

## Chapter 1238

Who has come? (3)

“Who has come?”

“They said it’s Hwasan, Hwasan! Cheonumaeng has come!”

“This is ridiculous! With the storm raging like this?”

“This is not the time to argue about whether it makes sense or not! They’re here in the guest hall! Have you been living in denial?”

«...Unbelievable.»

Upon hearing the conversation, someone reached out and opened the window.

Whiiiiiiing!

The wind howled at a frightening speed, causing trees to sway helplessly. Some trees had already been uprooted and were rolling around.

«To break through this?»

Facing a storm like this, even climbing a mountain would have been challenging. Typhoons in the waters of the Southern Sea were on a different scale compared to those on land. Yet, amidst such a storm, people unfamiliar with the Southern Sea...

«Who, who came?»

«Don’t be surprised! Ogeom themselves has come, Ogeom!»

«Ogeom? Could it be the Ogeom of Hwasan?»

«Yes! That very Ogeom!»

«...Haha.»

The mention of Hwasan’s Ogeom evoked various feelings among the disciples of Haenam sect.

«That’s them.»

At the martial arts competition held in Shaolin, the disciples of Haenam clashed with the disciples of Hwasan, exchanging blows and fists. While the incident was mediated by Shaolin at the time and didn’t escalate significantly, it wouldn’t be entirely wrong to say that it was the disciples of Haenam who spread the news of Hwasan’s Ogeom to the world. Therefore, when the disciples of Haenam heard the term «Hwasan’s Ogeom,» their emotions were inevitably complex.

These people, who hadn’t been significantly different from others back then, had risen to become representatives of their generation, achieving unimaginable feats that swept away all the fame and glory of Gangho.

«Wait, so Hwasan Geomhyeop has come too?»

«That’s correct!»

«...Really. He really came.»

Someone who heard the news shivered uncontrollably.

Hwasan Geomhyeop. That title had long transcended Hwasan itself to become a symbol of Cheonumaeng. How could one not know what it means that he came in person?

“Where are they now?”

“That’s right, in the guest hall.... Yes, Sahyeong! Where are you going? Sahyeong!»

“I have to see it with my own eyes!”

«Let’s go together! Sahyeong! Ah, wait!»

‘The special envoys of Cheonumaeng have arrived in Haenam!’ This news spread throughout Haenam faster than the strong winds. Some were surprised by this fact, others were moved, and a few hotheads rushed forward without hesitation.

And Cheonumaeng’s group, who received all that attention...

«More rice! Please, we need more rice!»

«Ah, this Hainan chicken is delicious!»

«That’s not chicken, it’s fish.»

«Why are these grains of rice so long?»

«Who cares about the shape? As long as it tastes good!»

They were tearing through Haenam’s food supplies at a speed that could rival a plunder. To an uninformed observer, they might have seemed like dispatched agents of Sapaeryeon, sent by Jang Ilso to deplete Haenam’s resources.

The chef of Haenam looked helplessly at the chaos unfolding on the dining table.

Under normal circumstances, they would have prepared delicacies from the mountains and the sea for visitors from afar, but with the sudden arrival of guests, Haenam had no capacity to do so. As a result, there was much concern that the hastily prepared food might not be to their guests’ liking.

However, as he looked at this scene now, he couldn’t help but think...

‘Was there ever any significance to the ‘mountain and sea delicacies’?’

It seems like they’re just stuffing anything edible they can find into their mouths... Is it really worth putting precious food into those mouths? Seems like a bit of a waste...

«Is there any more rice?»

«But you just had a pot.»

«None left?»

«I’ll... I’ll get some more. More rice! Bring more rice, quickly! And prepare more of the other dishes too!»

The chef dashed back to the kitchen, sweat pouring down his face.

After a while, Cheonumaeng’s group, having thoroughly emptied Haenam’s warehouse, finally sat back in their chairs with contented expressions.

«...Feels like we survived.»

«Yeah...»

Namgung Dowi closed his eyes tightly, after looking at his bulging belly.

To be honest, there was a time when he thought poorly of the people from Hwasan, who seemed to devour food like ravenous beasts, lacking any refinement. But now he realized... It wasn't a lack of refinement at all.

