

Chapter 1036

You'll find out soon enough. (1)

Baek Cheon took a long breath.

'Magyo.'

His heart pounded like a drum.

Whenever he heard the two words 'Demonic Cult', vivid memories from the Northern Sea immediately surfaced in his mind. The word «madness» was not enough to describe the cultists there, and the overwhelming presence of the Bishop, which made one doubt if he was even human.

Baek Cheon slowly clenched and loosened his fist.

He would be lying if he said he wasn't afraid.

Those who had experienced Magyo knew. The reason their name instilled fear was not just because they were formidable, but because of the sense of dread and otherworldly terror when confronting something that, although still human, felt inhuman. Overcoming it was not easy.

Of course, they had chosen this path themselves, but once they crossed the Yangtze River and had to face Magyo, a bitter tension seemed to infiltrate their entire being.

«Then...»

As expected, Jo Geol was the first to speak.

«Is it okay for only those present here to go?»

«...Huh?»

In response to his words, Baek Cheon rechecked the people around him.

With Yu Iseol, Yoon Jong, Jo Geol, Tang Soso, and Hye Yeon, and including Chung Myung, there are a total of seven.

'Seven...'

Baek Cheon couldn't help but feel it anew. How small a number this was. Compared to Sapaeryeon and Magyo, they would seem like grains of sand.

But...

'Chung Myung's words are right.'

If all of Hwasan crossed over to Gangnam, it would be incredibly difficult to withdraw in case of any unexpected situation. Considering that it's enemy territory, moving with the minimum number of people is the best approach.

'Chung Myung.'

«What?»

«What about Baek Sang or Gwak Hoi? Some of them seem worthy of taking with us.»

There is undoubtedly a difference in power between those present here and the other Hwasan disciples. However, among the remaining disciples, there are some who have shown rapid improvement in their abilities.

«No.»

But Chung Myung firmly shook his head as if there was no need for further consideration.

«We won't bring more.»

«Is that so?»

«Remember, Sasuk. This isn't a journey to gain experience — it's a journey to fight and win.»

«Understood.»

At that moment, Chung Myung spoke calmly,

“We can't go with those who are not here for now. This battle is not the battle we can fight while protecting someone.”

Baek Cheon briefly looked at him and then nodded firmly,

“I get it.”

He then turned his gaze to the others.

“Those who want to stay behind can stay...”

“Don't say useless things. Let's get going quickly, Sasuk.”

Jo Geol's words made Baek Cheon fall silent. Yoon Jong scolded Jo Geol, hitting him on the back of the head.

“What's wrong with your tongue, you scoundrel! How do you talk to your Sasuk!”

“No... Isn't that right, Sahyeong? Are there people here who will stay behind? That guy tends to say strange things once in a while”

“Well, that's true.”

Huh? Yoon Jong? What did you say?

“Let's go.”

Yu Iseol took a step forward. Tang Soso confidently stood beside her, and Hye Yeon chanted while moving forward.

“Amida-bul. Although I'm not a disciple of Hwasan...”

“No, let's not go into those details.”

“Let's just assume you've joined the novice disciples.”

“Monk, even if you say you're from Shaolin no one would believe you now...”

“....”

Hye Yeon cleared his throat with a noticeably blushing face.

«Well, anyway, I will join you. It is the duty of a Buddhist to stop the suffering of the common people in Gangnam... Yes. I can't just stand by and watch from here.»

His words carried a bitter undertone. Everyone present understood the reason behind this bitterness, so there was no need to point it out explicitly.

«Then, with seven...»

«Eight.»

An unexpected voice interrupted, and everyone turned their attention to the person approaching. A familiar face was walking towards them.

«Let's make it eight.»

«Sasuk...»

Baek Cheon could hide his dumbfounded expression when he saw Un Geom approaching.

«I saw you unintentionally. But it's a matter of a chance, so don't scold me for taking a peek.»

«Is that even possible?»

«A person you can trust without a need to protect. How about it, Chung Myung? Am I someone who can meet those conditions?»

Chung Myung furrowed his brow slightly.

