

Chapter 1211

Without a doubt. (1)

Observing the situation from one side of the path leading to the training grounds, Namgung Dowi, with a vacant expression, turned to Tang Pae.

«...What on earth is going on here?»

«Well... doesn't it seem like Un Am Dojang is becoming the Sect Leader, not Baek Cheon Dojang?»

«Un Am Dojang becoming the Sect Leader?»

Namgung Dowi blinked.

‘So, it's him.’

His gaze shifted to Un Am, who was standing beside Baek Cheon, his shoulders trembling. It was a situation that Namgung Dowi could not help but be a little perplexed by.

While Un Am might hold significance to the disciples of Hwasan, he didn't carry much weight in Namgung Dowi's eyes. In fact, not just Un Am, even the entire Un generation in Hwasan didn't have much presence.

‘Is this alright?’

Logically, when the Sect Leader of Hwasan steps down, it's natural for next generation to ascend to the position of the Sect Leader. However, what kind of position is the Sect Leader of Hwasan? It's a weighty position that few can bear, and it even involves shouldering the position of the leader of Cheonumaneg.

In such circumstances, hearing that Un Am is ascending to the position of the Sect Leader brought about a sense of confusion first.

«...I'm not sure.»

Tang Pae muttered, echoing a similar sentiment. The gaze directed at Un Am's back was a bit suspicious.

Whether it was Namgung Dowi, who would become the head of the Namgung family, or Tang Pae, who would become the head of the Tang family, both found Baek Cheon much easier to communicate with than Un Am. Therefore, it was inevitable for them to send cautious glances first.

«Indeed... he seems to be the Sect Leader now.»

However, Tang Hunak, who had silently observed the situation until now, nodded vigorously as if understanding this choice.

«I never thought about it, but... it seems to be the right choice.»

Tang Pae cautiously asked,

«Lord... do you think it's good for him to ascend to the position of Sect Leader of Hwasan?»

«It's not a matter of distinguishing between good and bad.»

Tang Gunak smiled.

«The question of who can lead the sect better as the Sect Leader of Hwasan is undoubtedly crucial.»

«Yes, I see.»

Tang Pae nodded. Therefore, he believed that Baek Cheon should become the Sect Leader. While he didn't know much about Un Am, but considering his external reputation and relations with other sects, there is currently no one else but Baek Cheon who is suitable for the position of the Sect Leader.

«However... the position of the Sect Leader cannot be determined solely based on those factors. What one has done for the sect so far is equally important.»

“...”

Tang Pae nodded in agreement, and Tang Gunak couldn't help but be impressed.

«Even I had forgotten about this fact... The Sect Leader didn't overlook it. It's such a natural choice for Hwasan to remain Hwasan...»

Tang Gunak's gaze shifted to one side, where Chung Myung was smiling contentedly.

To an outsider, it might seem like Baek Cheon was simply being pushed aside to make room for someone else, but...

'The one who didn't overlook this fact before Sect Leader Hyun Jong must be Hwasan Geomhyeop.'

Chung Myung had consistently opposed Baek Cheon's promotion to the position of Acting Sect Leader.

But now, even though Baek Cheon was appointed as the Vice Sect Leader, he seemed oddly content.

Following the law is essential. The reason for upholding the law of the sect is because within it lies the essence of a sect's identity.

The predecessors of that sect had deliberated for a long time and finally asked the future generations to uphold this principle. How could one dismiss it as just an old saying?

Whether he knew it with his head or with his instincts, Hwasan Geomhyeop was aware of that fact. So...

«Hehehehe...»

«...»

«Hehehehe. What a sight!»

«Is it really?»

«Yes?»

«Hmm.»

Tang Gunak shook his head, dismissing Chung Myung's laughter as unnecessary noise, despite his keen hearing.

«But is it alright? Him...»

«There's no reason it wouldn't be. The newly appointed Vice Sect Leader will handle the Sect Leader's external authority, and the new Sect Leader will focus on internal affairs. Isn't

that not much different from Baek Cheon Dojang taking the position of Vice Sect Leader alone?»

«Ah...»

Tang Gunak smiled and looked at Hyun Jong.

«Baek Cheon will still handle the external affairs he was entrusted with, while the tasks of the Sect Leader will be handed over to the new Sect Leader. It doesn't really change much for us. He managed to uphold both legitimacy and the law. He's simply stepping down a little earlier from the position of the Sect Leader.»

At that remark, everyone looked at Hyun Jong with renewed admiration.

The seemingly insignificant choice turned out to be quite rational upon hearing about it.

What's even more impressive is that he led the outcome through a decision to step back on his own.

«...I sense wisdom in it.»

«It's because he's a Taoist. We couldn't have imagined it.»

Tang Gunak nodded his head.

«That's why Hwasan is both a sword sect and a taoist sect.»

The gaze of the three turned towards Un Am and Baek Cheon, the two who would lead the new era of Hwasan.

«Sect Leader... I...»

Un Am unintentionally opened his mouth, speaking to Hyun Jong. Despite knowing it was not the right time, he couldn't help but speak up.

But instead of reprimanding him, Hyun Jong responded with a warm voice.

«Why? Are you lacking in confidence?»

«It's not something to question. I've already expressed my intentions...»

«Indeed. You certainly did.»

Hyun Jong looked at Un Am with compassion.

«But Un Am, my heart tells me otherwise.»

«Sect Leader, I am too small of a person to become the Sect Leader of Hwasan.»

«So?»

