

Chapter 1194

Why did it have to be like that? (4)

At the very moment when rumors swirled through the halls of Cheonumaeng faster than the wind, the gathering of Hwasan's disciples, who had been discussing the Abbot's response and how to deal with it, came to an end.

Hyun Jong nodded thoughtfully and spoke up,

«Let's set aside some time to discuss the finer details and future direction separately.»

«Yes, let's do that.»

Baek Cheon responded respectfully.

As Baek Cheon rose from his seat, the other disciples followed suit.

«Then,»

he said with a nod, turned and swiftly exited the room, the door closing behind him with a resounding thud.

In a desperate tone, Hyun Young spoke up,

«No, Sect Leader!»

«What more do you have to say now?»

«Isn't this all too hasty?»

«Quiet,»

Hyun Jong groaned.

«Why do you keep complaining when everything has gone your way? Why the need for more nagging?»

«But, Sect Leader, there was no mention of Baek Cheon assuming the position of the Sect Leader, was there?»

Hyun Jong let out a deep sigh. Being an elder was supposed to come with its own set of responsibilities, but whether he acted this way or that way, it seemed like there would always be problems.

«Did you think it was me?»

«Then, did he really say all that without any discussion with you, Sect Leader?»

«That's right.»

«Well, well...»

Hyun Young looked at the closed door where Baek Cheon had left the room with an incredulous expression.

«Kids these days...»

«They're not exactly kids. This is Gangho, after all. If he were from a different background, he would have already started a family.»

«That may be true, but...»

Hyun Young grimaced.

He understood. Hyun Jong must have been in an impossible situation. Rejecting the Abbot's proposal while he held the position of Hwasan's Sect Leader was simply not possible. However, even if that were the case, handing over the position of the Sect Leader so easily was unexpected.

Hyun Young's admonition was meant to remind everyone that they shouldn't take credit for what the children had achieved, but even he hadn't imagined that Hyun Jong would react like this.

«...Anyway, it seems like even the Sect Leader is at a loss from time to time,»

Hyun Jong murmured with a troubled expression.

«That's how it's always been, always!»

At that moment, Hyun Sang, who had been quietly listening, chuckled and spoke to Hyun Jong,

«I'm a little worried.»

«About Baek Cheon?»

«Well, Baek Cheon, yes, but I'm more concerned about Un Am.»

«Hmm, I see. I should probably have a separate conversation with Un Am.»

«You should consider doing that.»

Hyun Young grumbled as he poked at the fire.

«Is Un Am aware of the situation? With Baek Cheon becoming the Sect Leader right away...»

«He's not the Sect Leader, he's just the Acting Sect Leader, for now.»

«What's the difference between the two?»

«There's a difference. Being called Sect Leader carries much more weight than being Acting Sect Leader.»

Hyun Jong pondered quietly as he stared at the door.

'It won't be easy.'

While he wasn't sure how others viewed the situation, having lived as the Sect Leader of Hwasan for many years, Hyun Jong was well aware of the burden that came with the title. It's a burden he has taken upon himself. So he must overcome it on his own. But Hyun Jong also knows it's not an easy task, so he can only hope that being called 'Acting Sect Leader' will lighten Baek Cheon's load, even if just a little.

«Um... Sect Leader. So, are you really going to hand over the position? Is that true?»

«Tsk.»

Hyun Jong frowned and glanced at Hyun Young.

«Why are you so agitated today?»

«Well, it's just so sudden!»

«When has anything in Hwasan ever been anything but sudden? Since Chung Myung joined, has there been a single thing that was properly planned and executed?»

«Well, what Sect Leader says is true, but...»

Hyun Jong chuckled.

«Why? Now that I'm stepping down to become an old man in the back room, you think I've become feeble-minded?»

«Oh, why would you say such a thing? It's something we've dreamed about.»

Hyun Young clicked his tongue and waved his hand.

«Honestly, now Hwasan has become too big for us mountain hermits to handle. Thanks to the kids, we've enjoyed some good things, but has any of that really been in line with our principles?»

