

Chapter 1201

So what's the difference? (1)

«Then, the remaining sect is...»

All eyes turned to Tang Gunak.

With the representatives from Hwasan, Namgung, Nokrim, and the Ice Palace already chosen, the only place left was Tangga.

«Lord?»

Feeling the piercing gaze on him, Tang Gunak cleared his throat.

«As for Tangga...»

«Is the Tang clan going?»

«The leaders from the other sects are going themselves.»

«...»

Tang Gunak's eyes twitched, a hint of strain evident in his expression.

«Right now... ahem. Right now, I'm not here as the head of Tangga, but as the Vice Leader of Cheonumaeng, sorting out the situation. So, any matters related to Tangga should be directed to the Young Lord.»

«Isn't that what it is?»

«Hwasan also distinguishes between Alliance Leader and Sect Leader, so wouldn't Tangga naturally do the same?»

Though it felt like backing down, it was a bit ambiguous to confront. Thus, naturally, everyone's gaze turned to Tang Pae sitting in the corner.

«Um... that... uh...»

Under the sharp gaze, Tang Pae cautiously spoke up.

«Of course, there are many capable individuals in Tangga who can represent it, but...»

Before he could finish his sentence, Ogeom interjected.

«Many? Really?»

«There used to be many. But those who were prominent were all pushed aside by our current lord, weren't they?»

«Oh, you mean the resignation of the Council of Elders. Well, then, there aren't any left.»

Ignoring their remarks, Tang Pae continued.

«But, um... There's still a matter of fairness between factions, and there's also symbolic significance, so it might be appropriate for our leader to go directly...»

At that moment, feeling a chill ran down his spine as Tang Pae quickly turned his head. The expression on Tang Gunak's face as he looked at him changed momentarily, almost like an Asura, before quickly returning to a neutral one.

«...»

«Directly?»

«Oh, um... I mean...»

Tang Pae spoke with cold sweat forming on his forehead, hesitating.

«Well, it might be appropriate, but... you see, if our leader were to go, there might be some... issues...»

«What kind of issues?»

«...There might be something, right?»

«Something?»

«...»

Tang Pae, feeling the pressure once again, struggled to come up with an explanation.

«Um... Our lord is currently serving as the de facto Vice Leader of Cheonumaeng...

Because he has so many responsibilities, leaving his position would cause several issues with the tasks at hand...»

Jo Geol and Yoon Jong began to murmur again.

«Tasks? What is Cheonumaeng doing right now?»

«I have no idea. But I don't think there's anything urgent at the moment.»

«Then why would there be a problem with leaving the position vacant?»

«Well...»

Cold sweat started to drop from Tang Pae's forehead.

Those damn bastards, acting like a pack of wolves. How can such creatures be Taoists...?

«Well, if our lord leaves, it might make things difficult for the Alliance Leader.»

«Ah, so what?»

«That's a valid point.»

«Sect Leader must be preoccupied these days. We shouldn't disturb him.»

Tang Pae gritted his teeth. Those damned Hwasan's guys...

Baek Cheon seemed to cut to the chase, asking the key question.

«So, who from Tangga will go?»

«One of the elders...»

«An elder?»

«...»

Tang Pae glanced discreetly at Tang Gunak. His father was just smiling contentedly, as if the matter had already been settled. And Tang Pae seemed to know what that conclusion was.

«I... I will go.»

«You, Young Lord?»

«Yes. Since the leaders of other factions are going themselves, shouldn't I go too?»

«Hmm. If Young Lord is going, then...»

«Hmm.»

Before the sentence was even finished, Tang Gunak cleared his throat and spoke up.

«Well, it's a long and dangerous journey, after all.»

«...»

«Still, it seems like a matter of honor for the Young Lord to go personally. Thank you, Young Lord Tang.»

«It's nothing. It's only natural for me to go.»

Watching Tang Gunak's serene smile, Tang Pae nervously bit his lip.

He hasn't been like this before, has he? When did he become so sly? Why?

«Anyway, it seems like everything's settled.»

Tang Gunak summarized the situation.

«Those heading to Hainan will be Young Lord Namgung, Young Lord Tang, the Lord of the Ice Palace along with Nokrim King, and...»

Tang Gunak's gaze turned towards those seated as if guarding Baek Cheon.

«Are Ogeom coming as usual?»

Baek Cheon glanced back at those behind him.

«...Normally, they wouldn't be the ones to accompany the leaders of each sect.»

«No, what I mean is...»

«If they have the will, we are willing to take them along. They are not lacking in skills to protect themselves. As long as the leaders of other sects agree.»

«That would be fine.»

Tang Gunak nodded as if there was no need for further consideration.

«It's necessary for smooth negotiations. It cannot be denied that these representatives of Hwasan and Cheonumaeng symbolize our strength externally.»

«Symbolize? That's an exaggeration.»

«Hmm? You don't know?»

«What do you mean?»

Baek Cheon smiled as if to say, 'What are you talking about?'

«When ones' reputation rises, they often seem unaware. But it seems that saying holds true. With the news of your mission to Gangnam spreading, the reputation of Ogeom has undoubtedly soared.»

«...Is that so?»

«Of course, most of that reputation belongs to Hwasan Geomhyeop, but the fame of the other Five Swords, including yourself, is now beyond dispute.»

Tang Gunak smiled as he observed the somewhat peculiar expressions on their faces.

«Perhaps each of you will soon have your own titles. Those who stand as strong as a fortress against any foe are often bestowed with titles by others.»

