

Chapter 1075

Who made a mistake? (5)

«Hahaha!»

One, laughing maniacally, and the other, bowing his head in despair. In any situation, there may be no clearer spectacle of a winner and a loser.

Typically, the world's attention is drawn to the victor. But at this moment, it was not the maniacally laughing Jang Ilso in front of them who held the onlookers' gaze, but the hunched Mangeum Daebu before him.

Mangeum Daebu, also known as Gong Yawol. The leader of the Black Ghost Fortress that had completely dominated the west of Gangnam, one of the leaders of Shinjuopae [four main evil sects], and the first sword of Sapa.

A name that once shone brightly in the region was now crumbling. The glory and fear associated with that name would become nothing more than faded memories. But Gangnam was such a place to begin with.

Mangeum Daebu slowly raised his head, gazing at Jang Ilso, who was looking down at him. There was no longer any bitterness or anger in his eyes. Even regret was absent — all that remained was curiosity.

«...From the beginning.»

His mouth opened, and a hoarse voice emerged.

«Did you know from the beginning?»

«Of course.»

«...How?»

Jang Ilso burst out laughing as if it was the most absurd thing.

«That's a rather obvious question.»

His voice was too cold to be considered a sign of generosity of the winner and too sharp to be seen as sympathy for the loser.

«Because you're Mangeum Daebu.»

“...”

«Do we need more reasons than that?»

A response that could hardly be called an answer. But upon hearing those words, Mangeum Daebu simply nodded in acquiescence.

«...Yes.»

Mangeum Daebu helplessly laughed.

«I guess more reasons weren't necessary...»

If an opponent shows a weakness, you exploit it. That was a given for Sapa, and even more so for Mangeum Daebu. Looking back, it was such a simple matter...

«...Was it a trap from the beginning?»

«No way.»

Jang Ilso sneered.

«No matter who you are, you can't predict how those maniacs of the Demonic Cult would behave.»

«From what moment...»

Mangeum Daebu gazed at Jang Ilso with hollow eyes.

«How did you summon Cheon Myeon Susa?»

That was the last question left for Mangeum Daebu. Even if Jang Ilso had foreseen all of this, it wouldn't have ended so anticlimactically if Cheon Myeon Susa hadn't come here personally.

Mangeum Daebu proceeded with extreme caution, repeatedly checking for any hidden forces in Jang Ilso's disposal. However, he couldn't have imagined that Cheon Myeon Susa of the Hao clan had arrived here. After all, wasn't Hao clan the least cooperative with Jang Ilso? Jang Ilso turned his head slightly to look at Cheon Myeon Susa, who took a rather terrifying appearance.

«He is asking so desperately, I suppose you should answer his fervent question.»

«It's not difficult, Ryeonju.»

Cheon Myeon Susa replied. His voice carried a subtle hint of respect. When he gazed at Mangeum Daebu, his eyes were completely different from when he looked at Jang Ilso — they were cold and distant.

Mangeum Daebu bit his lips. Even though he knew that Wi Chung was an impostor, he still couldn't distinguish him solely by his appearance. If not for the icy glint in his eyes, he might have believed that Wi Chung had betrayed them.

«Why is someone as uncooperative as me... here?»

Cheon Myeon Susa slowly lowered his head.

«What a foolish question, Mangeum Daebu. Someone like you should understand without asking. In the evil factions there is nothing permanent, whether it's an enemy or a friend.»
He chuckled.

«And it was none other than you, Mangeum Daebu, who brought someone as uncooperative as me into this situation, isn't it?»

«...Me?»

«Haven't both you and the Black Dragon King lost an arm?»

“...”

«Until then, I could have just played the role of a benevolent bystander. But the moment you and the Black Dragon King lost your former influence, my position became complicated.»

Cheon Myeon Susa clicked his tongue as if increasingly annoyed.

«The Shinjuopae revolve around your factions dominating Gangnam. If the other two factions weaken, where do you think Ryeonju's attention will turn? So I had no choice. From now on, I have to oppose the one who will be most wary of me or pledge my loyalty.»

Cheon Myeon Susa shrugged slowly.

«Amidst all this, if Ryeonju personally calls me and offers me a place by his side, what can I do? I must recognize my own shortcomings and offer my loyalty.»

«Was there really no part of you...»

Mangeum Daebu, who had been biting his lips all along, asked with the feeling of vomiting blood.

«Was there really no part of you that thought you could reach the pinnacle of the evil factions if you could just kill Jang Ilso?»

This was the most incomprehensible part. Even if Cheon Myeon Susa had come here with such intentions, Jang Ilso's life was surely hanging by a thread.

If he had been Cheon Myeon Susa, he would have waited until Jang Ilso's death and then ambushed Mangeum Daebu.

Mangeum Daebu's fate might have been sealed the moment he entered this place, but at least if it was so, he could have taken Jang Ilso with him on the journey to the afterlife.

«Of course, there was a part of me. If I hadn't been tormented by that temptation, it would be a lie.»

Even with Jang Ilso right in front of them, Cheon Myeon Susa spoke without hesitation about his internal conflict over Jang Ilso's life. And Jang Ilso showed no signs of displeasure towards Cheon Myeon Susa.

«But why...?»

«If my desires were greater than yours, would that make it more understandable?»

Mangeum Daebu looked at Cheon Myeon Susa with a puzzled expression.

