

Chapter 1242

That's all? (2)

Under the eaves of the main hall, Geum Yangbaek stepped forward gracefully and respectfully approached Baek Cheon, who stood at the forefront.

«Once again, allow me to formally introduce myself. I am Geum Yangbaek, Sect Leader of Haenam.»

Witnessing this scene, the disciples of Hwasan couldn't help but feel a strange mix of emotions. The title of Sect Leader of Haenam didn't evoke much resonance now. They had already experienced too many formidable figures of Gangho.

In the past, the title of Haenam's Sect Leader had stirred up complex emotions among the disciples of Hwasan. It was a target of resentment for taking the place that should have belonged to Hwasan while also being the subject of envy as he led the rising sect.

But if you are in a situation where you are raising your voice and arguing with the Abbot of Shaolin, what is so special about the Sect Leader of Haenam?

Now, Hwasan's position has changed.

Geum Yangbaek stood there, bearing the brunt of the falling rain, welcoming Baek Cheon with open arms.

«I am Baek Cheon, Vice Sect Leader of Hwasan. Thanks to the consideration of the Sect Leader, I was able to rest my weary body last night. I express my gratitude once again for your kindness in not turning away unexpected guests who came without a prior notice.»

Baek Cheon graciously accepted Geum Yangbaek's gesture of hospitality, and witnessing this, Yoon Jong couldn't help but feel a tremor in his chest. He knew.

What Geum Yangbaek's courtesy displayed was not directed at Baek Cheon himself, but rather at the position Baek Cheon held as Vice Sect Leader of Hwasan. Or perhaps, it was an expression directed towards Baek Cheon's role as the «special envoy» of Cheonumaeng.

But what difference did it make?

Just a few years ago, Geum Yangbaek had shown little interest in the sect known as Hwasan. Though younger disciples couldn't hide their displeasure, Geum Yangbaek simply observed without disdain or regard. That indicated that Hwasan posed no threat to Haenam.

Yet now, Geum Yangbaek stood there, welcoming Baek Cheon while facing the brunt of the storm. It was a proper reception, as if correcting the courtesy that had been extended once before. This alone highlighted how much the status of Hwasan had changed from the past.

«We will lead you inside.»

«It is an honor, Sect Leader.»

Geum Yangbaek led them through the wide-open doors into the hall. As they entered, disciples of Haenam cautiously approached and offered cotton clothes to the Cheonumaeng's party.

«What's this?»

«Shh.»

Confused, Jo Geol tried to say something, but Hoon Jong nudged his side and pointed with his chin towards Namgung Dowi. Namgung Dowi naturally accepted the towel and began to wipe off the moisture from his body. Following suit, Jo Geol discreetly wiped off the rainwater from himself.

«It's nice to have a distinguished nobleman like Young Lord Namgung.»

«That's right. If we had come alone, what would we have done?»

«Indeed.»

The expression on Tang Pae's face twisted in bewilderment.

«I'm also Young Lord of the distinguished family.»

«Oh, right. But why doesn't it feel that way? It's strange. Is it because we are too friendly?»

«It's his face.»

For a moment, the three of them simultaneously turned to the person who uttered the last remark.

«Why? Did I say something wrong?»

Tang Soso tilted her head as if asking why they looked at her like that. Everyone turned their heads without saying a word.

«Let's go inside.»

«Yes.»

Tang Pae's shoulders slumped, and Yoon Jong simply turned his head away to show some consideration.

«Please, have a seat.»

«Then, I'll leave my modesty aside.»

At the gesture from Geum Yangbaek, Baek Cheon sat on the prepared cushion. Only then did Geum Yangbaek and the elders of Haenam take their seats in a row at the front.

As everyone's bottoms touched the floor, Haenam's disciples approached with tea trays and simple appetizers, placing them one by one in front of the disciples of Hwasan.

Yoon Jong felt a slight sweat forming on his forehead.

'It doesn't seem to be because of the heat.'

It didn't take long for him to realize the reason. Despite cultivating pride as a disciple of Hwasan, he had never been officially treated like this by another sect.

The hospitality was directed towards the elders and the head of the sect, not towards them as disciples of Hwasan. But the moment the treatment meant for those elders came their way, he began to keenly feel that he was representing Hwasan and Cheonumaeng.

It felt suffocating for a moment, but Yoon Jong straightened his shoulders even more. If he was representing Hwasan and Cheonumaeng, he couldn't afford to give the impression that he was being overwhelmed by this atmosphere.

«Having traveled a long and arduous journey to reach us, we deeply regret not being able to offer proper hospitality. However, given the urgent situation in Haenam, we hope you understand that this was unavoidable.»

«I am truly overwhelmed by your unexpected hospitality, and your words are beyond flattering. Who in the world would have received such treatment in Haenam? Regardless of my position, as an individual, it would be something to remember for a lifetime.»

Words of mutual appreciation were exchanged for a moment. The disciples of Hwasan, who would have usually giggled about how eloquent Baek Cheon's tongue was, now remained silent, sensing the gravity of the conversation.

«However...»

At that moment, Geum Yangbaek cleared his throat slightly and turned his head.

«Forgive me for asking again, but I want to confirm. You are here representing the Sect Leader of Hwasan, and also as a special envoy of Cheonumaeng. Is that correct?»

«That's correct.»

«Doubting someone's words is not the virtue of a gentleman, but considering we are far from the central region, news doesn't travel quickly here.»

Baek Cheon smiled and gracefully drew the Purple Mist Divine Sword from his waist. Geum Yangbaek silently observed his actions.

Cling.