«Oh? Titles!»

Jo Geol's face flushed with excitement.

«So, are we going to get titles too?»

«Why not?»

«Of course! We've fought just as hard as anyone else, but we never had any titles like the others.»

«What kind of a strange nickname would you want?»

«Oh, mine would be something great! Like the Unrivaled Sword of the Plum Blossom Storm [질풍매화무적검(疾風梅花無敵劍)]. Yeah, something like that!»

«That's the weirdest one yet. That...»

Tang Gunak smiled at Jo Geol's reaction.

If Baek Cheon had not suggested taking Ogeom along, Tang Gunak might have been the one to propose their company first. Whether in battles against Sapaeryeon or Demonic Cult, they had always been present.

They were no longer just ordinary rising stars from Hwasan sword sect. They were the swords of Cheonumaeng, fighting against the demons, symbols of solidarity who rushed to the aid of the wronged anywhere they were found.

Certainly, even in Haenam they weren't living with their ears closed, news of Ogeom's virtuous deeds would have spread widely. If such individuals were to come personally, the treatment they received would undoubtedly be different.

«So, there's... Yu Iseol, Yoon Jong, Jo Geol...»

Tang Gunak interrupted himself and looked at Tang Soso.

«...Even you?»

«I'll go.»

«It seems like we already have enough people.»

«I'm going.»

«...You might just be a distraction.»

«I'm going.»

As Tang Soso stubbornly smiled, Tang Gunak's expression noticeably hardened.

«Are you sure?»

«You're stating the obvious. It could be dangerous. So, naturally, I should go. Sahyeong's are the kind of people who wouldn't even know how to patch themselves up if they got cut by a sword.»

«Since Young Lord Tang is going himself, there's no need for additional members.»

«But...»

At that moment, Baek Cheon spoke up.

«Soso will not be accompanying us just to fill the numbers.»

«...Hmm?»

Tang Gunak's gaze shifted to Baek Cheon, who then spoke firmly.

«Soso will join as a sword of Hwasan. It would be difficult to find someone else to replace Soso, regardless of who else may come.»

«...»

«So, please allow it.»

Tang Gunak's lips twitched. As a father who didn't want to send his daughter into danger, it wasn't exactly pleasant to hear, but at the same time, it was exactly what he wanted to hear.

The child who had once entered Hwasan not as a sword, but to fill a gap with Tang's medical skills, was now recognized by the Acting Sect Leader for the value of her sword.

Tang Soso's face flushed with pride as she heard Baek Cheon's words. Sensing her youthful eagerness, Tang Gunak ultimately nodded in agreement.

«If Acting Leader says so, I have no objections. You have my permission.»

«Thank you.»

Baek Cheon slightly bowed respectfully and fixed his gaze forward, as if there was no need for further discussions about Tang Soso.

'Indeed...'

Tang Gunak nodded involuntarily. Hyun Jong and Baek Cheon certainly had their differences. But among them, the most prominent would be their determination and confidence.

«So, is the number of people confirmed?»

«It seems so.»

«Oh, there, Sasuk.»

«Hmm?»

«... You might want to take a look behind.»

«Huh?»

Baek Cheon turned his head. In one corner of the room, he noticed Hye Yeon, fidgeting like an anxious puppy.

«... Monk?»

«Um... Take care... Yes, please take care. Dojang. I pray for a safe return... even from here...»

Jo Geol whispered to Yoon Jong.

«Why is he acting like that?»

«I'm not sure. Maybe it's because of the incident with the Abbot. He might feel awkward about going while being someone from Shaolin.»

«He's worried about that?»

Everyone looked at Hye Yeon with puzzled eyes. His head turned bright red in an instant.

«... The Abbot should have at least half of the shame he has.»

«What, half? If it were up to me, even one tenth's of it would be enough.»

«Come to think of it, maybe the Abbot didn't have anything because this one had too much.»

«Then he is the problem.»

«Oh, come on, what did I do?»

Baek Cheon chuckled as he watched Hye Yeon defend himself, feeling unjustly accused.

«Don't worry about it, let's go together, Monk.»

«Um, are you sure about that? While Cheonumaeng may understand my position, from Haenam's perspective, having someone from Shaolin along might seem like mockery.»

«I don't think you need to worry about that. No one in their right mind would think that all these lords risked their lives just to mock someone.»

«Oh...»

Hye Yeon looked around at those present. While the situation could indeed lead to misunderstandings, the faces of those heading to Haenam seemed enough to dispel any misconceptions.

«Well then, I'll accept the shame and join you. Amitabha.»

As it became certain that Hye Yeon would also join, Jo Geol looked around at everyone with a renewed sense of determination.

«Wow. So, all the leaders, Young Lords, and Acting Sect Leader, even Monk Hye Yeon from Shaolin, are going together, except for the Beast Palace...»

Jo Geol, who seemed impressed, paused as if sensing something strange.

«Um... no, Sasuk. But still.»

«Why?»

«Wasn't the whole point of sending only a select few to Haenam to minimize risks and ensure safety by sending fewer people?»

«Wasn't that explained earlier? Why bring it up again?»

«...But aren't the people going to Haenam the most important leaders of each sect, who shouldn't be risked?»

«...»

Jo Geol asked again, as if he couldn't grasp the meaning of this.

«So what's the difference between this and when the whole Cheonumaeng is mobilized?»

«...»

No one had a proper answer to that question.

No one.