

Chapter 1192

Why did it have to be like that? (2)

«Sa-Sa...suk!»

«Why?»

«Have you heard the news?»

«What news?»

Despite the urgency with which Kwak Hoe rushed in and the anxious look on his face, Baek Sang's expression remained indifferent. It seemed like Kwak Hoe was about to announce something as serious as an invasion of Demonic Cult, but this weak-hearted bastard often made a fuss over nothing, so Baek Sang didn't pay much attention to his expression.

«Bae-Baek Cheon Sa...suk! Baek Cheon Sasuk!»

«Why Sasuk?»

«He became a Sect Leader!»

«Oh, really? He must have. He was bound to become one someday.»

Baek Sang lowered his gaze back to the documents he was reading.

«No! Sasuk, not that! He became a Sect Leader, I'm telling you!»

«Oh, I see. I got it.»

«No, it's true! The rumor is spreading like wildfire in Jangwon! Sect Leader has passed on his position to Baek Cheon Sasuk!»

Finally, Baek Sang raised his head and looked at Kwak Hoe.

“...Sect Leader?”

«Yes!»

«All of a sudden?»

«Yes, that's right! He abruptly passed on his position! It's chaos right now!»

«Um... So, what you're saying is that Sect Leader gave his position to Sasuk?»

«Yes!»

Finally understanding, Baek Sang nodded approvingly at Kwak Hoe's enthusiastic gestures. Baek Sang's eyes were halfway closed as he listened.

«... Why?»

«It's for the future of Hwasan...»

«Why?»

«Because... Because during the conversation with the Abbot, the leader of Shaolin...»

«Why?»

«...Because...»

«Why?»

Kwak Hoe fell silent. Seeing Baek Sang's trembling lips, he closed his mouth. Baek Sang murmured absentmindedly.

«So that's...?»

«Yes.»

«Why did it have to be like that?»

«...I'm not sure either...»

«...»

The silent standoff between Baek Sang, who was staring blankly at Kwak Hoe, and Kwak Hoe, who was utterly helpless, continued for a while.

«Sahyeong, it's Un Geom.»

«Come in.»

Un Geom quietly opened the door and entered the room. Un Am was sitting in front of the desk, organizing his documents. Despite hearing someone come in, he didn't even glance up, continuing his work as if nothing had changed.

Taking a seat in front of him, Un Geom spoke,

«I've heard the news.»

«Is it about Baek Cheon?»

«Yes, Sahyeong.»

Un Am nodded calmly,

«So it is. I apologize for not consulting with you beforehand. I hope you understand.»

«You've said more than enough.»

A faint smile appeared on Un Geom's lips. Originally, it should have been Un Am who would take the position next. Both Un Am and Un Geom had thought so, having lived in Hwasan for decades.

The position of the Sect Leader. A position of immense responsibility and burden.

Despite that, relinquishing the desire to ascend to the position of the Sect Leader, even though it was within his grasp if he wished for it, must have been incredibly difficult for Un Am.

It was right after such a significant event, but Un Am showed no difference from his usual self. That's why, even though his status wasn't particularly high, Un Geom obediently followed Un Am without any hesitation.

«You've worked hard.»

«As have you.»

Finally finishing organizing the stack of documents, Un Am neatly placed them aside and faced Un Geom.

«It's just what needed to be done.»

«Following the natural order may sound easy, but in reality, it's the most difficult thing to do.»

Un Am chuckled at his words.

«You seem to have learned to speak like a Taoist. Someone who only knew the way of the sword.»

At that, Un Geom scratched his nose feeling slightly embarrassed.

Sahyeongs are peculiar entities. Logically, the position of the elder is supposed to be more challenging, considering the hierarchy of the sect, but the person Un Geom finds most difficult to deal with in Hwasan is none other than Un Am.

«I've come to realize that while raising disciples.»

«It's a good thing.»

Un Am smiled warmly. It was as if he was seeing a matured younger brother for the first time.

