Chapter 8 : Chapter 8

Chapter 008 : Ambush

"...Are you speaking of the Horse Bandits?"

Seol Su-hyeok, the General Manager of the North Sea Ice Palace, widened his eyes.

"Yes."

Seol Baek-ho turned his head to look at Seol Su-hyeok.

"Aren't the Horse Bandits of the Great Grasslands running rampant lately? Those targeting the Ice Palace are becoming increasingly bold. A report even came in recently that traces of a bandit group were found at the southern border."

Seol Su-hyeok fell into thought for a moment.

The Horse Bandits of the Great Grasslands were an outlaw group settled between the North Sea and the Central Plains, and they had been a headache for the Ice Palace for a long time.

They constantly attempted raids targeting the Ice Palace's supplies, making them a familiar yet annoying enemy to the martial artists of the North Sea.

"Are you saying you will tell Hyeokryeon Yeom to sweep away those Horse Bandits?"

Seol Su-hyeok asked as if to confirm.

"I intend to at least bring it up."

Seol Baek-ho answered firmly.

Since Ye-rin had shown improvement thanks to Hyeokryeon Yeom, his safety was more important to Seol Baek-ho than anything else.

However.

He had to be able to protect his own body to stay by Seol Ye-rin's side in the future.

This was to verify that.

"I'll be able to confirm what kind of nature he possesses,and whether he is a person capable of protecting Ye-rin's life with this."

Seol Su-hyeok hesitated for a moment before speaking.

"Palace Lord, sweeping out the Horse Bandits is by no means an easy task. Although Hyeokryeon Yeom possesses the Extreme Yang Body, the Small snow squad has only just begun reorganizing. Wouldn't it be too difficult a task from the start?"

"Kuhaha, if he has resolved to become Ye-rin's spouse, he must overcome trials of that magnitude. I am not ordering him, but intending to leave it to his own choice. However, to become the son-in-law of the North Sea, shouldn't he feel the coldness of the North Sea to his bones and prove his heat within it? If he is a man, he will understand the meaning of my words."

Seol Su-hyeok could not refute him any further.

Seol Baek-ho's decision was made with the authority of the Ice Palace Lord.

Seol Su-hyeok bowed his head.

"I understand, Palace Lord. Then I will summon Hyeokryeon Yeom."

"It is done. General Manager, you should look after Ye-rin. I wonder what reaction she will show when she finds out he made Eun-bin bald. I will try conveying the related story myself."

Seol Su-hyeok made a puzzled expression.

"You will do it personally, Palace Lord?"

"Yes."

Seol Baek-ho smirked.

"I became curious about what kind of expression that bold fellow will make."

Seol Su-hyeok nodded without speaking further.

Affection for his daughter and expectation for Hyeokryeon Yeom were felt simultaneously in Seol Baek-ho's eyes.

Seol Su-hyeok quietly withdrew and left the Palace Lord's hall.

Watching Seol Su-hyeok leave, Seol Baek-ho gazed out the window.

Beyond where the snowy fields of the North Sea stretched endlessly, the grasslands were visible.

Grin.

Seol Baek-ho was looking forward to seeing how the hot flame named Hyeokryeon Yeom would burn when thrown into the middle of those grasslands.

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The edge of the Great Grasslands, not far from the Ice Palace.

The wind was blowing fiercely over the desolate land.

A den of Horse Bandits settled under the grey-dyed sky.

Rough laughter and sharp metallic sounds rang out, mixed together inside a tent surrounded by burning campfires.

"So, the Young Palace Head of the North Sea Ice Palace is in critical condition, is that it?"

A giant man sitting in the center of the tent spoke.

It was Blood Wolf Gwak Do-han, the leader of the Horse Bandits, who had a deep scar carved into his face.

"That is correct, Captain."

A subordinate sitting next to him nodded.

