

## Chapter 1208

Now the sect is finally back on track! (3)

«Urrahhh!»

Kagagagang!

Tang Pae's eyes widened sharply. His wrist, blocking the blow of Tang Jan's dagger, throbbed painfully. Glancing at the trembling tip of his own dagger, Tang Pae spoke.

«... How come you're overflowing with strength?»

«Hehehe, isn't it obvious, Older Brother?»

«Obvious?»

«Look. Hasn't Baek Cheon Dojang finally ascended to the position of Acting Sect Leader of Hwasan?»

«... Would anyone in Cheonumaeng not know that? But what does that have to do with what happened and your inner strength?»

«Only now you ask...»

«Hm?»

Tang Jan said with a meaningful expression.

«Until now, we've had young martial artists like Young Lord Namgung or Lord Seol in Cheonumaeng, but the case of Baek Cheon Dojang is clearly different.»

«... How so?»

«It's because it's the first case where the predecessor hasn't even retired yet and has passed on the position to the younger one.»

Upon hearing this, Tang Pae chuckled.

«How does that relate to your inner strength?»

«Oh my, how can you, as the future head, not grasp such insight? This incident doesn't simply end with the replacement of the Sect Leader of Hwasan. It marks the beginning of a generational shift throughout Cheonumaeng.»

«Hmm?»

Tang Pae narrowed his eyes as if to say, 'What nonsense is this?' Tang Jan burst out laughing.

«If a similar incident had occurred in another sect, it would have ended as their internal matter. But what happened at Hwasan doesn't just stop there. Perhaps other sect leaders can't help but consider the next generation now.»

«So, it's important to stand out at times like this! If you do well now, you might catch the head's eye and swiftly ascend to a prominent position!»

Tang Pae, who had been listening absentmindedly, spoke with a troubled expression.

«Jan-ah.»

«Yes?»

«... Stop this bullshit and just focus on what you were doing.»

«Older Brother.»

«What?»

«Take a look around. See who's failing to grasp the situation right now.»

«Hm?»

Following Tang Jan's gesture, Tang Pae glanced around.

«Yahhh!»

«Take this!»

Excessive force... No, excessively loaded with inner strength, daggers were flying through the air at a ferocious speed.

Of course, it's good to put effort and passion into sparring, but...

'Their eyes have gone rotten, utterly rotten.'

Anyone who looked at those flickering eyes could suspect the dark intentions harbored within them. Tang Jan's voice reached Tang Pae's ears, who had lost his words.

«Well... Perhaps the Lord might not have any particular intentions, as Young Lord thinks.

But... Can he really just ignore them when they're all acting like this?»

Cold sweat broke out on Tang Pae's forehead.

'These lunatics...'

It seems they've collectively lost their minds.

«Ahh! Did that guy really thrust his dagger?»

«The one who couldn't evade is at fault!»

«Bring it on! Let's settle this!»

Tang Pae, feeling disgusted, turned his body and left the training grounds as he watched the scene unfolding before him.

«Where are you going?»

«I might lose my mind if I stay here any longer.»

«Just give up and accept it, Older Brother.»

«Stop spouting nonsense!»

With a weary expression, Tang Pae hurried out of the training grounds. As he turned the corner, he encountered a familiar face. Upon seeing their expression, he felt a moment of sympathy and unease simultaneously.

«That one too?»

«... Seems like Tangga is in serious trouble.»

Namgung Dowi and Tang Pae sighed deeply as they faced each other. They held the position of Young Lords, after all. They were quite close, in private like older and younger brother.

«This brat's antics... There's never a dull moment with him.»

«That's for sure.»

«Is Namgung also dealing with the same situation?»

«As you know, I've been solely focused on restoring the clan after most of our elders passed away at Maehwado.»

«True.»

«As a result... I haven't been able to properly fill the positions that the elders used to hold...»

Tang Pae closed his eyes tightly. He could roughly guess how things had unfolded.

«Suddenly, these guys start swinging their swords in front of me, instead of eating peacefully in the dining hall, they draw their swords for sparring, they even shout and fight in the middle of the night...»

«...It seems worse over there than with us.»

«Tangga seems to be doing a bit better.»

«We don't have any vacancies, that's all... Who knows, the Lord's experience might be different.»

The two of them sighed deeply once again.

«It's not a bad thing.»

«That's right. It's a good thing.»

In truth, it was quite a challenge for the leaders of the sect to deal with the fervent training and self-promotion of the disciples.

«...It would be better if they were a little less aggressive.»

«That's for sure.»

The problem was that these guys simply didn't know when to stop.

In fact, Tangga and Namgung were not like this originally.

Tangga, due to its focus on hidden weapons and poison, tended to lean towards caution and calmness in the sect's temperament. And as representatives of their distinguished family, Namgung's lineage also symbolized solemnity.

«It's all because of Hwasan.»

They sighed for the third time. There was probably no one else who understood each other's hearts as well as they did.

«So, are you also making your escape?»

«Huh? Escape? No, I'm on my way to the training grounds.»

«...Are you sure it's not an escape?»

«Well, it's not exactly that. If Namgung is training, can't I also observe for a bit?»

«...I see.»

Ignoring Namgung Dowi's subtle gaze, Tang Pae quickly walked away.

«...This way.»

As they headed towards the open field opposite to the training grounds, many sights greeted their eyes. Ice palace warriors wielding their swords, releasing cold air with every swing, and beast palace warriors boasting their strength with bulging muscles, with bare tops even in broad daylight...

«It's all the same.»

«They're all the same.»

At this point, couldn't they just merge into one sect? Apart from their martial arts styles, they were all abnormal in their own way.

