

Chapter 1210

Now the sect is finally back on track! (5)

In a situation where the training grounds of Jangwon served as the ceremonial field, it wasn't particularly spacious. Thanks to this, the disciples of Hwasan, gathered all at once, didn't make it look empty but rather filled densely.

The disciples of other factions of Cheonumaeng seemed to have vacated the training grounds for the ceremony of appointment of Hwasan's Acting Sect Leader, as not a single one was visible. Gratefully acknowledging this consideration, Baek Cheon took a heavy step forward. It was what he had longed for. Since leaving Jongnam and first joining Hwasan, his dream had been to become a Sect Leader and someday make Hwasan a superior sect to Jongnam. Though this goal was set when he still was young, his dream hadn't changed a bit even as he grew into an adult. Instead, it became larger and stronger.

Now, his dream wasn't just to make Hwasan superior to Jongnam. It was to surpass that and make it the best sect in the world, even beyond that, to lead the flow of power in Gangho. And today, finally, Baek Cheon was taking the first step toward that longed-for dream.

'Don't be nervous.'

It's only the first step. If he's already tense now, how could he navigate the challenging path ahead?

Baek Cheon took a short deep breath.

The always playful disciples of Hwasan, who were usually full of mischief, were now staring at him with utmost seriousness. With their gaze fixed on him, Baek Cheon moved forward. He walked confidently along the center of the training grounds and finally stood before the Sect Leader and the elders who were waiting for him.

No one had explicitly told him what to do, but he felt like he knew what he needed to do now.

«Hwasan's senior disciple, Baek Cheon, pays respects to the Sect Leader!»

With that signal, the disciples of Hwasan all knelt on one knee, extending their hands forward in a gesture of respect.

«We pay our respects to the Sect Leader!»

Hyun Jong silently looked at Baek Cheon before shifting his gaze to the disciples lined up behind him.

Dressed in formal attire, Hyun Jong exuded an even greater sense of solemnity than usual. Those who met his gaze straightened their posture and tensed their bodies, determined not to leave any room for error.

They all understood the significance of appointing a Sect Leader in a sect.

Changing leadership in any sect was not a simple matter. But especially for Hwasan, the significance was profound.

Sect Leader of Hwasan wielded stronger authority than a Sect Leader of any other sect. And Hwasan is a sect that was going through a crisis to the point where it was on the verge of a ruin just a few years ago.

For such a sect to appoint a new Sect Leader meant not only bidding farewell to the past but also the rising of new reborn Hwasan.

That's why it was so significant, even if it was appointment of an Acting Sect Leader, and not an actual Sect Leader.

Hyun Jong had all the disciples within his gaze. Seeing them emitting a sharp aura unlike their usual selves was somewhat unfamiliar yet reassuring.

In that moment, he closed his eyes, overcome by a strange sense of déjà vu.

'So that's it...'

There was no reason for him to experience a déjà vu about a sight he had never seen before. Yet, this feeling was not a delusion. Hyun Jong knew the reason well.

The sight of the disciples before him now was not much different from the vision of Hwasan he had always dreamed of. No, rather, his disciples now had grown into a more splendid image of Hwasan's future than he had ever envisioned.

Seeing the realization of his dream before his very eyes filled him with indescribable emotions. And at the same time, he realized anew that it was time for him to step down from the position of a Sect Leader.

'Perhaps I might have been a little late.'

Regret? There was none.

Every person has their role to play. Hyun Jong, who realized that his role had come to an end, couldn't afford to harbor regrets.

All that remained for him was not so much regret as...

Hyun Jong smiled faintly and spoke up.

«Listen, disciples.»

«Yes, Sect Leader!»

The disciples of Hwasan replied in a resounding voice. Hyun Jong nodded and spoke in a serious tone.

«I'm sure you all know, but as the Sect Leader of Hwasan, I am here today to appoint a new Sect Leader who will lead the future of Hwasan.»

Various emotions flickered in the eyes of everyone present.

There was a sense of regret about Hyun Jong stepping down from the position of the Sect Leader.

Some unease and fear about the changes that would come to Hwasan.

But the biggest thing was the firm trust in Baek Cheon, who would lead the transformed Hwasan.

Hyun Jong thought to himself.

It'll be fine. If he can evoke such looks from the disciples, he surely has the qualifications to be a Sect Leader and can perform the role even better than Hyun Jong.

Hyun Jong recalled the time when he became the Sect Leader.

With all the seniors leaving Hwasan, he took on the role almost as a burden. There were no congratulations or blessings. There was only the sense of duty and heavy responsibility to protect Hwasan at all costs.

The gazes of Hyun Sang and Hyun Yeong at that time became the weight that Hyun Jong would remember for a lifetime.

'It's a fortunate thing.'

Indeed, it's truly a welcome thing. That someone new stepping into the role of a Sect Leader would receive different perspectives than his own.

Now, Hwasan wasn't the declining sect he inherited, a place where decisions were made haphazardly and opinions of a few were enough to suffice.

The Hwasan of the new era would be a proud, prestigious sect of Shaanxi, which name would be resonating throughout the world. So it was only natural that someone fitting for that era would ascend to the position of Sect Leader.

What Hyun Jong would take away from stepping down from the position of a Sect Leader was simply the pride of having endured until the dawn of a new era for Hwasan. Wasn't that alone enough?

