

Chapter 1206

Now the sect is finally back on track! (1)

Power has been intertwined with human history, pushing countless people into destruction. Like a double-edged sword, wielding power the wrong way often leads to losing everything one has.

Yet, people cling to it because it must hold some value worth risking everything for, despite all the dangers it entails.

However, here, the young swordsman who has risen to become one of the most powerful figures in Hwasan is questioning whether the power he holds is truly worth as much as a roadside pebble.

«Take this, and this too.»

«... Thank you.»

«Don't forget to stop by and get some medicine from before you go.»

«Sure, I won't forget.»

«If the water changes, the kids might get sick. Tell Soso to prepare some medicine ahead of time.»

«Why would they get sick just because the water changes...»

«If any of them get sick, will you take responsibility, Sahyeong?»

«... I'll make sure to tell her.»

«... Tsk.»

... Uncomfortable.

Of course, Baek Sang wasn't always accommodating. Nevertheless, as the second in command of the Baek disciples, it was naturally a position deserving respect from Baek Cheon. Moreover, Baek Sang had done numerous tasks for him in the past as well, serving as an irreplaceable aide.

So, Baek Cheon also tended to gauge Baek Sang's mood to some extent. But, how should he put it... The discomfort he was feeling now seemed a bit different.

«Uh... Sang-ah.»

«What?»

«... It's nothing.»

Baek Sang, who had been staring at Baek Cheon, turned his head abruptly and began rummaging through his items.

«People aren't like young calves that just need a bit of prodding...»

«...»

«They cause trouble left and right, and even when you turn away for a brief moment, they still cause trouble!»

«...»

“Who’s going to fix this mess? Oh my, it’s up to me. This is my fate. I look like I’m already carrying the burden of countless years at this age.»

«Well... I’m just temporarily taking over as Acting Sect Leader. It’s not like things will change much...»

Baek Cheon fell silent as Baek Sang pulled something out from his sleeves and shoved it in Baek Cheon’s face.

Baek Cheon’s expression turned slightly puzzled as he looked at the bundle of keys on thick wire.

«Do you know what this is?»

«...Keys?»

«For the warehouse! These are the keys to the warehouse where we store supplies and food! Keys!»

Baek Cheon tilted his head slightly as he stared blankly at the bundle of keys.

«What’s that small key in the middle? Why is it gold...»

«Yes, yes. You noticed it well. That’s the problem, that’s it!»

Baek Sang’s voice rose as he blinked rapidly, causing Baek Cheon to take a startled step back.

«Do you know what this is?»

«I, I asked...»

«It’s the safe key, the safe! The one that elder Hyun Yeong carries around like a precious treasure wherever he goes! The safe that’s only in the elder Hyun Yeong’s room, the sect’s safe! The key to that safe! The key to Hwasan’s safe that the elder brought all the way from Shaanxi here!»

«...»

«He even carried it in his mouth when he bathed! He handed me that safe key! Do you know what that means?»

I know. Why don’t you understand...

«While the Elders are already in a cheerful mood thinking about passing on their duties, when someone actually messes up, it’s like a flower garden blooms in their minds!»

«I-I’m sorry.»

«Ugh, really!»

Baek Sang snorted loudly. Seeing him like that, Baek Cheon nervously put his hands in front of him.

«I thought that was a story for twenty years later.»

«Me, an Elder. Oh my, my stomach...»

Baek Cheon bowed his head deeply.

While others could simply act a bit ignorant and continue their usual tasks, Baek Sang was quite different in many ways. He was supposed to be Hyun Yeong’s successor in becoming the head of finance, after all.

If viewed from a business perspective, there was no one else but Baek Sang to take on the duties of financial head. Naturally, Baek Sang's stomach would turn, while forced to rise to the position with the highest workload.

«So!»

«Yes?»

Baek Sang narrowed his eyes and spoke.

«Have you decided on the positions for the head of martial arts?»

«W-What?»

«Yes! The one responsible for the martial arts of the sect!»

«Well, um... if Elder Hyun Sang comes down, then it's probably... Un Geom Sasuk...»