"It is news heard from a merchant bastard who slipped out of the Ice Palace. They say the Ice Palace Lord brought in a live-in son-in-law from the Demonic Cult."

"A live-in son-in-law?"

Gwak Do-han's eyebrows rose.

"For the Ice Palace Lord to bring in an outsider, is it because of his daughter?"

"Yes, they say that the live-in son-in-law possesses the Extreme Yang Body. They said he is the only one who can melt the Young Palace Head's ice."

The subordinate added cautiously.

Gwak Do-han fell silent for a moment and rubbed the blade of his axe with his finger.

"Extreme Yang Body... interesting. Then if we just get rid of that guy, the Young Palace Head with the Extreme Yin Body will freeze solid, right?"

"There is a high possibility of that happening, Captain."

The subordinate grinned and spoke.

"If the Young Palace Head dies, the Ice Palace will fall into chaos. If we swallow the North Sea in that gap, we won't have to worry about being attacked from behind while going down to the Central Plains, so invading the Central Plains will become easier."

Gwak Do-han slammed the tent floor with his axe.

Bang!

"Good! Then let's set up a plan. The targets are the Ice Palace's Young Palace Head and the live-in son-in-law. We deal with the live-in son-in-law first, then kidnap Seol Ye-rin to threaten the Ice Palace."

The Horse Bandits inside the tent burst into laughter all at once.

Greed and cruelty filled their eyes.

Gwak Do-han stood up from his seat and went outside the tent.

The cold wind brushed past his scar, adding an ominous aura.

"Get ready. We are going to the North Sea."

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The training ground of the North Sea Ice Palace.

I was standing on the cold snowy ground.

"Mmm."

Eun-bin, who had come to her senses, recalled the situation right before she collapsed and swept her hand over her head.

Smooth.

It was clean.

Because Eun-bin had cut off all her hair after realizing the hair on her head had lost its function.

Eun-bin's dark hair, with only fine stubble remaining, shook slightly in the cold wind of the North Sea.

And Baek Mu-yong and Wi Ji-yeong were watching that sight.

"My hair...?"

I grinned and answered.

"I gave you a gift in commemoration of becoming the Vice Captain. You look a bit cooler now."

"Don't be funny."

Eun-bin grit her teeth and glared at me.

"Are you still saying you won't approve the Vice Captain position?"

I slowly approached Eun-bin.

The image of burning in fire again is imagined instantly.

Eun-bin shouted without realizing it herself.

"I-I just have to do it, right!"

"You thought well."

Baek Mu-yong sighed at that sight and intervened.

"Captain, please stop with the jokes and tell us what you are going to do now. A message came that the Palace Lord is coming soon."

My expression became serious.

"The Small snow squad will become the core unit protecting the Young Palace Head from now on. Eun-bin is the shield, Baek Mu-yong is the spear and Ji-yeong is... hmm, let's make you the cook and general affairs officer."

"Ehh?!"

Wi Ji-yeong opened her eyes round and protested.

"I can fight too, Young Master!"

"I know, I know. It's because your cooking skills are so excellent that I think it will be necessary for boosting the squad members' morale."

I said soothingly.

At that moment, a massive energy was felt at the entrance of the training ground.

Everyone's gaze headed that way.

Seol Baek-ho, the Palace Lord of the Ice Palace, revealed himself alone.

"Hyeokryeon Yeom."

Seol Baek-ho's voice rang through the training ground.

"I greet the Palace Lord."

"I heard you became the Small snow squad Leader."

I bowed my waist and greeted him.

"Yes, Father-in-law. I am doing my best to protect the Young Palace Head."

"Father-in-law..."

Seol Baek-ho's eyebrows twitched.

"You are still far from being able to speak that title."

My eyes sparkled.

"What must I do to be able to use the title of Father-in-law?"

"Hmm, if you establish merit that the martial artists of the North Sea can acknowledge, then I will allow you to call me by that title."

"Is saving the Young Palace Head not enough?"

