

Chapter 1178

I have something to tell you. (3)

Jo Geol clenched his fist. He didn't want to eavesdrop. He was merely intending to offer his greetings when he accidentally overheard the conversation.

However, the intention behind why he heard those words inside wasn't crucial. The content was far more important than such matters.

Something surged within his chest.

As he attempted to rush inside without hesitation, someone firmly grabbed his shoulders.

Jo Geol, unable to conceal his intense emotions, turned his head sharply. However, when he saw the person who grabbed him, the anger he was about to unleash faded.

Baek Cheon.

With an incredibly resolute expression, Baek Cheon was shaking his head and made a gesture that signaled Jo Geol to keep silent.

Baek Cheon pulled Jo Geol behind him. The determination not to tolerate any resistance could be felt in the strength of the hand that held Jo Geol's shoulder.

Jo Geol was dragged away helplessly, and walked away from Sect Leader's residence. Only then did Baek Cheon release his grip, looking at Jo Geol with stern eyes.

«Didn't we agree that regardless of Sect Leader's decision, we should follow without any questions?»

«But... But, Baek Cheon Sasuk.»

«They have pondered ten times more than you and endured a hundred times more pain. It's not something that can be changed by shouting and clinging.»

“...”

Jo Geol's shoulders slumped.

‘...Dammit.’

For some reason, he couldn't fathom it. Despite knowing Baek Cheon's intentions, he had steeled himself throughout his time here. However, his emotions were more tumultuous than he had anticipated. He held Cheonumaeng dearer than he had thought.

And it seemed the sentiments of others, not just Jo Geol, weren't vastly different. Though not explicitly expressing their feelings, the gathered Ogeom members also had less than favorable expressions.

«Ah...»

A sigh escaped Yoon Jong's lips, unable to contain himself.

«I've thought about it to some extent, but... facing it head-on like this feels strange.»

«Is that so?»

Baek Cheon stared at Yoon Jong intently.

«Even though he said he couldn't choose, it seems he has already decided on it in his heart.»

«...»

«Yes. Perhaps that's better than being indecisive.»

Baek Cheon was about to move on as if it was nothing, but Jo Geol couldn't hold back any longer and raised his voice.

«Sasuk. But still, this isn't right, is it?»

Baek Cheon turned to look at Jo Geol, silent.

«The problem is within the questions without the answers, I'm aware. But they can at least listen to our thoughts...»

«Presumptuous.»

Interrupting him was Yu Iseol. Unlike usual, she glared at Jo Geol with a chilly gaze, causing him to flinch.

«Sago...»

«The choice was made by the Sect Leader.»

He couldn't find the words, biting his lip.

«What Samae says is correct.»

«Sasuk...»

Then Baek Cheon, too, was more stern than usual.

«You are a disciple of Hwasan, aren't you?»

«...»

«If you are a disciple of Hwasan, even if there are parts that don't align with your will, you must believe and follow the words of the Sect Leader, who determines the direction Hwasan would take. Do I need to explain even such an obvious thing?»

Jo Geol weakly shook his head.

As he did, Baek Cheon observed Jo Geol sternly.

«Hwasan has so far granted disciples the authority that no other sect would dare to ask for. That's because Sect Leader is so incredibly excellent. In that case, you should be grateful to him. You shouldn't think that what you've enjoyed so far is an inherent right.

«... Yes.»

Listening to their conversation, Yoon Jong opened his mouth with a troubled expression.

«Don't push him too hard, Sasuk. It's not a statement because I'm feeling upset.»

«Just because you're feeling uncomfortable doesn't mean you can say anything.»

«Then would you rather have me stay silent all the time?»

There was a moment of silence. Baek Cheon looked at Yoon Jong with eyes that revealed no emotion, but Yoon Jong did not flinch.

Their gazes clashed in the air.

«Sasuk, I understand that you don't like the thought of Jo Geol questioning Sect Leader's choice. But wasn't Hwasan originally a place that allowed such things?»

«Allowed?»

Yu Iseol's eyes narrowed slightly instead of Baek Cheon.

«This is self-indulgence.»

«...»

The two pairs of people representing the second generation and the third generation faced each other as if in a confrontation. In the moment when the air around them seemed to settle, Tang Soso weakly cleared her throat.

«...Perhaps they couldn't hear you?»

All four turned to look at Tang Soso.

«If we heard... if we decided together, then we all would have to bear the responsibility, right?»

«...»

«If we heard...»

Yoon Jong closed his eyes tightly.

After letting out a deep sigh, he opened his eyes and bowed his head toward Baek Cheon.

«I apologize, Sasuk. I spoke without thinking...»

«No. Don't worry about it.»

Baek Cheon casually concluded the matter, but the gaze from Yu Iseol was still chilly. As she had deep affection for Sect Leader Hyun Jong, she still seemed displeased with their behavior.

Baek Cheon spoke in a stern tone.

«Listen to me, all of you.»

«Yes.»

«There's no way they didn't know that we were listening from outside.»

«...»

“However, the reason they didn't stop talking was probably to convey that we should know and listen first. We should be grateful for that consideration.”

«Yes.»

Baek Cheon stared at the two for a moment before speaking.

«There's no such thing as a perfect choice that satisfies everyone. Ultimately, we have to push forward the direction we believe is better. Those who don't choose and don't take responsibility shouldn't judge the choices made by those who bear the responsibility as right or wrong.»

«We'll keep that in mind.»

«Good.»

Baek Cheon nodded and turned away without waiting for a response. A cold aura surrounded him as he walked away briskly.