«Sorry, but I have no desire to return to the time when we fought among ourselves in Gangnam. I've seen enough. This barren land, and even that rich land, isn't as promising as it seems.»

«That can't be yours!»

«What's the problem with that?»

Cheon Myeon Susa replied calmly.

«Isn't it better to aim for a high position in the whole Gangho rather than continue being an insignificant leader in a remote place. It's not a particularly special or unusual choice.»

His gaze turned back to Jang Ilso.

«Besides, Hao clan isn't inherently the highest place to be. Information becomes meaningful when there's someone to use it.»

Mangeum Daebu, who had been listening silently, laughed as if to mock himself. While Cheon Myeon Susa was merely stating his position, Mangeum Daebu couldn't help but hear his words as a rebuke for having unwarranted ambitions and causing chaos.

Cheon Myeon Susa, as if understanding his sentiment, smiled wryly and added words that didn't need to be said.

«And the most decisive reason is separate from all that.»

«Reason?»

«If I have to elevate someone to the top... it can't be you. My pride won't allow it.»

Mangeum Daebu bit his lip. He couldn't know the real reason why Cheon Myeon Susa sided with Jang Ilso. He might never know. Human hearts are fickle, and understanding someone's intentions completely is an impossible task.

Nevertheless, Mangeum Daebu couldn't deny that Jang Ilso had achieved what he couldn't. That was the most critical difference that decided the outcome of their struggle.

Mangeum Daebu's gaze shifted from Cheon Myeon Susa, to Jang Ilso.

“Did Hwasan know?»

«Of course not.»

«Then...»

Mangeum Daebu's eyes were filled with questions once more. There were so many things he wanted to ask. What was the arrangement between them, and how could they act as they did without even speaking to each other?

But Jang Ilso's next words shattered all of Mangeum Daebu's questions in an instant.

«You still don't understand, Gong Yawol.»

Jang Ilso opened his mouth with a mocking smile.

«Asking such questions... it just proves you had no right to step onto this stage. People can guess what a dog is thinking, but a dog can't understand what a person is thinking. Do you get it?»

Those words cut deeper into Mangeum Daebu's core than any words he had heard before, as they denied everything he stood for. All that remained for him was a proud defeat. But now, Jang Ilso had even taken away his last remaining sense of pride with a few short words.

«Is that so... I never had the qualifications to begin with.»

Mangeum Daebu, who had given everything up, turned his gaze towards the Black Ghost's who stood there, looking at him blankly.

Those he had raised like his own limbs, now, no one rushed to save him. They simply stood and watched what was happening here. This had been a sight he had witnessed countless times before.

The difference was that, up until now, it had been Mangeum Daebu standing in Jang Ilso's position, and now, he was in the very positions of those he had killed over the years.

What could be different? Indeed... just that.

«Kill me.»

Mangeum Daebu closed his eyes. Jang Ilso slowly bent over, gazing at him. His long eyes narrowed slightly.

Mangeum Daebu had pressed Jang Ilso to the brink of death. If he had taken just one more step, his blade might have reached Jang Ilso's heart. He had ultimately lost, but he had earned the right to be acknowledged.

Nevertheless, he shed all regret at this moment. Even though everything had slipped through his hands, he did not resist and simply accepted it.

«Excellent,»

Jang Ilso exclaimed with admiration, nodding his head.

«And indeed, you are the true Mangeum Daebu.»

Then Jang Ilso lightly touched his shoulder. Mangeum Daebu flinched slightly at the touch.

«There's no reason to deny it. You, Gong Yawol, are unlike the idiots I've encountered so far.»

Upon hearing this, Mangeum Daebu slowly opened his eyes and met Jang Ilso's gaze. When he saw the peculiar lines drawn by Jang Ilso's eyes, a faint glimmer of hope surfaced in his heart. Perhaps...

«So, therefore...»

But in an instant, Jang Ilso's face cruelly twisted.

«I don't like it.»

His hand suddenly grabbed Mangeum Daebu's face. His fingers, like a piercing gust from the Northern Sea, radiated a sharp chilling energy as they dug into the bone.

«N... Nooo!»

In a sudden surge of cold energy, Mangeum Daebu let out a desperate scream. Jang Ilso's eyes, looking down at him, revealed a flame of madness.

«That's right... this is how it should be. This is what death is, Gong Yawol. When you gamble with your life, you should die in a filthy and wretched manner. You don't get to act all noble and clean, do you?»

«N... No... Nnggh...»

A steady stream of dark red blood continued to pour out of Mangeum Daebu's mouth, as his limbs twitched in agony. It was evident how much pain he was experiencing just by looking at his contorted figure.

«Why? Did you harbor a glimmer of hope for a moment?»

«Ugh...»

«Know it well, Gong Yawol. There's no such thing as a good death for people like us. We live and become demons or we die in filth and misery. There are only those two options. You knew that, didn't you?»

A savage glint filled Jang Ilso's eyes.

«So... don't feel too wronged.»

Bang!

Mangeum Daebu's head exploded. His headless corpse slumped lifelessly. Who would think that this was the former head of the Black Ghost Fortress and the leader of Shinjuopae, the ruler of Gangnam?

Jang Ilso silently stared at the blood-splattered hand he had used to kill Mangeum Daebu.

«Anyway... human blood is all the same, isn't it? Yours and mine.»

He wiped his hand clean and turned away.

The cold wind of Gangnam swept somberly over Mangeum Daebu's lifeless body.