"That is a great merit, and I am thinking of it gratefully. However, I do not know if the people of the North Sea will acknowledge that."

I fell into thought for a moment.

"Then what kind of merit must I establish to be formally recognized as the live-in son-in-law?"

"Shouldn't you handle at least a group of Horse Bandits?"

A group of Horse Bandits... the outlaws running wild between the North Sea and the Central Plains.

If I wiped them out, my position in the North Sea would become solid and it would also help in protecting Seol Ye-rin.

'But did he come all the way here just to tell me this story?'

Looking at the atmosphere, it seemed he wanted me to wipe out the Horse Bandits.

It wouldn't matter if I said I didn't want to, wasn't interested, or that it might be dangerous.

But then the unfortunate event of not being able to call my Father-in-law "Father-in-law" might occur.

'To embrace the Wish-granting Jewel, I have to enter the dragon's maw.'

"I understand. When should I depart?"

"Mm? You really intend to try handling the Horse Bandits?"

"Wasn't that what you wanted?"

"Kuhum, I never wanted it!"

Even if he said that while showing an expression that looked satisfied to anyone watching, no one would believe it.

It felt like I had scored points with my Father-in-law.

"Ah, even if you go out to handle the Horse Bandits, I want you to continue checking on Ye-rin's condition. It gets worse again when night comes, so I would like you to go quickly and treat her."

"Why are you telling me that now?"

I started sprinting towards the Young Palace Head's Hall at tremendous speed.

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The Young Palace Head's Hall.

Standing in front of the door, I took a deep breath.

I could feel a cold chill leaking out from beyond the door.

Knock knock knock-

"Young Palace Head, it is Hyeokryeon Yeom. May I come in?"

"...Come in."

Seol Ye-rin's voice was heard faintly.

When I opened the door and entered, I saw Seol Ye-rin sitting on the bed.

Thin ice crystals had formed again on Seol Ye-rin's hands and neck.

Her face was pale and even the sound of her breathing seemed labored.

"Your condition doesn't look good."

I said as I approached.

Seol Ye-rin turned her head to look at me.

"It's not because of you. The Extreme Yin Body originally deteriorates periodically like this. It just came a bit faster this time."

I sat next to Seol Ye-rin and reached out my hand.

Grab-

"Wh-what are you doing?"

"I didn't grab it with bad intentions, so I hope you don't misunderstand."

Seol Ye-rin stopped the movement of trying to pull her hand away after hesitating.

As our two hands touched, steam rose up with a sizzling sound.

I carefully injected Yang energy and melted the ice crystals.

Seol Ye-rin's expression became a little more comfortable.

"...Thank you."

Seol Ye-rin spoke in a low voice.

"There is no need to be thankful. It is something I do because I like it."

I savored the Yin energy seeping into my body.

I realized that the energy of Extreme Yin and the energy of Extreme Yang were indeed mutually complementary energies.

"Still... I-I have to say thank you. Even though I know it's just a temporary measure."

The word temporary measure bothered me.

"I will try researching a bit more. I should be able to find a solution soon."

I spoke firmly.

"So wait just a little bit. Since I think I'll have to go out for a while starting tomorrow."

Seol Ye-rin's eyes wavered.

"Going out, what do you mean by that?"

"I plan to go and wipe out the Horse Bandits."

"Why would you go for the Horse Bandits..."

"I told you. I'm going to be recognized as the live-in son-in-law. To do that, the Father-in-law is important, but I have to be recognized by the people of the Ice Palace first."

I grinned and looked back at Seol Ye-rin.

Seol Ye-rin's eyes began to shake.

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Having left the Young Palace Head's Hall, I returned to the training ground.

Baek Mu-yong, Wi Ji-yeong, and Eun-bin were waiting for me.

Eun-bin had a stiff expression.

"How is the Young Palace Head?"

Eun-bin asked.

