and serene place.

But now that they knew what lay hidden beneath the earth and the seemingly indifferent green grass, they couldn't look at this place with the same eyes as before.

Everyone was speechless.

How many had died? How many had killed each other here?

«What exactly happened here...?»

«There must have been a battle.»

As they stared blankly at the bones, an indifferent voice flowed into their ears.

«It's probably one of those places. It's not really surprising. This is the battlefield of Hundred Thousand Mountains.»

Those few words struck the hearts of everyone present.

Hundred Thousand Mountains.

The place of the final showdown. Where everything between the orthodox sects and Demonic Cult was put on the line. And where the final resolve to sever Heavenly Demon's head was carried out.

Yes, it was indeed Hundred Thousand Mountains.

«No matter what...»

Amidst the somber atmosphere, Yoon Jong broke the silence.

«Shouldn't there have been some sort of closure?»

«...»

«It's not just Demonic Cult buried here, is it? These people... these people fought to protect the world...»

«Who will provide closure?»

«Who...?»

No one had an answer.

However, Chung Myung's tone remained caustic.

«Given the situation where my neck could be on the line tomorrow, who has the luxury to go around burying the bodies of the dead? Tomorrow, I might end up lying on top of them.»

«But even after the war is over...»

«Are you suggesting they had to meticulously retrieve and transport thousands, even tens of thousands of corpses all the way to Gangbuk?»

«...»

«If they had the sanity to do that, they wouldn't have had such chaos in the first place. It seems forgotten, but Demonic Cult hasn't been eradicated. They retreated after losing Heavenly Demon. If the alliance of orthodox sects had tried to wipe out the remaining ones, it would have ended up with Gangho being destroyed instead. They withdrew as soon as Heavenly Demon died.»

«Then, even belatedly...»

«Well...»

Chung Myung sneered.

«If it had come to that, maybe they would have done it.»

A rough guess was made.

Immediately after Heavenly Demon's death, they probably couldn't have entered Hundred Thousand Mountains. The poisoned cultists would have been rampaging. Didn't they even push their luck and advance to Shaanxi?

Furthermore, even if they weren't completely devastated like Hwasan, other sect also suffered catastrophic losses. With no time to regroup, it wouldn't have been easy to send people back to Gangnam to retrieve the bodies.

With urgent matters at hand, they kept postponing day by day, and the bodies would have decayed. Eventually, it would have reached a point where retrieval would have been impossible.

«No matter what...»

«Don't talk nonsense.»

Chung Myung cut in with a cold, weary voice.

«Great Mountain, Hundred Thousand Mountains, but these aren't just any mountains. It's a massive mountain range spanning five hundred li from the east of Guangdong to the west of Guangxi, including Guizhou on top.»

«...»

«And battles took place across this entire mountain range during the long war. No, battles occurred not just in the mountains but all over the world. Are you suggesting they comb through the entire mountain range just to retrieve a few bodies? In a mountain range where remnants of Demonic Cult might still be lurking?»

Yoon Jong bit his lip. Chung Myung asked,

«Is it possible?»

In the end, Yoon Jong also replied with a heavy sigh.

«...It would be difficult,»

Chung Myung added indifferently.

«It's easy for those who haven't experienced it to say what should have been done. But those who actually experienced it didn't let go because they wanted to. There was simply no other choice.»

Yoon Jong remained silent. He could understand it logically, but he couldn't accept it emotionally.

It was then that he truly realized. Only one of the ancestors, whom he had been so proud of, had belatedly returned to Hwasan.

The bodies of others were buried so callously in this distant land, unable to return to where they belonged.

Who could dare to blame anyone for this?

They hadn't even dared to retrieve the remains of their ancestors from Hwasan, let alone others. No, they had even forgotten that it needed to be done in the first place.

Now, who could they blame, who could they resent?

«Well, then, at least...»

He wanted to suggest that they should at least properly pay their respects, but Chung Myung cut him off abruptly.

«Bury them again.»

Yoon Jong glanced at Chung Myung, momentarily startled, his eyes wide open with a hint of anger shining in them.

It might be impossible to retrieve all the remaining bodies from the mountain. But isn't it still our duty as human beings to at least give proper respect to the bodies we've already found?

However, Chung Myung showed no reaction to his gaze.

«A corpse is just a corpse. A dead body, nothing more, nothing less.»

«...»

«Isn't it absurd to bury someone who died while you just stumbled on their bones? We don't have time for that, so just bury them again quickly. We need to hurry to Haenam.»

«Chung Myung!»

«Sahyeong.»

Chung Myung's voice was eerily calm.

«Don't treat people as a joke.»

«...»

«Do you think those who died here didn't know they would end up like this?»

Yoon Jong bit his lip.

«Those who fought here knew what they were getting into. Yet they still fought. Do you think those who died here expected to be treated as someone special?»

A bitter smile flickered across Chung Myung's face. There was a faint taste of blood in his mouth.

Back then, it was like that. Even when a comrade died right next to you, you couldn't even cover them with dirt. Knowing they would be torn apart by mountain beasts, or decayed by the wind and rain, you could do nothing but leave them be.

But never once did he think to feel sorry.

He knew he would soon fall where his comrade had fallen, and rot just the same.

So, was there any reason to feel sorry?

'Useless.'

Chung Myung turned away completely.

Thinking about the past would only make him sentimental. Now was not the time for it.

What mattered to him was not the past that had already passed, but the present.

There was no need to pity those who had died. They all fulfilled their duty until their final moments. Rather, the one who should receive pity was Chung Myung, who, despite fulfilling his role, was being dragged back into this hell once again.

So...

«We don't have time to waste here.»

Chung Myung shook his head.

«Keep your emotions in check. If you really don't want to vividly witness this kind of scene again, then keep going forward,»

Chung Myung said indifferently, about to cover the hole with dirt again.

«Chu... Chung Myung...»

Jo Geol's trembling voice pierced their ears.

At that moment, Chung Myung sensed it. Whatever would be said next, it would be better not to hear it.

But Jo Geol's voice relentlessly persisted.

«Here...»

Chung Myung turned his gaze. Confirming the direction Jo Geol pointed at, he saw it.

Stuck at an angle, a rusted sword.

So worn out that it was hardly recognizable as a sword, engraved at the end of its hilt...

«It's the Plum Blossom Sword...»

...It was a small plum blossom pattern.