Return of The Mount Hua – Chapter 741. Who touched what? (1)

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Chwaaa!

The sailor swallowed dry saliva as the sleek-looking ship approached through the current.

"Pi- Pirates!"

"Wha- What do we do? Are we all going to die?"

The people on the deck were in a state of panic. Seeing this, the ship's captain, Ma Byung (마병(馬倂)), yelled out loud.

"Stay calm!"

"……."

"Encountering pirates on the Yangtze is not uncommon! Our ship doesn't have a particularly bad relationship with the pirates, so it should be fine!"

Then someone asked in a trembling voice.

"A- Are you sure it's safe?"

"There's no need to worry. Just as those leaving by road must climb mountains despite them being filled with bandits, encountering pirates on the Yangtze doesn't necessarily mean we're in danger. However, we must not provoke them, so everyone, please gather on one side!"

Having reassured the passengers, Ma Byung quickly issued orders to his crew.

"What are you doing! Gather the people on one side!"

"Yes, Captain!"

"Drop the anchor and stop the ship! Right now!"

"Yes!"

The crew began to move efficiently in response to the instructions. Ma Byung stole a quick glance at the approaching ship.

'What's going on?'

What he said was not a lie.

The Yangtze is so vast and long that it's beyond the reach of all authorities. Therefore, those who sail on the Yangtze must tolerate the threat of pirates to some extent.

However, the reason they reacted with such surprise upon seeing the pirates was that this was not an area known for pirate activity.

Regardless of the freedom of the river's flow, there need to be places for ships to anchor. Consequently, pirates tend to operate around their bases.

Furthermore, with as many as eighteen different pirate groups coexisting along the Yangtze, they tend to strictly maintain their territories to avoid disputes.

Much like the seventy-two bandit stronghold of Nokrim not infringing on each other's territories.

As far as Ma Byung knew, this wasn't a base for any of the pirate groups.

‘Is there a new pirate band?’

Ma Byung's dam's apple moved greatly due to the tension.

If it's a pirate group he's familiar with, the situation can be resolved without any problems. But if it's an unknown group, there could be trouble. Especially if it's a newly formed group, they might commit some atrocity to show off their ruthlessness.

'I need to stay alert.'

Ma Byung tensed his shoulders and prepared to face the approaching ship.

As the carrier ship slowed down, the pirate also reduced its speed and stuck close.

Kuuung!

There was a big shake as the two ships bumped into each other.

"Uaaargh!"

"Ooot!"

A brief sense of terror swept over the people's faces.

As the pirate ship fully attached to the side of the ship, about ten ropes with hooks flew onto the deck at once.

Thunk! *Thunk*!

The hooks dropped onto the deck, dragging along before hanging on the ship's railing. It looked as if a dozen people had grabbed the ship's railing. The rope was pulled tight.

Seeing the menacing hooks, the people were all so tense that they couldn't even breathe deeply.

"Climb up!"

Along with a rough voice, several pirates quickly climbed up onto the deck.

The blue-colored clothes resemble the color of the Yangtze.

Black Dragon symbol inscribed on their chests.

Armed with Amiza (아미자(峨嵋刺)) and tridents.

It was the typical appearance of pirates. Ma Byung wiped the sweat from his forehead and stepped forward.

"I am...."

"Hush."

At that moment, the sharp point of Amiza was pointed at his throat.

"Keep your mouth shut. Before I tear off your snout."

"……."

Ma Byung, for now, silently nodded. At the same time, he examined the faces of the men who quickly boarded the deck. Despairingly, he saw no familiar faces.

'It seems like today is filled with more danger than safety.'

He looked with tense eyes at the back of the group. Usually, the one with authority appears last.

Sure enough.

Over the railing behind the grim group, a man with a cold demeanor slowly revealed himself.

'Hmm.'

Then, Sojeongbok's face, which was looking at the situation from the back, became tense.

The man who appeared last looked quite different from the ones who came up first. He was... leisurely walking on the connecting rope.

This place is on the water, and the water is constantly flowing. Naturally, the connecting rope between the two ships was also shaking severely. But isn't that man walking on the undulating rope as if it were a flat surface?

Sojeongbok belongs to Yuryong Sect, which can be said to have a good reputation in Lightness Art, so there was no way that he did not know how difficult it was.

'He's strong.'

A cold sweat started to form down his spine.

"Hmmm."

Tung.

The man jumped lightly onto the deck and took a look around.

He is a man who looks cold at a glance. In addition, the two cuts across the face were making his impression even more eerie.

Those who met his icy gaze could not dare to meet his eyes and lowered their gazes.

The man's gaze was fixed in one place as he looked all over the ship.

"Are you the captain?"

Ma Byung quickly opened his mouth.

"Yes! I'm the captain of this ship, Ma Byung! It is an honor to meet the heroes of the Yangtze!"

"Heroes?"

When the man briefly asked back, Ma Byung nodded his head.

"How can you not be called heroes, for your esteemed are the ones who maintain the order of the Yangtze under the protection of the Black Dragon King?"

"Hahaha."

The man smiled quietly as if he liked the flattery.