If you wanted to survive, you had to eat.

The rigorous training imposed by Hwasan Geomhyeop and the tasks they undertake often leave one's body exhausted, despite any amount of internal strength cultivated. If Namgung Dowi had maintained his usual eating habits, by now he would likely be gasping for air, unable to move his body, only skin and bones left. It's only by eating like a madman that he manages to maintain his strength.

«I thought I was a goner for sure.»

«Maybe we're already dead? We've already sunk to the bottom of the sea, and this is just a dream...»

«Don't talk such nonsense.»

Tang Pae grimaced, delivering a sharp reprimand.

Namgung Dowi had been acting stranger and stranger lately. Despite having some unlucky tendencies in the past, he used to be a serious person.

«...I really felt like I was facing death.»

«I can relate to that.»

Tang Pae nodded with a weary expression.

Just the thought of towering waves was enough to make one's spine tingle.

«We've survived against all odds... somehow.»

Indeed, facing a typhoon out in the open sea was a feat that even the most seasoned warrior would find challenging.

If Im Sobyong hadn't advised them to dive deep, they might have suffered some consequences halfway through.

«Well, at least the outcome isn't the worst.»

«Is it good?»

«...It's not the worst outcome, at least.»

Namgung Dowi nodded in agreement, his head shaking slightly.

'How on earth did he know that?'

He learned it the moment they submerged. The powerful currents that had been raging on the surface became strangely calm deep down.

Of course, diving to such depths and swimming wasn't easy, and they had to surface occasionally to catch their breath, but nothing compared to swimming on the surface.

«But where did this guy get such valuable herbs!»

At that moment, Chung Myung kicked Im Sobyong, who was holding the medicine bowl. Even though Im Sobyong toppled over, he managed to protect the herb bowl and desperately sucked it dry.

«Why won't you give it to me? This Sapa bastard is wasting valuable herbs!»

«Oh! Sahyeong! What if he really dies?»

«That's what I'm saying! You're from the Tang clan, and you're using herbs on Sapa instead of poison? Wasting such expensive stuff?»

«... We have to save lives. Besides, I'm a doctor.»

Namgung Dowi let out a deep sigh. Chung Myung and Im Sobyong were quite consistent in their ways. Although he didn't say anything, it seemed like Tang Pae agreed, nodding.

Suddenly, Namgung Dowi's gaze shifted to the side. Without realizing it, quite a few people had gathered by the window, snooping around despite the raging storm outside.

Their eyes showed a strange mix of anticipation and anxiety. Namgung Dowi spoke in a low voice.

«The expressions of the disciples of Haenam don't look good.»

«It's understandable. They've endured for years under the pressure of not knowing when Sapaeryeon might attack.»

«Shouldn't they be a little more welcoming then?»

«You seem to have forgotten something too.»

«What's that?»

«We've been just as neglectful of Haenam until now, completely excluding them.»

Namgung Dowi's expression stiffened slightly at those words.

«Of course, we can brush it off as the role of Gupailbang, but they might not see it that way.»

Namgung Dowi especially could not discard these words.

Namgung Hwang's death and the transfer of Namgung clan to Cheonumaeng marked a shift in Namgung's position. Until then, Namgung clan had been acting in conjunction with Gupailbang under the name of Five Great Families. During those three years, they had turned a blind eye to Haenam. That was an unchanging fact.

'It's something I must not forget.'

Therefore, they did not come here as saviors. They came to apologize for neglecting what should have been done and to inform them where Cheonumaeng now stands.

«We come with good intentions, but it would be arrogant of us to expect a warm reception without first reflecting on our past actions.»

Namgung Dowi nodded at those words.

'I must approach them with a more humble attitude.'

He thought that might be the key to resolving the situation in Haenam.

And then, it happened.

The door of the guest hall swung open, and a fierce wind rushed in. Drawing everyone's attention, Gwak Hwanso stepped inside.

Thunk. Thunk.

Gwak Hwanso approached the table where they were seated in a straight line and nodded as he observed the empty plates neatly arranged.

«Sect Leader instructed us to ensure the guests' comfort. If you need anything...»

«Oh? I remember now!»

At that moment, Chung Myung pointed at Gwak Hwanso.

