

Chapter 1169

Have I really been wrong? (4)

Swush. Swush.

Slowly leaving Cheonumaeng's manor, Beop Jong raised his head to gaze at the sky.

He desired to see the bright moon, but unfortunately, it was obscured by clouds.

Letting out a sigh of regret, Beop Jong soon composed himself.

'But clouds inevitably pass by, no matter how thick they may be.'

Although the moon was hidden now, in time, it would reveal itself again. And isn't it the way of the world — that when dawn comes, the sun will soon rise?

«Abbot.»

Seeming really impressed, Jongli Hyeong spoke.

«Abbot, I truly admire your insight into these matters.»

«...Is that so?»

«Yes, Abbot. I never expected you to propose such a thing to Cheonumaeng. Even if it doesn't come to fruition, who could refuse an offer granting authority in Gupailbang equal to Shaolin?»

«It will come to fruition.»

«Yes. Indeed... Wait, what did you say?»

Beop Jong calmly affirmed his statement.

«Not a single word of what I said there was false. Everything I suggested will come to fruition.»

«But, Abbot. Hwasan...»

«Hwasan has the right. They have already proven their qualifications.»

«...»

«And...»

Beop Jong slowly nodded.

«This should have happened long ago. We, at least, knew that, didn't we?»

«But, Abbot, isn't that a matter of the previous generations?»

«I, too, have been saying that, evading responsibility. But looking back, it was hardly a justifiable excuse. I say this now with a face more embarrassed than ever.»

«...»

As Jongli Hyeong looked dumbfounded, Beop Jong smiled softly.

«If you truly wanted to separate the actions of the previous generation from the present, then the glorious achievements of our predecessors should also have been relinquished. If you don't want to take responsibility for what the predecessors did, isn't it inconsistent to enjoy the rights and privileges as the leaders of Gupailbang, based on their accomplishments?»

“That, well, it's true.”

“I will not only implement everything proposed to Hwasan, but also restore their lost honor. We must speak of what they did for the world in the past.”

“...Then why didn't you say that inside?”

“That is not something to be presented as a condition. Talking about what should be done naturally is also an embarrassing matter.”

Jongli Hyeong looked at Beop Jong, unable to comprehend.

“But, Abbot, there will likely be resistance.”

“No, there won't be. If Hwasan and Shaolin recognize each other, none of the sects within Gupailbang will easily oppose. Wudang have lost their speaking rights, and Jongnam... well, Jongnam has also lost a lot of ground due to their prolonged Bongmun.”

“...”

“The other sect have nothing much to lose, so they won't have a reason to stand against Hwasan. Simply put, Hwasan will fill the void left by Haenam and take on the role of Whdang who lost legitimacy.”

“... Depending on how you think about it, that could be true.”

Although it was doubtful whether it would go as smoothly as Beop Jong claimed, Jongli Hyeong chose not to point out the fact. It was not that he didn't want to, but rather, it was difficult to do so.

Beop Jong was never an easy person to deal with, but the current Beop Jong felt different from what he knew.

Wouldn't there only be a handful of people in the whole world who could easily speak out in front of the current Abbot?

«Then, are you really going to accept Hwasan...?»

«That's right.»

Beop Jong nodded quietly.

«It's not to take away but to reconcile. Hwasan has already proven its qualifications to become the leader of several factions by creating Cheonumaeng. If we don't treat such a sect appropriately, it will become another seed of discord.»

«...»

«We need to unite our strength to stop them, don't we? In the face of such cause justice, pride and rights are all small things.»

«The Abbot's words are right a hundred times.»

Jongli Hyeong nodded.

In reality, they had nothing to lose. While it's a bit bitter that Hwasan, as a sect that can't be ignored, receives treatment that exceeds its actual power, ultimately...

‘There's no reason not to acknowledge their achievements.’

In the end, everyone would come to accept it.

«I think I misunderstood you a bit, Abbot.»

«Is that so?»

“Yes, Abbot. Honestly... I thought you might be hostile to them because of Shaolin, fearing it could shake the position of Shaolin as a leader.”

«Shaolin, Shaolin...»

Beop Jong shook his head.

«Shaolin is where I reside, but Shaolin itself cannot become the purpose. It is just a temple. The role of the temple is to spread the Dharma and save sentient beings.»

«I am a bit dim-witted, so I don't quite understand what you mean.»

«What meaning does Shaolin have if Gangho falls? Everything will end up as a fertilizer in the fields anyway.»

«...»

Even after hearing that, Jongli Hyeong momentarily closed his mouth with an uncertain expression.

«Anyway, it was a truly great plan. It will be difficult for them to reject this proposal. Who else could come up with such an idea unless it's you, Abbot?»

«Not great...»

Beop Jong shook his head again.

«That's not it, Sect Leader.»

«Yes?»

«It's not me who is great, it's Hwasan.»

«...Isn't that being excessively humble?»

«It's not. Think about it. If the leader of Cheonumaeng were not Hwasan, could I have proposed something like this to them?»

«That's...»

Beop Jong let out a bitter laugh.

«It's an absurd idea. Do you think any sect in the world, able to rival the power of Gupailbang and the Five Great Families, would create such a force and occupy that position, only to relinquish it for the sake of righteousness and consensus?»