"You know it well."

"Yes, it is a matter of course for those who travel to and from the Yangtze River. Because we have the heroes of the Yangtze, we are able to travel safely on this dangerous river, right?"

"Right."

Sojeongbok, who had been watching, admired Ma Byung's eloquence.

Although he seems to be speaking with great fear, the captain emphasized order and protection. This implied that he was willing to pay a protection fee to avoid major accidents.

The man nodded as if he understood the meaning of the word.

"Managing the Yangtze isn't easy. So, of course, those who pass through our territory should express their gratitude. Isn't it?"

"You're absolutely right. If they don't know this rule, how dare they trust their bodies to the waterway of the Yangtze? The Dragon King would be furious."

Seeing the situation being resolved more smoothly than expected, Ma Byung smiled with relief.

"So, are you prepared with your token of goodwill?"

"Ple- Please wait just a moment. I was so foolish not to know that the heroes were here. If you give me a little time, I will prepare it right away."

"We're not very patient people. I might be, but those guys can't stand boredom at all. If you don't want to see unnecessary bloodshed, you better hurry."

"U- Understood!"

As soon as the man nodded, Ma Byung ran to the back and explained the situation to the passengers in a low voice.

"As you've probably heard, it seems you'll have to express a bit of goodwill."

The passengers all nodded and opened their pouches.

It was better to be robbed of some money than to lose their lives. It's not that they didn't feel resentment, but when they saw the sharp weapons in the pirates' hands, that resentment naturally subsided.

They all took out the money from their pouches and handed it to the sailors.

Sojeongbok sighed deeply at the scene.

'It's a relief.'

Contrary to his worries, no major incident occurred.

Sojeongbok was not very unfamiliar to the scene, as he now has some acquaintance with the bandits of Nokrim. While one might expect that pirates or bandits would kill people and rob their money recklessly, in reality, this rarely happens.

If murder and robbery occur repeatedly in a certain area or waterway, people tend to avoid that place. Then, the pirates also have to migrate to other areas to make ends meet.

But since each group's territory is clearly defined in this world, moving to another territory often leads to conflict.

So it's better to take a moderate amount from the passers-by without causing them too much hardship. Even if it reduces their immediate earnings a bit, they can continuously collect tolls.

Then one of the sailors approached Sojeongbok and whispered.

"Look here. The passengers seem to be poor and the amount is not quite good. I'm sorry, but could you afford a little more?"

"……Understood."

Sojeongbok took out a silver tael from his pouch. A silver tael is a big money for Sojeongbok, but it was better to solve the problem with money than to cause trouble. After all, the money he would receive from this mission was much more than this.

"Here it is."

The sailor's face bloomed brightly as he took the silver tael.

"Thank you."

The sailors take the money they collect to the captain. The captain pooled the money in one place, took some more out of his own pouch, and put it into a sack. He carefully approached and handed the sack to the bandit leader.

"It's a small token. I don't think it will be a sufficient tribute to the heroes of the Yangtze, but it's going to be worth the night's worth of alcohol to soothe tonight's worries."

"Hmm."

The man reached out to take the sack. He didn't even bother to check the amount and casually tossed it to his subordinate standing behind him.

Tuk, *tuk*!

He reached out and patted Ma Byung on the shoulder.

"I'll remember your face, captain."

"It's an honor!"

"If you continue to be as cooperative as this, there won't be any major problems. The Yangtze is calm, but remember that it can be extremely turbulent when the wind blows. Whether the wind blows or not is up to you."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Good."

The man nodded lightly and turned around. It seemed like he was thinking about leaving now that his task was done.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief secretly.

Although they were robbed of their money, they saved their lives, which was a huge relief. In the middle of the Yangtze River, where the influence of the authorities does not reach, and where even the major martial sects cannot interfere, it would not be strange if something happened. So it was a good deal to get away with just this.

But it was then.

Just as the man was turning around to cross the railing, one of the subordinates whispered

something into his ear.

"…Hmm?"

The man, whose eyes had momentarily sparked with curiosity, slowly turned around again.

The man's gaze swept across the nervous people who were oblivious to what was happening and then settled in one place.

"This... I didn't know we had such a famous person aboard."

At the end of that gaze, Sojeongbok stiffened and bit the inside of his mouth.

"To think we have the special delivery from that famous Eunha Courier Service. It would have been quite disappointing if we had just left."

Cold sweat began to bead on his forehead.

If he were on land, this situation wouldn't be particularly tricky. His legs are faster than anyone else's, so he could simply run away without having to confront anyone. But this is the wide and deep Yangtze River. No matter how fast he is, his speed is useless here.

Even if he jumped into the water, there was no chance he could escape from the bandits who were professionally trained in underwater combat.

"Special delivery... A special delivery, huh. To think I would meet someone who professionally transports such valuable goods. It seems my luck is rather good today. Hahaha."

The man slowly approached Sojeongbok. As if that were a signal, the pirates all surrounded him, closing in from all directions.

|Note

Quick question. Eunha Express or Eunha Courier Service??

峨嵋刺 (Amiza/ Emei Dagger.)