«Un Geom Sasuuuuk?»

As Baek Sang's eyes rolled again, Baek Cheon tightly closed his eyes.

«Baek Cheon is an Acting Leader, and Baek Sang is a head of finance! And the head of martial arts is Un Geom Sasuk? Even if the sect is going upside down, there's a limit to this absurdity! Are you saying you'll receive reports from Un Geom Sasuk now? Yes?»

«T-That, that's not possible! That's right! That's absurd!»

«Then who will you appoint?»

«Um, that's...»

Baek Cheon sealed his mouth like a clam. Baek Sang, unable to overcome his frustration, squeezed his chest in agony.

«You must stop talking! Let me speak...»

«...»

«Sahyeong.»

«Huh?»

Baek Sang glared at Baek Cheon with intense eyes.

«Listen to me carefully.»

Baek Cheon felt the weight on his shoulders from the serious tone. He thought that the words that followed did not seem to be something that could be passed off as a joke.

«Sahyeong's mind might be preoccupied with the state of Gangho and the future of Cheonumaeng, as well as the relationships between the various sects, which is undoubtedly complex.»

Baek Cheon silently nodded in agreement.

Though he pretended otherwise, in truth, he was feeling a heavy burden. Consequently, his mind was filled with what Baek Sang had just mentioned.

«People ascending to high positions tend to be like that. They can't afford to pay attention to trivial matters when dealing with significant issues. I understand. However...»

After exhaling deeply, Baek Sang continued speaking.

«As the saying goes, 'The family's prosperity contributes to the country's peace.'»

«...»

«Our ancestors advised us to pay attention to what's under our feet because if the foundation isn't stable, one cannot jump forward. If you truly wish to lead Hwasan well, you must thoroughly examine what's closer at hand rather than distant matters not yet within your reach.»

As Baek Cheon began to nod heavily, Baek Sang's complexion suddenly changed.

«If that were the case, I wouldn't have to say such things. Ah!»

«...»

«Read this on your way to Haenam.»

Baek Sang pulled out a book and held it out.

«What's this?»

«Accounting ledger. Finances of Hwasan!»

Baek Cheon's expression faltered slightly.

«Do I really need to see this? It's your job, I trust you to handle it...»

«What nonsense are you spouting!»

As Baek Sang erupted, Baek Cheon flinched and nervously cleared his throat.

«Trust is one thing, but one should know how to do their job properly! Finances are like the veins of our sect! If they clog, people die, people!»

«W-well, yes.»

«So, at least know the sect's income and expenditures! And whether there are any leaks in between, you should know how to read the ledger! What will you do if I decide to embezzle money?»

Seeing Baek Cheon unable to speak, Baek Sang clicked his tongue and pulled out another book, placing it on Baek Cheon's hand.

«And take a look at this too.»

«...What's this one for?»

«It's a record of the personal details, inclinations, and martial arts levels of the Baek and Chung disciples. The sect is founded on martial arts, isn't it? As the Acting Leader, you should properly understand the characteristics of everyone's martial arts.»

«Oh, Baek Sang. You're not wrong in what you say. It's just that right now, I...»

«Oh, it's not urgent, you say? Because you're the Acting Leader?»

«...»

«Stop making excuses. Did anyone expect me to be in this position? I thought it would take another ten years just to get the warehouse keys, but here I am, not even a year later!»

«That's... fast.»

«When have Hwasan's affairs progressed at a reasonable speed? It wouldn't even take a year for someone to transition from being an Acting Leader to a real Sect Leader. Do you understand? In other words, within a year from now, you must fully master the duties of a Sect Leader!»

«That's true, but...»

«Don't even think about Sect Leader helping you.»

Baek Cheon, who was about to say those exact words, closed his mouth again and politely clasped his hands in front of him.

«That's no different from enjoying the rights while evading responsibilities. Then how will the disciples view Hwasan? I cannot condone that!»

«Y-yes. I'll try my best...»

«So, memorize the ledger and the directory I gave you perfectly!»