Jongli Hyeong unknowingly nodded.

Switching roles, if Jongli Hyeong were in the position of Hyun Jong, would he have considered Beop Jong's proposal?

Absolutely not. He would have immediately stood up and left upon hearing such futile words.

«It's because it's Hwasan that my words were being heard. It's because it's Hwasan that they are contemplating my proposal. That's why the remarkable one is not me, but Hwasan that allowed such words to come out of my mouth.»

Beop Jong chanted quietly.

«I already knew this. It was a fact that I was aware of. Yet, captivated by arrogance and greed, I failed to see them properly... Every single incident is my mistake.»

«How could that be? Who wouldn't recognize your efforts for the world, Abbot?»

«If the direction is wrong, then everything is wrong.»

Beop Jong sighed, looking back at the sky.

«It's not too late to correct it. Even the act of correcting my mistakes must rely on their generosity. It's just shameful.»

A sigh escaped from Beop Jong's lips.

As he said to Jongli Hyeong, if it were any other sect, they wouldn't have bothered listening to Beop Jong's words.

There's no need to go far. Just consider yesterday's Abbot: if Hyun Jong had come and recounted a similar tale, he would have blatantly scorned it and then issued an order to banish such guests.

Beop Jong came prepared to endure insults and face shame, he thought it was all his fault. Instead of openly humiliating him, they not only refrained from cursing him but rather took his words seriously and pondered upon them.

'Tough.'

He did what needed to be done. However, the bitterness of that task was none other than due to their attitude.

«Abbot, do you think they'll accept the proposal?»

«Most likely.»

Beop Jong nodded slowly.

«No, it must be so. If not, a real crisis will come.»

Sapaeryeon is not everything.

Beop Jong also believes that Demonic Cult will return sooner or later.

Acknowledging that Chung Myung is superior to him, there is no reason not to believe what he says.

Although their positions may differ, it is crucial not to mock worrying about something that Hwasan Geomhyeop wouldn't overlook.

«Uh... but, may I ask, Abbot.»

«Why do you ask?»

Jongli Hyeong glanced at Beop Jong and then opened his mouth.

«If... though it's unlikely, if they were to reject the proposal, what would you do then?»

«That won't happen.»

«But there's a saying, 'Once in a thousand, once in ten thousand.'»

A sigh escaped from Beop Jong's lips.

«In that case, I must have misunderstood them. Unless they are people who cling to trivial matters and cannot see the bigger picture, or...»

«...»

«But I believe that won't happen. Their hearts are sincere in seeking the well-being of the world. There's no room for doubt. Whether it's Hyun Jong, the Sect Leader of Hwasan, or Hwasan Geomhyeop, they are all exceptional people.»

Jongli Hyeong cautiously spoke after a moment of thought.

«I still think, Abbot, that you are overestimating them.»

«I only hope that's not the case.»

Beop Jong turned his head, capturing the scenery of a quiet manor with his eyes.

‘Now, it's time for them to contemplate.’

It might not be an easy decision.

They are human too. It wouldn't be easy for them to willingly dismantle the foundation they've built over the years under the name of Cheonumaeng.

Their ideals are deeply embedded in Cheonumaeng. Letting go of those ideals may be a more agonizing process for them than him letting go of his own misconceptions and pride.

So much so that it was difficult to dare to ask anyone for it.

Nevertheless, Beop Jong hoped they would make the right choice.

‘The world under the heavens must not be divided.’

Otherwise, they wouldn't be able to withstand the consecutive invasion of Sapaeryeon and Demonic Cult.

And... Beop Jong was convinced.

If they rejected this proposal and continued such reckless actions, they would eventually pay a heavy price.

That, in the perspective of Gangho, that had to fight Sapaeryeon and Demonic Cult, would be an irreparable loss.

Chung Myung possessed the power and tactics to shake the world, while Beop Jong had the ability and skill to fully utilize Chung Myung's sword.

Even if Chung Myung devised a plan, it wasn't something that Jongnam or Wudang could obediently follow. However, Beop Jong had the power to press the noses of those noble sects and make them follow Chung Myung's orders.

With Chung Myung and Hwasan at the forefront, and Beop Jong and Shaolin assisting them from behind, if all the factions of the world could be made to follow them seamlessly, what could be feared, be it Sapaeryeon or Demonic Cult?

‘For you, the best choice is to join hands with me. Never forget that your luck won't last forever. Hwasan Geomhyeop.’

Beop Jong closed his eyes. A faint sigh escaped from his lips.

As he opened his eyes, he looked up at the sky, but the moon remained obscured behind the clouds.

«The weather is cloudy.»

«They say rain is expected for a few days.»

«...Indeed. It seems so. But after these days pass, won't the bright moon rise again?»

As if leaving behind lingering regret, Beop Jong, who had gazed at the manor once more, slowly moved his feet. Having done everything he could, now all that was left was to wait. It would be a wait that felt like a day stretching into a year.

«Let's go. There's much to do in advance.»

«Yes, Abbot.»

The two of them walked away. The clouds thickened, casting a darker hue over the already dark manor.

Accompanied by a silence so profound that even the sound of breath seemed nonexistent.