

Chapter 1130

Here. This is hell. (5)

Chung Myung's rampage was finally subdued only after both Hyun Yeong and Hyun Jong intervened. Watching Chung Myung collapse, restrained and tied in a corner, beads of cold sweat ran down the backs of all present.

Hyun Jong looked at everyone with a troubled expression.

«Why is it so difficult for everyone to maintain control here?»

«...»

«We agreed to fight during the sparring matches, so we'll let that slide. But isn't it a significant problem when you engage in fights regularly?»

Empathizing with his words, everyone nodded.

However, Hyun Jong furrowed his brows, seemingly displeased with their response.

«Then each of the leaders should take charge of sorting out the situation. Why do these incidents keep happening?»

«Hmm.»

The leaders remained silent, avoiding eye contact.

«Please speak your minds frankly.»

«Well, that's...»

«Hmm...»

Despite Hyun Jong's urging, they continued to cough and remained silent. Seeing Hyun Jong's incredulous expression, Tang Gunak finally spoke up, with a bitter smile on his face.

«It seems like a problem is rooted in differences in understanding...»

«Differences in understanding, you say?»

«What differences in understanding could possibly exist here?»

«The Alliance Leader seems to think that it would be easy for us to control them if we were determined enough... But in reality, our authority isn't as strong as the Alliance Leader perceives.»

«...Really?»

Hyun Jong blinked with a bewildered expression upon hearing these words.

What kind of nonsensical statement is this?

«Places like Namgung or Tangga don't have strong authority. What does that even mean? As far as I know, prestigious places like Five Great Families have incredibly strong leadership.»

Tang Gunak sighed deeply.

«That's the issue.»

«Issue?»

«...It's about the perception of that authority. Who holds the strongest authority in the world?»

«Well... His Majesty, the Emperor.»

«Even the Emperor can't disregard the sentiments of the people, can he?»

Hyun Jong was left dumbfounded. It made sense, though.

Even the most powerful authority in the realm, the Emperor, pays attention to the people's sentiments and strives to gain their favor.

«Of course, with our power, we can easily exert force a few times. However... If grievances pile up and go unresolved, leading to repetitive occurrences, ultimately, the authority weakens.»

«Well, that's... I mean...»

Hyun Jong looked at the other lords as if he couldn't comprehend it at all. However, the others merely nodded in agreement, acknowledging the truth of the statement.

«Are you being completely sincere?»

Hyun Jong asked again.

Tang Gunak sighed deeply.

«That's why it was difficult to explain. It's not something the Alliance Leader can easily grasp.»

Hyun Jong paused for a moment, scratching his head. It seemed to be a sensitive subject to address abruptly.

«...Even if that's the case, it's uncomfortable to hear that even instructing disciples not to engage in fights is considered... awkward.»

«Sect Leader.»

«Yes.»

«Is the authority of Tangga's leader strong? What about Shaolin's Abbot?»

«Well...»

Hyun Jong couldn't easily answer that question. It might not sound pleasant to Tang Gunak, but comparing the authority of Tangga's lord to Shaolin's Abbot was a different matter altogether. Wasn't the head of Shaolin not just the leader of the Shaolin temple but also acknowledged as a representative figure of the strong? Naturally, their authority within their sect had to be significant.

«Have you heard about it? Shaolin's disciples, in defiance of the Abbot's orders, returned to their home base.»

«...I have heard about that.»

That's quite understandable... no, he thought there might be some like-minded people even within Shaolin.

“Consider this, Sect Leader. Even the leader of Shaolin, who holds the greatest authority in Gangho, faces such situations. When a few choices don't sit well, don't their disciples rebel and return to their origins?”

“.....”

“In such circumstances, do you think we, with a mere gesture, can control our disciples, thinking we are an exception?”

Hyun Jong’s mouth slightly opened.

Listening, it seemed true... no, it also seemed absurd.

Seeing the bewildered expression on Hyun Jong’s face, Tang Gunak chuckled dryly.

“So, Alliance... no, Sect Leader, I mentioned that it might be difficult for you to understand.”

“..... Why is that?”

“The reason is simple. Our positions and yours as the Sect Leader, are different. In Hwasan your authority as a Sect Leader is unparalleled in the whole Gangho.”

“In Hwasan?”

“Yes.”

“Hwasan?”

“..... Yes.”

“Hwasan?”

When Hyun Jong made a face that said, ‘What kind of nonsense is this?’ the other leaders around him all smiled bitterly.

Certainly, to Hyun Jong, it might sound strange. Indeed, unlike other leaders, Hyun Jong was treating his disciples like friends. Therefore, sometimes, disciples of Hwasan acted in ways unimaginable in other sects, especially when dealing with Hyun Jong.

But being close and formidable authority were entirely separate matters.

To Tang Gunak’s eyes, Hwasan is a sect with Sect Leader’s authority second to none.

Imagine a situation arose where each sect’s leader deployed their disciples into a seemingly desperate battle — no justification, no strategic advantage.

Would the members obediently risk their lives as per Tang Gunak’s command in such a fight that lacked both justification and leverage?

Well, he was skeptical.

Perhaps, at that moment, people would prioritize their own lives over Tang Gunak’s orders. The power he possessed stemmed from legitimacy and position, not from faith and trust in the leader.