Suddenly, an odd sight caught the eyes of the two, making them tilt their heads.

«Huh?»

They both raised their eyebrows simultaneously. Namgung's disciples, who should have been deeply engaged in training by now, were gathered on one side, peering curiously towards the training grounds.

«... What are you all doing right now?»

«Oh? Y-Young Lord!»

The disciples, who were startled, turned to look at Namgung Dowi.

«Aren't you supposed to be training?»

Namgung Dowi asked in confusion. Despite seeing those who had already left for training wasting time, he didn't get angry, perhaps because of the overwhelming momentum of those who were departing for the training ground. They seemed ready to face any challenges that might arise. Even if a dragon appeared, they were going to kill it right away, make stew and eat it...

«W-We can't go in there.»

«Huh? What do you mean?»

«It's hard to explain. You'll have to see it for yourself...»

Namgung Dowi pushed through the crowd. Just as he glanced towards the training ground...

«Kwaaah!»

Thunk! Thunk! Thunk! Thud!

Something flew from the front and slammed onto the ground in rapid succession, then sprawled out in a pitiful manner. Not just sprawled... Recognizing the identity of the sprawled figure, Namgung Dowi gasped in horror.

«Jo... Jo Geol Dojang!»

With eyes rolled back and unconscious, Jo Geol was frothing at the mouth with white foam.

«I-Is he dead?»

«Seems like it?»

«N-No, what...?»

In a panic, Namgung Dowi lifted his head abruptly. And he saw it.

The formidable swordsmen of Hwasan, now recognized as the strongest in Cheonumaeng, lying sprawled in a pitiful state. And among the barely surviving, there was a giant figure of immense evil.

'Heavenly Demon...?'

No, it couldn't be.

Right now, these swordsmen besieging one person would probably prefer facing the Heavenly Demon. Rather than facing that deranged human.

«... What?»

His eyes rolled back alarmingly, and his mouth parted. It seemed like faint white steam was escaping from his slightly agape lips.

«... The head of martial aaaaa-arts?»

Silence hung heavy in the air.

«Who said someone would become the head of martial arts?»

The disciples of Hwasan glanced around almost frantically, eyeing each other.

‘Who the hell was it?’

‘Who dared to mention the position of head instructor in front of that guy?’

‘I’ll kill them! I swear I’ll kill them!’

Blaming a typhoon for blowing or resenting a downpour for raining is as futile as blaming that human’s rampage. Instead of blaming him, it’s better to find out what triggered that bastard’s outburst.

But unfortunately, the culprit who had incited the disaster had already received a blow to the chin and fallen unconscious.

«The head of martial arts? An Elder?»

Silence persisted.

«If Acting Sect Leader is like that, then even you guys should snap out of it! These so-called taoist monks are getting blinded by such trivial things!»

Though not entirely wrong, the bitter truth behind those words saddened everyone, because Chung Myung was the one saying it.

«You all seem hell-bent on destroying Hwasan. What? Who will become the head instructor? Who? Was it you?»

There were certainly many things they wanted to say. But who could confidently speak their mind to enraged Chung Myung, who was rolling his eyes and seemingly having seizures?

It was a moment of collective resignation.

«Uh, well... Chung Myung...?»

Yoon Jong raised both hands in a gesture of peace and offered an awkward smile.

Approaching Chung Myung cautiously was like reaching out to a furious cat.

«I-It’s not like Sasuks had any bad intentions. We were just seriously considering the future of the sect, and naturally... uh, yeah! That’s right! It’s a good thing, depending on how you look at it, right?»

“...”

«So, um... let’s put down the sword and talk, okay?»

‘You’re doing great! Excellent job, Yoon Jong! You shine!’

‘He’s truly the next Sect Leader!’

Everyone’s eyes lit up with hope as they cheered for Yoon Jong.

«...A good thing?»

«Yeah, that's right. A good...»

Kwuuuuung!

Thud.

«Oh, Yoon Jong!»

«How could you be taken out in one blow?»

It seemed even a great taoist who could guide a trapped criminal onto the path of righteousness couldn't convert a resurrected demon from hell.

Yoon Jong lay sprawled on the ground, trembling with convulsions. Wisps of smoke rose from his head, and his eyes rolled back, showing only the whites.

«Is it a good thing that Dong Ryong has become the Acting Sect Leader?»

Chung Myung shouted, flipping his eyes entirely white.

«No! Let me show you what a good thing for you guys is today!»

«Heeek!»

«Run! Quickly!»

«Where are you going, you brats!»

Chung Myung lunged forward like lightning. But then, at that moment...

«You son of a...!»

A loud roar echoed, and suddenly, Hyun Jong appeared, his beard waving as he ran forward!

«It's the Sect Leader!»

«Oh, Sect Leader! Why are you here now?»

«It was that guy! That guy!»

Pushing past the complaining disciples, Hyun Jong sprinted towards Chung Myung and swiftly grabbed his ear.

«Ow! Ow ow! Sect Leader! My ear! My ear!»

«You little rascal! Come here!»

«Ahhhh! Sect Leader! My ear's coming off! My ear! Owwww!»

«Just follow along!»

Dragging Chung Myung while firmly holding his ears, Hyun Jong pulled him away.

Meanwhile, Tang Pae, who had been staring blankly as if watching a play, spoke up with a half-distracted voice.

«... Young Lord.»

«Yes?»

«... When were we supposed to leave?»

«Tonight... Tonight.»

«Ah, I see. Right.»

The two silently gazed into the distant sky and whispered quietly.

«Stay strong.»

«... Yes.»

As they traveled towards Haenam, perhaps their greatest enemy wasn't Sapaeryeon, but the realization of that fact dawned on them once again.