

## Chapter 1040

You'll find out soon enough. (5)

Paaah!

Baek Cheon ran forward like a fierce wind surging alongside the breaking dawn.

With each stride, Baek Cheon flew a distance of over three zhang, like a darting tiger. The term «thunder lightning» [섬전 — the hanja I've found(閃電)] came to mind considering the speed.

However, it was nothing special. Everyone around him was running at the same speed. Baek Cheon glanced to his side.

Un Geom had an emotionless face as he ran. There was no sign of strain in his expression. Baek Cheon sighed in relief, this time glancing behind him. They were all keeping up, no one falling behind.

Ogeom had experienced such high-speed movement quite often, so there was little to be concerned about. What worried him were Namgung Dowi and Im Sobyong.

Impressively enough, Im Sobyong, who appeared frail and sickly, was maintaining a composed face while keeping pace. And Namgung Dowi, in turn, was sticking right with the group.

‘This is amazing.’

Hwasan is a sect that places great importance on its foundation. Of course, now it has come to the point where Chung Myung has focused not only on the basics but also on the martial arts and overall power dynamics in the sect.

Regardless, Im Sobyong and Namgung Dowi didn't seem to be bothered much by Hwasan's speed, which implied their profound internal strength.

‘Seems like I don't need to worry about others.’

Baek Cheon's breathing became slightly heavier.

This level of physical exertion shouldn't have been a problem for someone like him, who was usually much faster.

In his normal condition, he could have maintained a speed at least two times faster without any change in his expression.

Yet, the reason Baek Cheon was currently feeling strained had only one cause.

Warriors dressed in the fiery red attire, running with them in a close vicinity.

Unlike the pristine energy of the orthodox factions, these men showed a raw savagery that looked like they could explode at any moment. They had surrounded Hwasan's party, drenched in this wild energy, as they ran alongside them.

Baek Cheon's face grew tense.

He knew they didn't have any malice toward him. However, the discomfort was inevitable. These men had fought with Hwasan just a short while ago, sword to sword, their lives on the line.

‘Maninbang...’

Maninbang's distinct pure-red [백홍포(白紅袍) — I think 白 here means pure/plain/clean in color] robes.

‘Red Dogs [Hong-gyeon — 홍견(紅犬)]

The name they used to call themselves would've been different initially, probably something with more dignity. But at some point, Gangho had started calling them ‘Red Dogs.’

Red Dogs.

An insulting name that was a mix of fear of Jang Ilso and disdain for those who followed him. Nevertheless, the members themselves welcomed the name, showcasing their unwavering loyalty to Jang Ilso by referring to themselves as the ‘Red Dogs.’

That's why even though Gangho referred to them as dogs, it was afraid. With their symbolic red robes, these warriors had always surrounded Jang Ilso, acting as his protection and trampling his enemies underfoot. The Red Dogs were now encircling the disciples of Hwasan.

Each time they released their untamed energy, there was a sensation of the hair all over his body bristling. Their aura was entirely different from that of the orthodox factions. Their sharp savagery didn't allow a single moment of relaxation.

‘Is Maninbang really this strong?’

They weren't exerting their full power, but even in their current situation, the disciples of Hwasan proudly believed that they couldn't be outdone in light arts by any other faction. However, now, they were witnessing over a hundred Red Dogs members keeping up with their pace.

This destroyed the confidence that came from previous experiences facing Maninbang and taking down those who attacked Hwasan.

Baek Cheon bit his lip.

‘Well...’

This explained why Maninbang had been able to occupy the seat of the leader of the Sapaeryeon. No matter how competent Jang Ilso was, he would have never been able to rise above other unorthodox factions without the powerful backing from Maninbang.

Thud!

Baek Cheon's legs dug into the ground instinctively as he pushed himself forward.

‘These people are enemies,’

he knows for certain. That's why Baek Cheon can't help but remain vigilant.

But, at this moment, these fearsome warriors temporarily become allies who aim at the same foes.

It was a strange feeling, with anxiety and reassurance, unease and hope coexisting. Just then, Yoon Jong's voice reached him.

«Sasuk, when do you think we'll arrive?»

«It won't be long now.»

From Gugang [mouth of the river] to Hangzhou, there's a distance of a thousand li, a journey that would take an ordinary person about ten days of continuous walking. However, for them, it's a distance they can cover in half a day without a break.

They've been running without rest from sunrise to near sunset, so they'll likely reach Hangzhou soon.

«Well, we'll see them soon.»

The word referring to the subject was left out. But everyone here knew who Yoon Jong was referring to.

Demonic Cult.

Baek Cheon instinctively looked ahead in the thought of those two words. The leaders of the group, the two people at the very front.

Baek Cheon momentarily felt as if his breath was taken away. The backs of Chung Myung in black uniform and Jang Ilso in the red robe left a lasting impression.

'During my lifetime... I never thought I would see those two running side by side.'

Among the disciples of Hwasan, regardless of what others said, Chung Myung was the person they could rely on the most. He might be the least trustworthy guy in the world in everyday life, but on the battlefield, Chung Myung was more dependable than anyone else. And what the disciples of Hwasan feared the most, no matter what anyone said, was Jang Ilso. In Hwasan, Jang Ilso was both the embodiment of hatred and a symbol of fear.