«But, Sahyeong...»

Un Geom, feeling a bit awkward, changed the subject slightly.

«Sahyeong, are you alright?»

«Hmm?»

Un Geom's gaze became somewhat serious.

«You're still human, Sahyeong. No matter how much you follow the natural order, you must have some regrets.»

Un Am chuckled at his words.

«Why? Are you afraid of being too soft on your cute little disciples?»

«Sahyeong also...»

«Haha.»

Un Am laughed lightly, then quickly lowered his head.

«Regrets... Honestly, wouldn't it be a lie to say there are none?»

«Yes, I suppose so.»

Un Geom let out a light sigh. It couldn't have been easy. It was only natural.

«Both you and I, haven't we both harbored the desire to lead Hwasan to become the greatest sect in the world someday? If I were to become the Sect Leader one day, I wanted to take Hwasan to a different place from what we've experienced.»

«Yes, Sahyeong.»

Un Geom could hear Un Am's voice carrying a hint of bitterness.

He had hoped for that too.

Un Am became the Sect Leader, while Un Geom aimed to reclaim the glory of Hwasan as the First Sword. That had been their dream ever since they first entered Hwasan. Although, at some point, reality had become so stifling that they couldn't even think about it.

«But there's no regret. Do you know why?»

«I'm not sure.»

Un Geom admitted honestly. He had come to this place to hear this very answer.

Un Am chuckled softly as he spoke.

«It's because you find me difficult.»

«... Yes?»

It was an unexpected remark. Un Geom blinked in surprise. Seeing his bewildered expression, Un Am chuckled softly.

«Don't make that face. I'm not saying it's because of you.»

Smiling, Un Am elaborated,

«The reason you find me difficult is simple. It's because I owe you nothing.»

It was a confusing statement that seemed to make sense and yet didn't at the same time.

«Poor children may still respect their parents, but parents who raised their children in poverty can't help but feel a sense of guilt.»

«Ah...»

«What's interesting is that children are aware of that fact as well. That's why deep down, even if I make a mistake once or twice, I think they'll pretend not to be able to beat their parents and understand.»

Un Geom nodded as if he understood what Un Am meant.

«It certainly seems to be the case.»

«Yeah. You must know by now. Because you see the children through parents' eyes.»

Un Geom sighed.

«That's true, Sahyeong.»

It wasn't just Hyun Jong who felt guilty towards the children. Un Geom harbored the same feelings. As a teacher, he hadn't given those children anything.

Despite all the training and whatnot, during his teachings, the disciples of Hwasan hadn't shown any remarkable progress. It was only after Chung Myung appeared that they began to grow.

Was it because of practical martial arts? Un Geom knew better than anyone else that wasn't the truth. If he were truly a skilled teacher, he would have been able to raise his disciples excellently even with mediocre martial arts techniques.

Could Un Geom sternly scold his disciples when they made mistakes? Like parents who couldn't properly feed or clothe their children, hadn't he avoided blaming himself?

«Do you understand?»

«Yes.»

Un Geom nodded in agreement.

«Right now, anyone can see that the core of Hwasan are Baek and Chung disciples. But I don't have the confidence to lead those kids properly. In the eyes of the children, I'm just a slightly less intimidating, slightly less strict leader.»

«...»

«It's nice to be like parents and children. But ultimately, children end up acting up towards their parents. Parents who haven't given anything inevitably have to accept that childish behavior. I've long been worried that my own sense of entitlement might ruin those kids someday.»

«Sahyeong...»

Un Geom looked at Un Am with new eyes.

When had this man started thinking like this?

He had simply thought it was a decision to look at the future of Hwasan. He had thought it was rational to quickly transfer power to the core of Hwasan.

But Un Am seemed to be looking deeper. It seemed that he had never considered a path where Hwasan became stronger. He had only been looking for a path where his disciples could grow properly.