"Ice crystals formed again, so I melted them with Yang energy, but I saw the possibility of recurrence. A fundamental solution is needed. And I think we need to go see the Horse Bandits."

Baek Mu-yong tilted his head.

"Do you have business with the Horse Bandits too?"

"Yeah. I plan to score some more points with my Father-in-law."

Wi Ji-yeong raised her hand and asked.

"What do we do when we meet the Horse Bandits?"

At Wi Ji-yeong's question, I grinned and answered.

"We have to burn them."

"Hiek?"

"I intend to set fire to the Great Grasslands."

Eun-bin scoffed at the words set fire.

"Are you saying you'll burn all the Horse Bandits with fire? The Horse Bandits aren't such easy pushovers. They are guys who endure the cold of the North Sea; do you think your flames will work?"

"I have to make them work."

I spoke confidently.

Baek Mu-yong tilted his head and asked.

"How?"

I snapped my fingers and created a small flame.

"It's simple. We find the den where the Horse Bandits are hiding and set it on fire. Because of the North Sea's cold, they will be gathered in tents or caves, so I plan to use that against them. We start a fire and spread smoke to suffocate them or drive them out. Then we deal with them one by one."

Eun-bin narrowed his eyes and spoke.

"If that was possible, why hasn't the Ice Palace been able to get rid of the Horse Bandits until now?"

"It's troubling if you compare me to the martial artists of the Ice Palace who mainly unfold Ice Arts."

I looked straight at Eun-bin.

"Do you not want to protect Miss Seol?"

The reason he accepted the Vice Captain position was solely to protect Seol Ye-rin.

Eun-bin was silent for a moment before nodding.

"If it is for the Young Palace Head... I will follow your plan."

Wi Ji-yeong smiled brightly and spoke.

"Then should I prepare meat to roast on the fire?"

"Sounds good."

"Good, then let's start preparing."

I held out my hand.

"Tomorrow, we are going to burn the Horse Bandit den."

Baek Mu-yong and Wi Ji-yeong placed their hands on top, and Eun-bin also reluctantly raised his hand.

The moment the four people's hands overlapped, a small flame rose from my hand.

That flame pierced through the cold air of the North Sea and burned hot.

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The North Sea Ice Palace where the night had deepened.

I was looking out the window, lost in thought.

Around that time I was thinking that life in the Ice Palace seemed to suit my aptitude a bit better than life in the Demonic Cult.

"Hm?"

Tsk tsk tsk-

The atmosphere is unusual.

I can feel a human presence flocking around.

This feeling.

I felt it many times in my past lives.

It's a surprise attack.

"Who is it?"

What was more important than who the opponent was,

It was the fact that the target was me.

Swoosh-!

Hidden weapons flew in.

The hidden weapons flying in slowly were clearly visible to my kinetic vision.

Flare-!

The soaring flames struck down the flying hidden weapons.

"Come out."

"The Demonic Cult's Third Young Master, Hyeokryeon Yeom. I heard you were a scoundrel, but this is unexpected."

My eyes flashed at the figures of the assassins revealing themselves in the darkness.

Looking at their rough attire, it was like they were advertising 'I am a Horse Bandit'.

"Horse Bandits?"

"You're a sharp guy."

Shuuk!

I snatched the hidden weapon flying in again just as it was and shot it back towards the opponent who threw it.

The Demonic Cult's dagger art, Yin Wind Flying Dagger, unfolded from my hand.

But it was strictly different from that of the Demonic Cult.

Where my past lives meet and unfold,

'Here, throw a curve.'

A high-speed curve with the experience of my first life added.

On top of that, the principles of magic gained from a previous life drew a circuit in the air as it moved forward.

Whiz-!

The Horse Bandit with the dagger stuck in his glabella fell to the floor with a thud.

"Bastards here to assassinate talk too much."

Whoosh-

In the pitch-black darkness, flames like daggers shot out towards the Horse Bandits.