«Yeah, you're right.»

A light smile appeared on Hyun Jong's face.

«It was bound to happen anyway. What difference does it make if it happens a little sooner than expected?»

His voice was calm, as if he had already accepted everything.

«The future of Hwasan lies with those kids. And they are the ones who must bear the burden of Hwasan's choices. So it's only right that they also decide the direction Hwasan would take.»

«Yeah.»

Hyun Young sighed, his tone filled with both concern and acceptance.

«Our job is just to watch from behind and make sure those kids don't make too radical or extreme choices.»

«Isn't that what we've been doing all along?»

«Yeah. Nothing will change. It's just that Baek Cheon is the first one to speak up now.»

Nothing has changed.

But many things will change. That was the consensus among the three of them.

«Well done, Sect Leader.»

Hyun Jong glanced briefly at Hyun Sang's words.

«It's not difficult to say 'I trust you'. But putting that trust into action will never be easy. The fact that you've supported and trusted him without questioning current situation will undoubtedly be a great source of strength for Baek Cheon.»

«...»

«Excellent job.»

Hyun Jong cleared his throat as if to downplay it. The tips of his ears turned slightly red.

«I am doing everything I can.»

Hyun Sang chuckled as he observed him.

'He seems to be getting more comfortable.'

Hyun Jong's tone had noticeably lightened compared to before. That made Hyun Sang realize once again how much pressure he had been under all this time.

If it weren't for Baek Cheon stepping in on time, Hyun Jong might have been overwhelmed and crushed by that pressure before he could overcome it.

«It's all for the best.»

Nature may seem capricious at times, but ultimately it leads to where it needs to be. Just as Hyun Sang was about to nod in agreement...

«But...»

«Yeah?»

Hyun Young glanced at the door as if something peculiar caught his attention.

«That guy, isn't he strangely silent?»

«That guy? Who?»

«Oh, come on. Who else could it be? The one who's always ready to spew venom.»

«...Chung Myung?»

«Yes, exactly. That guy.»

Hyun Sang chuckled softly.

«Despite his usual antics, doesn't he become more serious when it comes to deciding the fate of the sect?»

«Hmm.»

«And besides, even though he doesn't say it, he seems to feel quite comfortable with Baek Cheon. He even gives him some recognition as a fellow disciple.»

Hyun Young tilted his head as if pondering and then asked Hyun Jong.

«Do you feel the same way, Sect Leader?»

«...Chung Myung?»

«Yes.»

«Well... From what I see, he just...»

«Just?»

«...Seems a bit out of it?»

A brief silence ensued.

The three of them looked towards the door with an uneasy gaze.

Baek Cheon was walking ahead, as Jo Geol stared intently at his back. He awkwardly opened his mouth with a voice filled with hesitation.

«Um... Sa... Sasuk. Earlier, I... I...»

«What is it?»

Jo Geol cleared his throat when Baek Cheon turned to look at him. Then he spoke cautiously again.

«I... I was a bit thoughtless earlier...»

«You!»

But at that moment, Yoon Jong thundered with a stern voice. Startled, Jo Geol looked at Yoon Jong with widened eyes.

Yoon Jong's expression was grim. It was the same stern look he had when someone committed a serious mistake.

«No, Sa-Sahyeong... What did I do wrong?»

«Do you not know what you did wrong?»

«What?»

Yoon Jong sharpened his tone once more.

“How dare you speak to the Acting Sect Leader in such a manner! Do you think repentance comes from simply acknowledging your crimes and then bowing your head in remorse? Receive the punishment for your negligence and reflect on your actions properly before speaking again!”

Upon hearing these words, Jo Geol turned his head to look at Baek Cheon. Baek Cheon, seeing the enlightened expression on Jo Geol's face, felt an unexpected chill run down his spine and instinctively took a step back.

“Oh no! Acting Sect Leader!”

Jo Geol bowed deeply on the spot, begging for forgiveness.

“I have committed a grave sin! I spoke thoughtlessly to the Acting Sect Leader! Please punish me for my foolish words! Cut out my tongue to atone for my mistake!”