Hyun Jong turned his head towards Baek Cheon and asked,

«Baek Cheon, what do you think? Do you also believe that Un Am is inadequate to become the Sect Leader of Hwasan?»

Baek Cheon responded without a moment of hesitation,

«How could that be, Sect Leader? Un Am Sasuk is more than qualified to be the Sect Leader of Hwasan. There's no one more fitting than him for this position. I can't even compare myself to Un Am Sasuk. If he hadn't declined, and if the situation wasn't urgent, everyone would have naturally asked Sasuk to take the position of the Sect Leader.»

«I see.»

«Sect Leader...»

Seeing Un Am's bewildered expression, Hyun Jong smiled.

«Un Am.»

When Un Am looked up with a questioning expression, Hyun Jong continued, his sincerity evident in his expression and his voice.

«The moment when we feel we're not lacking will never come. What matters is not whether we are lacking, but whether we are prepared to shoulder the responsibility despite our shortcomings. Baek Cheon has demonstrated that, hasn't he?»

«...Sect Leader.»

«I felt the same way. I felt infinitely inadequate and lacking. Becoming the Sect Leader was truly daunting and terrifying for me.»

Un Am bit his lip, the words of his teacher ringing clearly in his ears.

«But I know. You are worthy of that qualification.»

“...”

«You said it yourself. Now is the time when those who step forward, not those who protect, should take on the role of the Sect Leader.»

«... Yes.»

«Perhaps that saying is true. Perhaps it's the more rational choice. But Un Am, my heart doesn't agree.»

Choosing to follow the heart over rationality.

But sometimes, within that rationality, many values are buried. Hyun Jong didn't want that. He knew better than anyone how those buried in rationality viewed the world.

«If following the heart is righteous, and looking at that heart honestly is the Taoist way, then I am embodying righteousness more than anyone else right now, and following the Tao more than anyone else. Even if it's not the best choice as the Sect Leader of Hwasan...»

Hyun Jong glanced at Chung Myung and shrugged lightly.

«Well, what do you think? I've lived my whole life suppressing myself as the Sect Leader of Hwasan. So, don't I have the right to make the final choice according to my own desires? Even the ancestors won't scold me for that.»

«S-Sect Leader!»

«I mean, I have a lot to say to the ancestors, don't I? And they probably have a lot to say to me too.»

Hyun Jong chuckled mischievously.

Un Am felt a mixture of unfamiliarity and familiarity in that moment. This was a side of Hyun Jong he hadn't seen before, and perhaps... a side he could have seen.

«So, please do so. It would put my heart at ease if you were to take the position of the Sect Leader.»

Un Am bowed his head silently. A long silence ensued.

Hyun Jong didn't press him, simply waited.

The disciples of Hwasan also waited patiently for Un Am's response, without a single hint of wavering even after a considerable amount of time.

Finally, after a while, Un Am slowly lifted his head.

«May I ask the Sect Leader, as your disciple?»

«Proceed.»

«Does your disciple have the ability to bear the position of Sect Leader of Hwasan?»

«Indeed.»

«Then, is it truly right for your disciple to ascend to the position of Sect Leader of Hwasan?»

«Without a doubt.»

«Is it for the good of Hwasan that your disciple ascends to the position of Sect Leader?»

Hyun Jong smiled subtly before responding.

«That's not for me to answer.»

Hyun Jong turned his gaze towards his disciples.

«I ask!»

The disciples of Hwasan slightly lowered their posture, as if they were already prepared to give their sincere answer before the question was even asked. It was as if they were ready to deliver their heartfelt response with the most resounding voice in the world.

«Is it for the good of Hwasan that disciple Un Am ascends to the position of Sect Leader?»

«Yes, Sect Leader!»

Before the question even finished, thunderous voices erupted as if they could pierce through the sky.

Un Am's shoulders involuntarily trembled.

«So I ask.»

Hyun Jong's gaze returned to Un Am once again.

“Will disciple Un Am, as the Sect Leader of the Great Hwasan Sect, safeguard the spirit of Hwasan and lead the disciples, even at the risk of his own life?»

Un Am lowered his head, and with a voice filled with determination, he spoke.

«Disciple... Disciple Un Am...»

And finally, he lifted his head.

«I... I shall... dare... I shall dare to shoulder that heavy responsibility.»

Hyun Jong nodded, swiftly unfastening Purple Haze Divine Sword from his waist.

«Then I, Hyun Jong, proclaim to the world that I, as the Sect Leader of the Great Taoist Hwasan Sect, appoint Un Am, the great disciple of Hwasan, as the new Sect Leader.»

Lowering the Purple Haze Divine Sword that he had raised above his head, Hyun Jong sheathed it again and extended both hands towards Un Am.

Un Am, with trembling hands, reverently accepted the sword.

«I shall dedicate my life to fulfilling the duty of the Sect Leader of Hwasan!»

Simultaneously, a tremendous roar erupted. The disciples of Hwasan, who had hoped for Baek Cheon's ascent to the Sect Leader's position but could not let go of their sadness for the Un disciples, were now able to rejoice wholeheartedly.

Amidst the chaos, Chung Myung chuckled.

«...What a mess.»

There were no formalities or decorum here. This was not the succession ceremony he knew. There were no rituals, no prayers offered to the predecessors, not even proper procedures or strict oaths.

Yet... he didn't feel the need to nitpick about it.

Despite its many shortcomings, he found this succession ceremony far more appealing than any he had seen before.

'Is it right, Sahyeong?'

As he looked up at the sky, it felt as if he could see Chung Mun smiling brightly.