«It's him, Sahyeong! That guy!»

In Chung Myung's menacing arms, Yoon Jong casually asked, swaying from side to side,

«Who?»

«Oh, him! Sahyeong! The guy who got beaten up by Sasuk at Shao-«

«Oh! That guy?»

«Yeah! He cried after getting knocked out by Sasuk...»

«Who cried? Who!»

Gwak Hwanso erupted with a loud shout. He got hit, sure, but he didn't cry! He might have lost consciousness from a single blow though!

«Well, well. It's good to see you here.»

«...»

«But, isn't the treatment of the guests a bit lacking here?»

«Pardon?»

Chung Myung spoke grumpily,

«Is this how you treat guests in the Southern Sea? How can you not bring out a bottle of liquor?»

Gwak Hwanso chuckled,

«Ah, you're talking about liquor. Of course, there's good liquor in Hainan. But since our liquor tends to be quite potent, it might be a bit much for tired folks like yourselves...»

«You guys can handle it just fine.»

«...»

«It's the kind of liquor that wimpy guys who get knocked out by Sasuk drink.»

Gwak Hwanso's cheek twitched involuntarily.

«I've said it before, Southern Sea's liquor is potent. And our men are...»

«Weaklings?»

«...»

At that moment, the sound of Gwak Hwanso clenching his teeth came out.

«Jayang.»

«Yes, Sahyeong.»

«Go get some liquor.»

«Um... yes?»

«Bring everything we've got. Right now!»

At the sound of an angry voice, several of Haenam's disciples rushed outside in a hurry.

Moments later, they returned carrying large liquor jars. Even at a quick glance, there were easily more than ten of them.

Thunk.

Gwak Hwanso pulled open the cloth covering the liquor jar, releasing the strong aroma of the alcohol throughout the room.

«We've brought the liquor you requested. But... just from the scent, you can tell it's quite potent. So, it's not something to...»

«Sasuk, does the scent smell strong?»

«It's quite fragrant.»

«These country bumpkins. Their pretentiousness knows no bounds.»

Gwak Hwanso's eyes flashed with anger.

«If you gentlemen can't handle the liquor, then leave. We'll gladly drink it ourselves.»

Unable to contain his frustration, Gwak Hwanso grabbed one of the liquor jars and raised it as if he was about to throw it away.

«Sahyeong!»

«S-Sahyeong! You can't!»

Thunk!

However, he continued to walk forward and placed it firmly in front of Baek Cheon. Then, he sat down heavily, facing him.

«...Travelers from afar deserve to be treated generously, it's only proper etiquette.»

«Oh?»

Baek Cheon smiled meaningfully as he looked at Gwak Hwanso. Gwak Hwanso twisted his lips and spoke.

«But... I'm concerned. Even if someone has a fair face, if they can't handle the taste of the liquor and end up peeing themselves, it could become a lifelong memory.»

Baek Cheon just smiled amiably.

«Well, it's better to have a bitter experience than to foam at the mouth and collapse after being beaten, isn't it?»

«What?»

«Why?»

Flames flickered simultaneously in the eyes of both men.

«So? Are you willing to go at it again?»

«It seems you still don't understand, even after experiencing it before. While Hwasan may not start a fight, they never shy away from a fight that comes their way.»

Those who heard his words murmured from behind.

«Don't start fights?»

«Don't you engage in any fight you can?»

“Even Sasuk speaks lies as easily as he breathes. He could make a career in the imperial court.»

«Does he not have conscience?»

Baek Cheon gave a death glare to the murmuring people behind him, then turned his gaze back to Gwak Hwanso.

Gwak Hwanso forced a smile, his face contorting.

«You'll regret it, you know?»

«Regret?»

Thud. Thud.

Baek Cheon tilted his chin slightly, and sharply bent his neck from side to side.

«Make me regret it.»

«Um, Vice Sect Leader?»

«Show some restraint...»

«Well, let's leave it at that. Looks like someone's already lost their cool. Can't stop them now. It's too late.»

Ignoring whatever was said around them, the two of them simultaneously grabbed their cups firmly.

«First to go!»

«It was your mistake!»

Two large cups clashed fiercely in mid-air.