“...Stop it.”

“Oh, Acting Sect Leader! Please vent your anger upon me! I had no idea things would turn out like this!”

“Stop...”

In that moment, Jo Geol fell forward completely, prostrating himself before Baek Cheon.

“I alone bear the guilt, so please forgive the other disciples and punish me alone, Acting Sect Leader!”

“...Ugh...”

“Yes, I know! The Acting Sect Leader has ordered you to stop!”

“Oh no! How could I dare defy the Acting Sect Leader's command! If I must die, I will die!”

“Well then, just die, please... Please, just...”

At that moment, a strange voice came from beside Baek Cheon.

«Acting Sect Leader.»

Baek Cheon turned his head to see Yu Iseol trembling inexplicably, her expression was unusual as she looked in his direction.

«Acting Sect...»

Baek Cheon's face twitched slightly as he tried to maintain his composure.

«...Leader... Pfft.»

Unable to contain her laughter, she turned her head sharply. At the same time, a hint of embarrassment flashed across Baek Cheon's face.

«Samae.»

«Acting...»

«Yes?»

«Acting Sect Leader.»

Wow... Did she have a talent for getting under people's skin? I never realized until now.

«Hehe. Congratulations, Acting Sect Leader!»

With a bright smile, Tang Soso clapped her hands. Baek Cheon nodded awkwardly at her unexpectedly ordinary and cheerful response.

«Yeah, thanks...»

«Oh my, oh my! Sect Leader Sasuk! Get a hold of yourself! Acting... Oh, no, not that? Then what should I call you?»

«...»

«Yes? Sasuk? What should I call you now?»

There was a devilish glint in Tang Soso's eyes.

Baek Cheon weakly covered his face with both hands.

‘This is why I didn't want to do this.’

Could he just leave himself at the mercy of these bloodthirsty wolves? Despite the circumstances that forced him to act, thinking about what he would have to endure from now on twisted his stomach.

At that moment, the unexpected voice of Hye Yeon was heard from the side.

«Amitabha. As someone who is not a disciple of Hwasan, I hesitate to speak, but it seems that everyone's teasing is a bit excessive.»

«Hye... Monk Hye Yeon!»

Baek Cheon looked at Hye Yeon with a touched expression. Yes, he was still...

«No, Acting Sect Leader.»

«Yes?»

«According to the strict laws of Gangho, it is not proper for the leader of one sect to show deference to me. From now on, just call me Hye Yeon... Um, please.»

Hye Yeon quickly covered his mouth with one hand. His bald head was trembling.

‘...I just wish they would all disappear.’

Wouldn't swiftly removing these people be the most righteous path for Gangho's peace?

Most people would probably agree, wouldn't they?

“Hahaha! Acting Sect Leader!”

«Wow! I can't believe I'm seeing Sasuk become the Acting Sect Leader.»

«The sect is in chaos! Hey, Chung Myung! What do you have to say... Huh? Chung Myung?»

Only then did everyone's gaze turn to Chung Myung. And at the same time they all flinched.

«Why are you like this, Chung Myung?»

«Are you okay?»

Chung Myung, now bleached white, stood with his mouth half-open, staring blankly. It seemed as if his soul had been shattered, leaving only the remnants behind. Strange sounds were pouring out of his open mouth.

“Dong... Dong...”

“...Dong... Ryong.”

“...”

«D...Dong Ryong....is the Acting Sect Leader....and I'm a disciple....»

«...»

«...I should just die... I should just die... What have I done to live to see this? I should just go out and die.... Ahahahahaha....»

«...»

«I should die. Oh my... I should just die.»

«Is that so, Sasuk?»

With his face buried in his hands, Baek Cheon sighed weakly.

«Someone, please just take that bastard away and come back.»

«Oh my goodness! Who do you think you are...?»

«Die, you bastard!»

«Aaaaah!»

Finally, Baek Cheon, who had lost his mind, attacked Jo Geol.

And so, the screams of agony from Jo Geol and the chants of despair from Chung Myung flowed through the manor for a while.