

## Chapter 1193

Why did it have to be like that? (3)

Rumors travel faster than the wind. And some rumors travel twice as fast.

The rumor that Baek Cheon assumed the position of Acting Sect Leader and refused the proposal of the Abbot became a tornado, sweeping through the entire Cheonumaeng. Naturally, it was an astonishing turn of events. Baek Cheon was not lacking in any way to become a Sect Leader, but Hyun Jong held such a firm position as the Sect Leader of Hwasan.

Usually, any group maintains its leader when momentum is high. So why would Hwasan, expanding its influence with such momentum, suddenly face such a drastic change?

«What?»

Some were astonished.

«Oh, no, why?»

Some were perplexed.

«What are we going to do...?»

Some worried.

Though reactions varied, they all shared shock and concern.

Being the leading faction within Cheonumaeng was a widely acknowledged fact. The abrupt change in Hwasan's leadership left everyone in the Alliance concerned about its potential impact.

But no matter how great their shock was... it couldn't compare to the unexpected lightning strike that befell Hwasan's disciples.

One moment they were sleeping peacefully, the next, the head of the sect had changed. The disciples of Hwasan were truly caught off guard and seemed to have lost their spirits.

The disciples of Hwasan stared at each other blankly.

As they huddled together, disciples from other sects passed by, whispering among themselves. Normally, they wouldn't have paid much attention, but given the circumstances today, even those murmurs seemed unsettling.

«So... what now?»

Chung Hwa asked with a bewildered expression.

«What do you mean, what now? Baek Cheon has become the Acting Sect Leader, hasn't he?»

«Oh, no, is it just going to end like that, as casually as tossing beans into a boiling pot?

Changing the Sect Leader is no small matter.»

«... Well, that's not entirely wrong, is it?»

«Even though Hwasan might not have a strict hierarchy...»

«Hey! Just because we don't have a strict hierarchy doesn't mean we're doomed. This doesn't guarantee anything.»

«Either way...»

«It's different!»

Chung Hwa turned his head towards Baek Hyun, his lips pursed.

«And... if they are relinquishing the Sect Leader's position, shouldn't it go to Un Am Sasukjo instead of Baek Cheon Sasuk? What happens to Un Am Sasukjo then?»

«I don't know. It's something they would have discussed among themselves, right?»

«Well, yes, but...»

The uncertainty lingered in the air.

Everyone's expressions underwent a subtle yet complex transformation.

They knew it wasn't a bad thing. After all, wasn't Baek Cheon destined to become Sect Leader at some point? The timing and order were merely the issue. There was nobody actually opposed to Baek Cheon becoming Sect Leader. It's just that there were some, ever so slight, differences from what they had anticipated.

However, those minor differences had greatly complicated the situation.

«Um... so...?»

Im Pyeong ventured hesitantly.

«Yes?»

Baek Hyun replied with a puzzled expression.

«Sect Leader... no, the original Sect Leader... uh, no, not that, I mean esteemed Hyun Jong... no, that's not it...»

Baek Hyun closed his eyes tightly.

«Let's just stick with Sect Leader for now.»

«What about Baek Cheon Sasuk's position?»

«...Let's call it the deputy sect leader [they use different word, not acting sect leader].»

«But that's against protocol...»

«Let's just leave it at that for now!»

«Why are you getting angry?»

«Ugh, darn it!»

Im Pyeong quickly interjected.

«So... what happens to the Sect Leader now that he's relinquishing his position?»

«He becomes the retired Sect Leader.»

«Retired Sect Leader?»

«Yes.»

Baek Hyun nodded and elaborated,

«It's customary to refer to the predecessor who relinquishes Sect Leader's position as retired Sect Leader [Taesang (太上) Jangmunin]. So, the current Sect Leader becomes the retired Sect Leader, and the Elder becomes the retired [also Taesang] Elder.»

«Oh...»

Im Pyeong seemed to ponder something, then furrowed his brows suddenly.

«Wait, doesn't retired Sect Leader refer to a superior rank above the current Sect Leader?»

«That's right.»

«So, what about the Un Sasukjos?»

«...Huh?»

«What should we call them? They're neither elders nor retired Sect Leaders...»

«Well... um... uh?»

Baek Hyun scratched his head in confusion.

«...Maybe they'll become retired Elders? Since the titles retired Sect Leader or retired Elder are used to honor a rank higher than the Sect Leader, as well as the elders... perhaps?»

«What about the current Sect Leader then? Earlier, you said the Sect Leader becomes the retired Sect Leader, right?»

«Then... the Sect Leader becomes the retired retired Sect Leader [Taesang taesang jangmunin], maybe?»

«What?»

«Twice retired... this guy! Retired and retired! What is that!»

«Uh, would that be it?»

Im Pyeong's eyes clouded with doubt. Suspicion lingered heavily in the air.

«Is that really an existing title?»

«It is! I'm telling you, it's real!»

«Hmm...»

Im Pyeong reluctantly nodded as if conceding for the time being.

«But what about Sasuk, then?»

«Yes?»

«Does the 'tae' character [Taesang where tae is the first chinese character] get added for each generation up?»

«As far as I know...»

«So, if Yoon Jong takes over the Sect Leader's position later, and the current Sect Leader is still alive until then, would we have to call him three times retired Sect Leader [Taetaetaesang Jangmunin]?»

«...Um.»

Baek Hyun covered his face with both hands. The words he never wanted to say finally slipped out.

«What a ridiculous hierarchy...»

«...You said the hierarchy in our sect was solid.»

«Solid? This bastard! Solid? How many sects in the world have had three generations of Sect Leaders alive at the same time? Is there any sect with such a solid council of elders in the world?»

«Is it really that solid?»

«Ugh...»