«And in the midst of that, Baek Cheon comes to me and says such things. That he doesn't have a debt to the past.»

«...»

«So he tells me he needs to take the position of the Sect Leader. Then he says we can assist him and lead Hwasan excellently. Arrogant brat. He doesn't even know what that means.»

Upon hearing those words, Un Geom burst into laughter.

Anyone else would have taken those words at face value. And even Baek Cheon probably wouldn't have hidden any ulterior motives behind those words. But how would those words sound to Un Am, who was grappling with such concerns?

«So there's no need to worry, right? Insisting on a different path even when there's a better one is just my selfishness.»

«But isn't there such a thing as laws?»

«Haha. Are there laws in Hwasan?»

«Sahyeong!»

«I'm kidding. Why are you so upset?»

Un Am chuckled and shook his head.

«If there's no regret, it's a lie. If there's no sorrow, then I must already be enlightened. But I have no doubt that my choice was right.»

«...And Un Geom.»

«Yes, Sahyeong.»

«Having regrets and feeling sorry is only natural.»

Un Geom looked at Un Am as if asking what he meant.

«Acting with virtue, following what is right, always involves that. If choosing what is right were easy and enjoyable, who would refuse to follow it? Shouldn't it be bitter and regretful to follow what is right?»

Those words resonated deeply with Un Geom.

«It's hard to do what is right...»

«Yeah, that's right. Good that is done effortlessly is nothing more than a comfort to one's heart. Can throwing a single coin to a starving beggar from a pile of gold really be considered virtuous?»

«I can't say it's not.»

«True.»

Un Am nodded slowly.

«But for someone who receives two coins as his daily wage, giving one coin to the beggar is an act of virtue in itself. Offering it, despite the inner conflict and hesitation, overcoming the regret, and extending that hand, that's virtue.»

«I understand what you mean, Sahyeong.»

Un Geom chuckled.

«In the end, you wanted to say that you're a very wise Taoist, didn't you?»

«This guy...»

«Hahaha!»

Un Geom burst into laughter.

He felt good. He felt really good.

This man was his Sahyeong. The one who, like an offering, surrendered the coveted position of the Sect Leader of Hwasan, and yet, despite feeling conflicted and regretful, extended his hand — that was his Sahyeong.

«Because I believe, I can give.»

Un Am smiled quietly after they both laughed heartily together.

«It's because he's Baek Cheon. He's my disciple whom I've watched over, so I can give it to him. In this era, there's no one better suited to lead Hwasan than him. As he said, he has no debt and his heart is full of determination. And...»

«There's no plan.»

«Yeah. A planless wanderer... Ahem. But that's where we come in, to assist him well.»

When Un Am let out a bitter smile, Un Geom chuckled in response.

«Un Geom-ah.»

«Yes, Sahyeong.»

«I guess it was a good thing, right?»

Un Geom raised the corners of his mouth.

«Among all the things I've seen you do as my Sahyeong, this is the second time.»

«...What was the first?»

«In the past, you couldn't handle it, so you ran away at dawn jumping over the fence, only to change your mind and come back...»

«Shut your mouth before I kill you.»

«Oh! Where did a Taoist master like you learn about killing or slandering?»

The two brothers looked at each other and chuckled. Both of them had eyes full of trust and confidence. They were aiming high, yet they never clung to their positions, which was evident in their gaze.

«He'll do well.»

«Yes, he will do well.»

«Yeah, he'll do just fine. Whose disciple he is anyway?»

Looking warmly at Un Am with a smile, Un Geom spoke,

«But, Un Am Sahyeong.»

«Yes?»

«Something's been bothering me for a while now.»

«What? What's...»

«Baek Cheon is my disciple.»

Un Am looked at Un Geom with trembling eyes. Un Geom responded firmly, like a sharp blade cutting through,

«Don't subtly meddle. I can't allow that.»

«Crafty bastard.»

In the end, they were also those who lived on Hwasan.