Another book emerged from Baek Sang's embrace.

«There's... there's more... wait.»

«This is a compilation of information about Hwasan's business establishments managed externally by Sect Leader, as well as a rough outline of the current ventures Hwasan is undertaking.»

«Why do books keep coming out of your arms?»

Was he keeping all of these in there?

«This includes approximate information about the places affiliated with the Eunha merchant guild and the Ghost Gate, along with the internal organizational chart of Hwasan!»

«...»

«And this is...»

Thunk! Thunk! Thunk! Thunk!

In an instant, books piled up in his hands like a tower. Baek Cheon tightly shut his eyes.

«Just by skimming through these, you can grasp how Hwasan operates. This is just the bare minimum, so cram every last detail into your head, without leaving anything behind!»

A sigh escaped from Baek Cheon's lips. He realized anew just how much Hwasan's Sect Leader was handling...

'These are things I should have naturally known all along.'

Baek Sang had been doing them on his behalf all this time, without showing reluctance even once.

As Baek Cheon's face stiffened with this realization, Baek Sang, noticing his reaction, continued with a different tone.

«Well... of course, it's a bit much, but there's no need to worry. Knowing about it is one thing, but actually managing and operating it is my responsibility.»

Though Baek Cheon felt grateful towards Baek Sang, Baek Sang mistakenly thought Baek Cheon was overwhelmed by the workload.

«No, don't make that expression. I know you're busy with external affairs. I'll take care of the internal matters, but still, you should be aware. That's what makes a great Sect Leader...»

«Sang-ah.»

«Yes?»

«...Thank you.»

Baek Sang's lips twitched for a moment.

«What's with these strange words... Anyway, just remember all that. I have to go manage the provisions now.»

With a slight blush on his face, Baek Sang left without looking back.

Standing there in a daze, Baek Cheon placed the books on the floor and picked up the one on the top.

In that moment, a sigh involuntarily escaped his lips.

It was a newly written book.

It wasn't something retrieved from the existing archives, but freshly written, character by character. Upon closer inspection, all the books were the same.

Wasn't Baek Sang already short on sleep from feeding the disciples of Cheonumaeng? He must have stayed up for nights on end to write these books from scratch.

The ink hadn't even dried completely, and the scent of ink lingered in the air. Baek Cheon couldn't tear his gaze away, but he eventually closed the books with a heavy heart. A small sigh escaped him.

«I look like a damn bastard...»

The responsibility didn't solely rest on Baek Cheon's shoulders. As he moved forward, others also shouldered their share of responsibility. When everyone became accustomed to that weight, they could become Hwasan they all aspired to be.

A sense of determination welled up in his chest.

'I won't disappoint you.'

With renewed resolve, Baek Cheon gathered all the books. And just as he was about to open the warehouse door, a piercing voice cut through the air.

«No, no, no! Do you think wooden swords grow on trees? Why are you writing it down so carelessly! And I told you to be careful not to tear the clothes during sparring, didn't I? These guys think clothes fall from the sky when they're worn out!»

«Oh, no, Sasuk... How do we spar...»

«What? Are you defying me now? You parasites who can't earn a penny on your own, don't know how precious the money earned by your Sasuks and Sahyeongs are, and yet you write it so carelessly!»

«I-I didn't mean...»

«Do you think the money will flow into Hwasan forever? Is it because Chung scoundrels have it easy? Why don't you understand the value of money? In my time, we patched up clothes dozens of times to wear them! We even climbed mountains to cut wood for wooden swords! Anyway, these days, the younger generation is hopeless!»

«I was wrong, Sasuk! I was wrong. Please...»

«Are you doing this because you think I'm wasting money? Huh? That money was earned by your Sect Leader and this punk Chung Myung getting stabbed countless times! It's the money earned through blood and sweat! And you guys...»

«Eeek!»

Listening silently to the drilling nagging, Baek Cheon carefully placed the books he had grabbed back.

«...Out of courtesy, I should probably read it here now, right?»

And then, let's leave when it gets quieter...

When it gets quieter...