Watching his departure, Yu Iseol, Tang Soso, and Hye Yeon, who seemed to have observed the scene with some discomfort, also left.

«Sorry, Sahyeong. It's because of me.»

When only Yoon Jong and Jo Geol were left, Jo Geol sighed and offered an apology.

However, Yoon Jong firmly shook his head.

«It's enough. You don't need to apologize. Anyone, in any situation, could say what they wanted. That's what made us Hwasan, wasn't it?»

«Still...»

«It's fine.»

Yoon Jong lightly tapped Jo Geol's shoulder.

«You're fine just the way you are.»

«Sahyeong...»

He smiled gently at Jo Geol, then turned his gaze to Baek Cheon, who was walking away in the distance.

He understands. Yes, he understands. In the position of the highest authority among them, Baek Cheon's role was to trust and resolve any potential dissatisfaction with Sect Leader's choice. But...

'At least, you shouldn't have said such things, Sasuk.'

As Yoon Jong observed Baek Cheon's distancing figure, he turned his head away with a composed expression.

«Let's go.»

«Yes.»

The two walked silently towards their living quarters.

In the early hours of the morning, two figures walked slowly towards the residence of Cheonumaeng.

The Abbot, adorned in the distinctive yellow attire symbolizing Shaolin, and following closely behind, his companion Jongli Hyeong.

Jongli Hyeong, observing the seemingly comfortable demeanor of the Abbot, flashed a friendly smile.

«You seem to be in good spirits, Abbot.»

«...Do I?»

Beop Jong showed a rare expression of slight humility.

«It's embarrassing. I suppose my inner thoughts are showing on my face now that the long-contemplated matter is finally being resolved.»

«Haha. Why wouldn't it be that way?»

Jongli Hyeong responded with a faint laugh.

Beop Jong rarely revealed emotions on his face. Wasn't he a leader for no reason? However, the Abbot couldn't hide his feelings completely when it came to such a sensitive issue as Cheonumaeng.

«They will give you a positive answer, won't they?»

«They will.»

Although Beop Jong returned an affirmative response, he furrowed his brow ever so slightly, as if something was bothering him.

«However, Abbot. I believe in your words, but still, there is a concern. If what you say is true, Hwasan Geomhyeop is an unpredictable person, and we have no idea where he might...»

«There's no need to worry.»

Beop Jong tilted his head.

«I understand your apprehension. Surely, Cheonumaeng is a place with an unusual structure. Sect Leader of Hwasan, the head of Sichuan Tang clan, Nokrim King, the successor of Namgung clan, along with the lords of the outer palaces, all gather there. Yet, the one determining the direction of Cheonumaeng is a young child.»

Jongli Hyeong nodded in agreement.

It's an inexplicable situation, but considering the actions of Hwasan Geomhyeop so far, one couldn't outright ridicule it as a mistake.

«Hwasan Geomhyeop is capricious. At least, that's how he appears from the outside. So, are you not worried that he might suddenly change his mind?»

«That won't happen this time.»

«Really?»

As Jongli Hyeong questioned the matter, Beop Jong nodded.

«Because the one at the forefront of Hwasan is none other than Sect Leader Hyun Jong. If it were an ordinary Sect Leader, they might step back from such matters. Unable to easily handle the consequences of their choices.»

«Yes, that makes sense.»

Jongli Hyeong also had a similar thought. Leading such a place with the will of an ordinary Sect Leader would have far-reaching consequences.

«But Hyun Jong never backs down in situations like this. He knows that the moment he defers his choice, the responsibility for all those choices falls squarely on Hwasan Geomhyeop.»

«Ah...»

«Amitabha.»

Beop Jong expressed his disapproval solemnly.

«So, Hyun Jong will never delegate the authority for this decision to Hwasan Geomhyeop. Even if Hwasan Geomhyeop considers changing his mind, this time, it will be under the authority of Hwasan's Sect Leader. In case of any future issues, he will bear the burden and step back, protecting Hwasan and Hwasan Geomhyeop.»

«To such an extent...»

«He is an exceptional person. That's why he is worthy of respect.»

Having said that, Beop Jong let out a small sigh.

«This time, Hyun Jong's temperament will guide everything in an orderly manner. Fortunately for us, Sect Leader is an unparalleled figure, a true gentleman and a Taoist. And strangely, Hwasan Geomhyeop, despite all his eccentricities, is determined to somehow preserve the honor of Sect Leader's name.»

«It's truly remarkable.»

Jongli Hyeong nodded continuously in agreement.

While Beop Jong humbly credits luck and boosts his opponent, what truly stands out is Beop Jong's ability to accurately grasp the character of such an opponent and lead them into an irrevocable situation.

Now is the time for them to become a united family and face the common enemies.

«I will remember and keep it in mind.»

«Amitabha.»

Beop Jong smiled gracefully. Then, after briefly gazing at the manor, he calmly shifted his step.

«Let's go. We shouldn't waste any more time.»

«Yes, Abbot.»

The two walked towards the manor.

As they approached, Beop Jong's eyes sank deeply.

‘Now, everything will fall into place.’

They may have taken a long and winding road, but in the end, the result might be better than arriving at the end quickly.

The factions under Cheonumaeng have grown stronger than before, and Shaolin and Gupailbang can now fully accept them.

‘Only the last step remains.’

As Beop Jong reviewed the final step in his head, the door to the manor finally opened.

A group of people with stiff expressions came out to greet Beop Jong and Jongli Hyeong.