Others present here might have similar thoughts.

However, Hwasan was different — distinct from the rest.

If Hwasan’s disciples were commanded by Hyun Jong, more than half of them would risk their lives even though they knew they might die.

‘That’s what authority is.’

Authority is such a thing. No matter how tightly one may grasp control under normal circumstances, if it fails to manifest at a crucial moment, that is not true authority.

Hyun Jong found it extremely hard to comprehend, but eventually nodded his head.

«Mm-hmm. So, you mean... it’s not easy to prevent rebellion among disciples.»

«Well, it's a bit embarrassing, though.»

«What's there to be embarrassed about?»

At that moment, Im Sobyong opened his mouth, wearing an expression that seemed to say, 'This is why orthodox sects...'

«For you, it might end with some ridicule or mocking glances. But while I am sleeping a sword might fly for my neck, a sword!»

«.....»

«And while you can manage if your disciples rise up, someone like me turns into a corpse in an instant! A corpse. Do you understand what that means?»

«Already halfway there, aren't you?»

«.....Still, being halfway to a corpse is better than being a full corpse.»

Im Sobyong grumbled, then spoke with a grim tone.

«Among the sects capable of giving commands that everyone dislikes with just a fingertip, there are only two in the world. One is Hwasan, and the other is...»

«Shaolin?»

«Huh? Shaolin is out of the question. It's Sapaeryon! Sapaeryeon! If I were to add one more, it would be Demonic Cult.»

Hyun Jong's face contorted in a peculiar way as he was listening.

“Well... depending on how you interpret it, Hwasan seems similar to Demonic Cult or Sapaeryeon...”

“To be honest, it's not that different, is it? Whenever Sect Leader issues an order, everyone gets fired up without a second thought, be it on the Yangtze river or in Gangnam. What kind of sane people do that? It's not normal.”

Hyun Jong fell silent. He felt that was deeply unfair but found it extremely difficult to counter with words. This sensation hadn't occurred since the time Chung Myung used to spin his sophistry — it had been a long while.

He sighed and asked Im Sobyong again,

“So, the conclusion is... it's difficult for even the factions leaders to prevent?”

“Even if they try to prevent it, once a spark catches on, who can stop someone from pouring oil on it? If you clumsily interfere, everything will burn.”

“Even the one who brought the spark ended up burned.”

“Yeah, that one's seriously charred.”

Everyone shook their heads while looking at Chung Myung, who was tied up in the corner. To them, it seemed like he had intentionally doused himself in oil and started a fire, then complained about being burnt and in pain.

“Well then, how do we...”

At that moment, Han Imyeong spoke with a face painted in utter confusion.

“Frankly, I don't understand why we're having such a meeting. If the sects were meant to easily cooperate, why bother dividing disciples by the names of each sect and distinguishing

them with uniforms? What's the point of these meaningless joint training, especially sparring?"

Everyone looked at Han Imyeong with a sense of hopelessness.

'We've questioned that too.'

'When did we ever understand? We just did it because we were told.'

'That man, coming from afar, doesn't seem to grasp the situation at all.'

Seeing the expressions of the other sect leaders, Han Imyeong, unable to fully read the atmosphere, spoke with frustration.

"I shouldn't say this in the presence of esteemed leaders, but simply stopping these exercises and separating the quarters of each sect might be the solution-"

"Ugh, shut up!"

At that moment, Chung Myung swiftly snapped the rope binding him and leaped to his feet.

"What? Separate?"

"....."

"What are you muttering?!"

The sect leaders nodded, seemingly impressed.

In this situation, the one facing the most significant damage was none other than Chung Myung. However, right now, he vehemently rejected any path that would allow him an easy way out.

That stubborn side of his was the very reason Hwasan had reached this point...

"Then it's me who's losing here! Damn it!"

...It wasn't about power. Uh... He just had bad personality.

"Mm-hmm. Hwasan Geomhyeop."

Tang Gunak sighed deeply.

"I understand your sentiments, but the current situation isn't as simple. Just as things were calming down, didn't the Beast Palace and the Ice Palace interfere and completely distort the situation? I appreciate the enthusiasm, but sometimes, excessive enthusiasm can be detrimental. First, let's calm down a bit and..."

"Calm down?"

"....."

"Who? Them? Or me?"

"Huh..."

Originally, he was going to say they should calm down... but it seems like Chung Myung needs to calm down a bit too...

"Uh, I understand what you mean."

"Hmm?"

"So, this approach isn't working, right?"

"....."

"Well..."

“That’s right... but... it seems like you’ve completely misunderstood my words...”

“I understand. You’re right. I backed off.”

Chung Myung’s eyes began to shine with madness.

“Then, let’s really do it properly.”

“.....What do you mean?”

“What do you think I’m going to do?”

“.....”

“Do you really want to know?”

No. He really doesn’t want to know. Tang Gunak shuddered.

Chung Myung started giggling and laughing like a madman.

“I must have lost my mind! When did I ever hold back! This isn’t me!”

“.....”

“Don’t worry! I’ll perfectly unite those guys!”

“.....”

Cold sweat began to trickle down the sect leaders’ spines. There was a creeping sense of doom, as if they were about to witness something unbearable.

Creeping slowly...