Baek Cheon raised his sword horizontally and slowly pulled it out of a scabbard. As the sword was revealed, emitting a white gleam, a short gasp escaped from everyone's lips. It was evident at first glance that this was no ordinary sword.

«This is the Purple Mist Divine Sword, the divine object of Hwasan. The Sect Leader of Hwasan has sent this divine object with me to convey our intentions.»

Baek Cheon spoke with a slightly awkward tone.

«However, proving that this sword is indeed the divine object of Hwasan is not necessary...»

«No, Vice Sect Leader. Your answer is more than sufficient.»

At that moment, Geum Yangbaek erased any lingering doubts from his mind.

There had never been a moment of doubt regarding Baek Cheon's role as Vice Sect Leader of Hwasan. Baek Cheon himself was renowned throughout as one of Hwasan's five swords. Fabricating falsehoods about the divine objects or the affairs of the Sect Leader was unimaginable.

Even if Baek Cheon harbored such malicious intentions, it would be impossible for him to deceive Hwasan's disciples or the Lords from other factions who accompanied him.

However, what he wanted to confirm was the extent of authority vested in the position of Vice Sect Leader of Hwasan.

The new role, an entity existing to exercise that authority in the absence of the Sect Leader. But sometimes, the divine object possessed even more authority than the Sect Leader himself.

If that Divine Sword was the divine object of Hwasan, then Baek Cheon had indeed held all the authority of Hwasan in his hands.

Geum Yangbaek swallowed dry unknowingly. Then, realizing it, he quickly relaxed his expression.

‘I was nervous.’

He hadn’t heard a single word from them yet. Nevertheless, he was so tense just facing Vice Sect Leader of Hwasan that he couldn’t manage his expression.

Baek Cheon may be the Vice Sect Leader, but wasn’t he just a young man who hadn’t even reached half his age? Geum Yangbaek, the Sect Leader of Haenam, had no reason to be nervous facing Baek Cheon.

However, the reason he couldn’t completely suppress his tension was because of the white robe and the plum blossom pattern engraved on his chest.

The fact that those two symbols representing Hwasan made him nervous meant that Hwasan Sect had become unimaginably powerful in their eyes.

Geum Yangbaek took a slow breath, faintly smiled, and spoke.

«Vice Sect Leader, how on earth did you manage to come all the way here?»

To loosen the tense atmosphere, it was necessary to start with small talk. Geum Yangbaek prepared himself to receive a vague response from Baek Cheon, regardless of what he said.

«To arrive at this time, you must have departed long ago. Why didn’t you give us a heads-up? We would have gone to meet you by the sea. It’s a bit embarrassing for us to feel like ignorant folks for no reason. Haha.»

However, Baek Cheon’s subsequent answer completely shattered Geum Yangbaek’s intention.

«We came through Gangnam.»

«Um... what?»

«We came straight through Gangnam via land route.»

Geum Yangbaek, momentarily speechless, stared blankly at Baek Cheon. Gangnam? Did he just say Gangnam?

«Vice Sect Leader, by Gangnam... are you referring to...»

«We departed from Hubei and passed through Guangdong.»

Geum Yangbaek’s eyes widened progressively.

«Guang... Guangdong?»

«Yes.»

Baek Cheon smiled softly and replied calmly. Geum Yangbaek, momentarily forgetting his dignity as the Sect Leader, blankly questioned,

«Are you saying you crossed the Yangtze River? And... th-through Guangdong, the headquarters of Maninbang?»

«Yes.»

«Why would you take such a dangerous route... What on earth were you thinking?»

Not just Geum Yangbaek, but even the elders momentarily forgot their positions and began murmuring among themselves. Some were incredulous, while others felt uneasy. But Baek Cheon simply responded, sticking to the truth.

«It was the fastest route.»

Geum Yangbaek was speechless.

Was this young man brave or shameless? Amidst such reactions, he merely wore a gentle smile.

‘No...’

In truth, Geum Yangbaek had something else he wanted to say.

‘Are you out of your mind?’

However, this wasn’t the place to freely express such thoughts. So, he refined and purified his words as much as possible.

«What if you were to encounter a grave danger or...»

«Of course, that was a possibility. But as you can see, we arrived safely, didn’t we?»

Baek Cheon didn’t bother to elaborate further.

«And...»

Baek Cheon stared straight at Geum Yangbaek and the elders behind him as he continued.

«It wasn’t just us who were in danger. Haenam is truly in a perilous situation.»

Everyone faced Baek Cheon, feeling almost drawn in.

«If one strives to protect oneself on the way to help those in danger, how can that be considered genuine help?»

Baek Cheon spoke calmly yet firmly.

«That’s neither the way of Hwasan nor the way of Cheonumaeng.»

A wave of tension swept through everyone.

In that moment, Geum Yangbaek sensed it. The control over the conversation he had sought had completely shifted to Baek Cheon in that moment.

The young man, without relying on the power and authority of Hwasan, completely overwhelmed the room simply by stating his intentions.

«So, Sect Leader, please listen to what I have to say without prejudice.»

Usually, after such words, there would be a pause for reflection, and Geum Yangbaek, sensing this, quickly nodded his head in anticipation.

However...

«For the future of Haenam Sect, and for the security of Gangho, we, Cheonumaeng, strongly recommend that you, esteemed members of Haenam Sect, withdraw from Gupailbang and join Cheonumaeng.»

«Cough!»

Geum Yangbaek, caught off guard, hastily blocked his mouth.

Truly, it was a straightforward proclamation that struck his solar plexus with full force, without even a hint of the possibility to turn around.