At that moment, Chung Hwa, who had been silent, spoke up again.

«Um, but...»

«What now?»

Baek Hyun sighed.

«Oh, it's nothing. It's just that something seems off. As you said, doesn't the 'tae' character signify 'former' or 'retired'?»

«It's more of a respectful term...»

«Then what about Un Am Sasukjo?»

«...Huh? What are you getting at?»

«I mean, the elders automatically become retired elders, so adding one 'tae' character for each seems logical. But Un Am Sasukjo has never occupied the Sect Leader's position, so shouldn't he be called something other than retired Sect Leader?»

«...»

«So, we have twice retired Sect Leader [Taetaesang Langmunin] in Hwasan, but not retired Sect Leader [Taesang Jangmunin]?»

«...»

«And if the Un Sasukjos are called retired Elders... we can't call the Sect Leader retired Sect Leader.»

His thoughts were all jumbled up. Baek Hyun desperately turned his head. This wasn't a problem he was supposed to solve in the first place. Isn't there someone else to sort out this mess?

«Sahyeong, Sahyeong! Can you help us... Huh? Sahyeong?»

Baek Hyun tilted his head. Baek Sang, who was supposed to help him sort things out, was sitting in a corner with a vacant expression.

Why is that bastard acting like that again?

«Sahyeong?»

«Well...»

«Yes?»

«... What does it matter, you bastards...»

Baek Sang's voice lacked soul.

«At this age... at this age, I look like an elder... at this age...»

«...»

«All the neighboring sects have their elders... why am I the only one? Why me...»

«Ahem.»

Baek Hyun cleared his throat sympathetically.

«Well, still... it's not all that bad...»

«Now that Hwasan's reputation is rising, our name will gradually spread throughout the land. If I'm known as Baek Sang, the elder of Hwasan, what will people think...»

«Wow, Sahyeong! Maybe it's because you look like a wise old man right away? Ah, so dignified!»

As Baek Hyun cheerfully chattered, he caught a glimpse of Baek Sang's eyes, which seemed to pierce through him, as if to kill him.

After hearing Baek Sang's words, the members of the Baek generation finally realized their situation and sighed one by one.

«An elder...»

«I haven't even gotten married yet...»

«Yeah, really. If I'm an elder, can I at least bring my wife?»

«Even if I were you, I wouldn't want to...»

The eyes of the unmarried men of Hwasan, who still hadn't given up hope, glistened with moisture.

«What's a wise old man without a wife?»

«Hey! It's okay in Hwasan to get married!»

«Seriously. Just because he's single doesn't mean he's a Taoist. That guy thinks he's something special every now and then.»

«But why is it like that when it's the law of the sect...»

«Excuse me.»

At that moment, Kwak Hoe quietly raised his hand. All eyes turned to him.

«Um... it seems like the elders are overlooking an important fact.»

«Huh? What?»

«... Isn't it true that when a main sect disciple gets married, they have to settle down in Hwasan? They can't leave the mountain.»

«That's right. That's just stating the obvious.»

«Do you have the confidence to set up a new household with a child on the way while there is Chung Myung in Hwasan?»

«...»

The members of the Baek generation, momentarily struck speechless, collectively glanced upward, briefly envisioning many possible futures. Then, as one, they lowered their heads and smiled contentedly.

«Let's give up.»

«It's a foolish act.»

«What's wrong with getting married? It's just accumulating sins.»

But should those who are supposedly wise drag innocent people into their own private hells? Even if there are people who understand and sympathize, it's still a problem. Who would enjoy seeing someone like a Taoist Master rolling around in the dirt all day?

«What's the point of the sect's law? This is the reality...»

«It's noisy.»

Baek Hyun waved his hand impatiently with an annoyed expression, redirecting the conversation elsewhere.

«Anyway, with the situation as it is, where is the new Sect Leader who caused the uproar? He should come and explain something.»

«Who? Baek Cheon Sasuk?»

«Yeah. That... um... the deputy Sect Leader.»

«If it's Baek Cheon Sasuk, he is probably... by now...»

Kwak Hoe gazed into the distance with a vague expression, as if imagining something.

«He is probably paying the price for what he has done.»

«Surrounded by a pack of wolves, perhaps?»

«Could be.»

Baek Hyun slowly nodded as if imagining something.

«He won't just be left alone.»

He sighed softly, then glanced at the other disciples. Their faces were a mixture of excitement, worry, and concern.

Speaking on behalf of the absent-minded Baek Sang, he said,

«As you all know, Sect Leader hasn't made any definitive statements yet. Since Sect Leader has nothing to hide from us disciples, he will surely explain the situation and the reasons behind it.»

«Yes, Sasuk.»

«Yes, Sahyeong.»

«So, instead of aimlessly gossiping, let's wait. What we say among ourselves might not be a problem, but we're not alone here, are we? We don't need to give the impression that we're confused and lost for no reason. Do you understand?»

«Yes.»

«Good. Everyone, disperse.»

«Yes!»

As everyone scattered, Baek Hyun sighed and turned his head.

«Sahyeong.»

«...Am I supposed to be the financial advisor now...? No, why...»

«Ah! One would think you are a beggar! Pull yourself together, please!»

«What is that bastard thinking...»

«How would we know? He's always been like that.»

Baek Hyun, leading the disheveled Baek Sang, smirked subtly.

‘Baek Cheon Sahyeong is the Sect Leader...’

That's unsettling too. It's not that they don't trust Baek Cheon, but for them, the Sect Leader of Hwasan had always been Hyun Jong alone.

But amidst that worry, one emotion clearly rose. It was inevitable.

‘Hwasan might get a little more interesting.’

He could be quietly confident about that in his heart. Perhaps other disciples were thinking the same.