«Sasukjo...»

«Let's not talk about the fact that I have to teach the kids. Anyway, it's not a path to death, but a path to return, right?»

Un Geom smiled again.

“This is not your task; it's the task of Hwasan.”

“...”

“Leading a mission to the enemy's territory is not something for the youngest disciple to take on. If I can't go with you, I will use all my authority to oppose it.”

Chung Myung shook his head.

“You don't need to do that. If I can entrust my back to Sasukjo, it's an honor for me.”

“Thank you.”

Un Geom nodded and looked at Hyun Jong.

“Geom-a.”

“Don't worry, Sect Leader.”

Un Geom spoke with a composed face.

“I will do whatever it takes to bring the kids back alive.”

Hyun Jong gazed at him and nodded. He patted Un Geom's shoulder.

“I'm counting on you.”

“Please entrust them to me.”

Such a dangerous mission should not be entrusted to the kids alone. Both Hyun Jong and Un Geom know. These kids are strong enough not to require Un Geom's help.

However, this is not just an issue of the elder disciples. What's important is not putting this heavy responsibility solely on younger generations but sharing the responsibility among the upper echelons of the sect.

“Sasuk.”

When Baek Cheon opened his mouth, Un Geom grabbed his head firmly with the one remaining hand.

“It’s not that I don’t trust you. I’m just worried that waiting for you here would be frustrating.”

“Yes, Sasuk.”

Baek Cheon nodded. He had no intention of asserting his pride. With Un Geom here, it certainly brought a sense of security. Baek Cheon knew that if Un Geom joined them, it would make a significant difference in their confidence.

Baek Cheon realized that what he felt would be felt more strongly by the others. No matter how much he does his best as the top disciple of Hwasan, he couldn’t fill the gap in experience.

Knowing that an adult would accompany them was comforting to everyone heading out.

“Alright, there will be eight of us.”

Baek Cheon’s words made Un Geom smile.

“Well, I suppose there’s someone who doesn’t think like that.”

“What?”

A clear voice responded, like it was waiting for this moment.

«Please wait for a moment.»

«Yes?»

Everyone’s heads turned in one direction. Namgung Dowi, dressed in white uniform, was approaching.

«... Wait, Young Lord?»

Namgung Dowi stood in front of Hyun Jong and Chung Myung and bowed deeply.

«Please take me with you.»

«Young Lord...»

Hyun Jong frowned involuntarily.

«It’s a dangerous task.»

«I am aware.»

«And you understand that this is not the time for Namgung Clan to take such risks?»

«Yes. But...»

Namgung Dowi looked Hyun Jong in the eye.

«Isn’t the same true for Hwasan?»

Hyun Jong couldn’t respond easily to that statement. What was more significant, Namgung Dowi’s worth in Namgung Clan, or the worth of these disciples in Hwasan? No one could easily say which had greater value.

Hyun Jong looked at Chung Myung with a perplexed expression.

When Chung Myung received his gaze, he stared at Namgung Dowi with cold eyes.

«Let me ask you one thing.»

«Yes.»

Namgung Dowi nodded slightly with a tense face.

«Namgung has already lost its leader.»

«...»

«The elders are also gone, which puts you in a difficult situation. If you lose the head of the family in such circumstances, can you imagine how much worse it will get? It's quite obvious.»

Namgung Dowi nodded heavily.

«Despite knowing all this, your decision to head for Gangnam seems like a feeble self-satisfaction to avoid the heavy responsibility placed on your shoulders. As the Young Lord of the family, or no, as the Head of the Namgung family, your top priority should be the family's well-being, shouldn't it?»

It was a heavy question. But Namgung Dowi replied calmly, without avoiding Chung Myung's gaze.

«I didn't step forward without any doubts, Dojang.»

There was a sense of certainty on his face, despite the deep breath he had taken.

«So I've thought about it. What would my father have said if he was still here?»

«...»

«It was easy to reach a conclusion. Doing things with a sense of righteousness isn't what we need when we have enough time and don't need to suffer significant losses.»

Namgung Dowi spoke with a resolute face.