«The Sect Leader of Hwasan must never forget the duty as the leader and a follower of the Taoist sect named Hwasan, and as the leader of the Sword sect named Hwasan, they must not stray from the path of the sword.»

Baek Cheon's face was truly resolute. Hyun Jong smiled lightly.

Yes. Baek Cheon will do well. He had walked the path of the sword more diligently than anyone else, and as the head disciple of Hwasan, he had firmly ingrained the responsibilities that should naturally come with the position.

«Now, under the judgment that I, Hyun Jong, have deemed the next generation of Hwasan worthy of the position, I would like to inform our ancestors that I intend to pass on the role of Sect Leader to the next leader of Hwasan.»

A gentle aura emanated from Hyun Jong's body.

«Is there anyone here who opposes this decision?»

«No, there is not!»

«Is there anyone here who objects to this decision?»

«No, there is not!»

Hyun Jong nodded quietly. Perhaps even the ancestors observing this scene would acknowledge his choice with a smile.

Hyun Jong could confidently speak to the ancestors he would eventually face. He would say that while he couldn't claim to have done everything perfectly, he had always fulfilled his role as the Sect Leader of Hwasan to the best of his ability, never once neglecting his duties.

‘Everything goes according to the natural order.’

Hyun Jong nodded and looked at Baek Cheon.

A heavy sense of responsibility was evident on his composed face. Hyun Jong nodded quietly once again.

Was his expression like that too? And was his master feeling the same way?

«In that case, I, Hyun Jong, as the Sect Leader of Hwasan acknowledged by the predecessors, and as the leader of Hwasan entrusted with authority by the disciples, will select the next Sect Leader for the future generations.»

All the disciples of Hwasan looked at Baek Cheon with hopeful eyes.

At that moment, Hyun Jong’s gaze shifted to another person. Amidst all the disciples, even the elders were looking at Baek Cheon, there was only one person who stood upright, looking directly at Hyun Jong alone: Chung Myung.

Seeing his unwavering eyes, Hyun Jong smiled. It was a smile that perhaps resembled Chung Myung’s.*

‘My ancestors. I have done my best.’

So...

«The one who will succeed me as the Sect Leader of Hwasan is!»

Hyun Jong’s gaze left Chung Myung and turned to someone else. To the one who rightfully deserved to be in that position.

«Un Am!»

«Yes?»

«.....What?»

For a moment, the eyes of the disciples widened in disbelief.

Over a hundred disciples all blinked, staring blankly at Hyun Jong. But the most visibly flustered among them was none other than Un Am. His eyes widened in shock.

On the other hand, a mischievous smile formed at the corners of Hyun Jong’s mouth.

‘So... may I have one final choice according to my will?’

Tao is ultimately about following your heart. His heart spoke.

Even if Baek Cheon could be a better Sect Leader, it would be wrong to ignore Un Am’s dedication to Hwasan. If a better person ascending to a higher position is considered natural, then Hwasan would become a sect that values only capability.

Not ignoring the voice of his heart. That was the result of Hyun Jong’s first and last manifestation of greed, facing himself as a Taoist monk.

«Um...»

Seeing Un Am too shocked to speak, Hyun Jong felt something that was difficult to describe at that moment.

«Maybe it wouldn’t be too bad to live the next life like Chung Myung.»

The sight that everyone couldn’t hide their astonishment created a feeling that Hyun Jong had never experienced in his life.

«Disciple Un Am, step forward!»

«Me, Sect Leader...?»

Un Am didn't know what to do and just looked at Hyun Jong.

«What are you doing? Are you defying the command of the Sect Leader?»

With a stern voice, Hyun Jong scolded Un Am. Unsure of what to do, Un Am hesitated but eventually stepped forward. Even though it might be from a distance, but others from different sects were most likely watching, and defying the authority of the Sect Leader was absolutely not allowed.

As Un Am cautiously stepped forward and knelt beside Baek Cheon, Hyun Jong shouted in a firm voice.

«I, Hyun Jong, as the Sect Leader of Hwasan, hereby appoint Un Am, the top disciple, as the Sect Leader of Hwasan!»

A bewildered expression crossed Un Am's face. Hyun Jong continued with another firm statement.

«Furthermore! Recognizing that Hwasan cannot be led properly by the strength of a Sect Leader alone as it was in the past, a permanent position of the Vice Sect Leader will be established to share the external duties of the Sect Leader. Thus, I appoint Baek Cheon as the Vice Sect Leader of Hwasan!»

«Ah!»

«Wha...?»

Even though they knew it shouldn't be, there was a momentary burst of admiration from the mouths of Hwasan's disciples.

«Is there anyone here who opposes this decision?»

The disciples of Hwasan exchanged glances for a moment. Shortly after, their gaze turned towards the two figures in front of them.

To the one who will lead the future of Hwasan, and to the one who will connect the past and the future of Hwasan.

Eventually, a tremendous roar erupted from the crowd.

«No one opposes, Sect Leader!»

Amidst the whirlwind of emotions, one person chuckled softly.

«Now the sect is finally back on track!»

There was unprecedented satisfaction in Chung Myung's gaze as he looked at Hyun Jong.

A clarification. Throughout the whole speech Hyun Jong never said "Acting Sect Leader", he was always saying "Sect Leader". So here they could have already sensed a trap.

*His smile resembling Chung Myung's also says that everything he is saying is sus. It was so funny.