And now, those two are leading the ones following them side by side.

It was a sight that had never been imagined, or rather, a sight that had no reason to be imagined. So it was only natural that Baek Cheon felt this intense alienation.

But at the same time...

'I might sound crazy saying this, but...'

Baek Cheon turned around slightly. It was as if he was worried that the others could hear his inner thoughts.

'Seeing those two together, it seems like we're not going to lose no matter what.'

Perhaps other disciples of Hwasan were also having similar thoughts.

At that moment, Jang Ilso's relaxed voice reached their ears.

«You seem quite tense, Hwasan Geomhyeop.»

Chung Myung didn't respond to Jang Ilso's words. He just kept his gaze fixed ahead.

However, Jang Ilso seemed to have expected such a response and smiled slyly.

«No need to be so tense. You won't have much to do. You just need to finish at the right moment. If you ask too much of someone so young, it would make me look bad, wouldn't it?»

At that moment, Chung Myung raised the corners of his mouth as he watched Jang Ilso running beside him. It was a distinct smile that was visible even to Baek Cheon, who was running behind.

«Hmm?»

Jang Ilso asked with a curious expression on his face.

«Why are you smiling?»

«Keep going.»

«Huh?»

«When you can speak, it's better to speak. Soon, the calmness will disappear from that face.»

«...Oh?»

Jang Ilso looked at Chung Myung with interest.

«Do you think I'm underestimating their power?»

«No. A guy like you wouldn't do something so foolish.»

«But?»

Chung Myung's eyes darkened.

«You'll find out soon enough.»

«...»

«There are things in this world that can't be measured by mere calculations.»

Chung Myung didn't bother to explain further.

He slightly turned his head to check on the group following behind.

Baek Cheon, Yu Iseol, Yoon Jong, Jo Geol, and Tang Soso.

The only ones whose complexion changed upon Chung Myung's words were those who had experienced Magyo in the Northern Sea. They would understand the meaning hidden in Chung Myung's words.

«Perhaps because you're about to see something you've never imagined.»

Chung Myung spoke sharply, and Jang Ilso looked at him with a strange glint in his eyes.

«That...»

Jang Ilso's mouth twisted and curled up gradually.

«...Is intriguing.»

With a light gesture from Jang Ilso, Ho Gamyong, who had been running not far away, quickly caught up. Jang Ilso quietly gave a few instructions.

Ho Gamyong nodded swiftly and slowed down to join Red Dogs, who were trailing behind.

Chung Myung watched this process with narrowed eyes.

Jang Ilso must have felt his gaze, as he looked back at Chung Myung with a slight smile.

«Why? Curious?»

«What instructions did you give?»

«Just a reminder, as you said, not to be surprised no matter what you see.»

«...»

«I don't know if your words are right or wrong, but not preparing for what you can anticipate is a foolish act. If advice is offered, there's no reason not to accept it, right?»

Chung Myung let out a bitter laugh.

In the past, even those within the same faction couldn't accept his advice as it was. But now, this Sapa bastard was taking his words seriously. This guy doesn't distinguish between the righteous and the evil — he only differentiates what he can use from what he can't.

It made him think anew.

Chung Myung and Cheonma were beings outside the laws of the world. Without their appearance, how would his group have fared? Perhaps they would have run amok beyond control in this guy's hands.

From that perspective, it might be Jang Ilso who had to bear the most significant losses due to the existence of Cheonma and Chung Myung.

«A strangely... unsettling look,»

Jang Ilso's red lips twisted, and his accessories made a clinking sound.

«Don't look at me with these kind of eyes. It makes me want to gouge them out, you know?»

«Lunatic,»

Chung Myung retorted sternly and turned his head in disgust. Jang Ilso's words were harsh, but his voice stayed extremely gentle.

There was no way around it — Jang Ilso and him were inherently incompatible. Joining hands with this guy was a one-time affair.

Just then,

«Hey!»

Baek Cheon raised his voice as if he had spotted something. Chung Myung's gaze instinctively turned forward.

“...”

At the same time his previously brisk steps began to slow.

They pace slowed gradually, before finally becoming slow. Then he came to a complete stop. Everyone who had been running like the wind also stopped in their tracks. Not a single one of them spoke. Even the sound of breathing died.

All of them simply stared in a silent shock at the scene before them.

As for what they could see... it was the ground, covered in corpses.

The land was smeared and soaked in blood, turning it a dark, terrible shade. It was filled with disfigured bodies of the dead.

They knew. Having fought countless battles, they could tell from the remnants that this was no result of war. Those who had fought and resisted each other, killing and using evil arts, never left such traces.

This was... the aftermath of a massacre.

«Ugh!»

Tang Soso choked back a cry and bent over, clutching her stomach. Yu Iseol, who was by her side, held onto her shoulders tightly.

«How...?»

A trail of corpses stretched endlessly before them.

The thought of how any human could commit such an act was beyond their imagination.

Someone in their right mind would never be able to kill endlessly like this.

Thud.

At that moment, Jang Ilso took a step forward. “This is...”

Standing before the land stained with death, he slowly licked his red lips. A cruel smile played across his ghost like face.

“...Magyo.”

A ghostly glow engulfed Jang Ilso’s face. Dark and profound emotions began to pool in his pale eyes.