«I want to restore the Namgung family to what it used to be. But what I want to regain isn't the prosperity of Namgung, but its spirit.»

«Young Lord.»

Namgung Dowi closed in with a determined expression.

«So, please give me a chance as well. I, who saved my life by relying on Hwasan, am asking for an opportunity to make a contribution myself. Please, at least do not cut off my chance to carry my share. I'm asking you for this.»

With this firm request, Chung Myung eventually had to nod in agreement.

He wanted to stop it if possible, but he understood the struggles of those who were left behind best.

«Just one thing to remember.»

«...What?»

«You're not going to die. If there's a spirit to preserve, come back alive and convey it with your own words and your own hands.»

Namgung Dowi nodded with a determined expression.

«I will definitely do so.»

«I'll leave you behind if you become a burden. I can't afford to take care of you too.»

«I'll follow you with all my determination.»

Chung Myung nodded. Baek Cheon took a deep breath and organized himself.

«So, it's nine of us.»

«No, ten.»

«Huh?»

Baek Cheon's face showed confusion at Chung Myung's unexpected words. Is there more?

«Come out.»

«...»

«Ah, come out quickly. We don't have time.»

«Fine.»

A moment later, with a slight groan, the bushes by the riverside rustled. And within them, two people stuck their heads out.

«...Lord Nokrim?»

«Oh, no. Lord Tang?»

Im Sobyong with a face like he was about to die, and Tang Gunak coughed pretending to be calm but with a red face.

«No, Father! What are you doing there without any dignity!»

Startled, Tang Soso cried out, and Tang Gunak covered his mouth and coughed repeatedly.

«I didn't mean to... I didn't mean to do that.»

«Is that so?»

Im Sobyong answered in place of him.

«No, it's just that suddenly, there's an abundance of laughter and inauspicious sounds coming from the riverside! Can you not come and see?»

«Ah, I see.»

Everyone quickly nodded in agreement. It seemed like people were getting noisy for some reason.

Then, Tang Gunak opened his mouth as if he wanted to avoid the situation quickly.

«By the way, is that tenth person talking about me?»

«No.»

Chung Myung shook his head firmly again.

«In case something unexpected happens, Lord Tang might need to provide assistance with escaping Gangnam.»

«That's something the Alliance Leader alone...»

«Lord Tang might be needed in certain situations.»

After a brief moment of silent contemplation, Tang Gunak slowly nodded.

«I understand what you mean.»

«Yes.»

Tang Gunak raised his hand and patted Im Sobyong's shoulder.

«Then be careful.»

«...What?»

«If not me, then who else would it be?»

«Me?»

«...»

«Me?»

Im Sobyong, as if he was laughing at the nonsense of it all, looked around. When his eyes met with Chung Myung's, his already pale face turned even bluer.

«Oh, no, I'm a tactician...!»

«Even tacticians are needed there.»

«I have to protect Nokrim...»

«If you die, they'll just appoint another Nokrim King. That's how Nokrim works originally.»

«No, that's just nonsense...!»

«It seems you've forgotten.»

Chung Myung chuckled.

«Nokrim is now a part of Cheonumaeng.»

«...»

«Once you gain the rights, you also bear the responsibilities. Stop grumbling and stick with us. Or should I tear up that contract?»

«This is absurd...»

Im Sobyong bowed his head deeply, wearing a face that had lost all hope. He had come to realize that there was no way out.

«Seems like I'm the one who said something would be resolved. Well, that's me. Sigh.»

Im Sobyong spat on the ground and pressed the crumpled hat against his head, then approached with a resigned look.

«...he is a human but a demon.»

And, slouching his shoulders, he stood behind Chung Myung.

«All ten of us.»

The disciples of Hwasan, Namgung Dowi, and even Im Sobyong. Exactly ten people were assembled.

It didn't grow as much as originally anticipated, but still, the fact that it became ten somehow felt different.

«Then...»

Chung Myung looked at everyone around him.

«Let's go. To kill those cursed Demonic bastards.»

Between his lips, Chung Myung's snow white teeth were revealed.