

Chapter 1179

I have something to tell you. (4)

«Welcome, Abbot.»

As Beop Jong approached, Hyun Jong greeted him with a bright smile, as if questioning when his face had stiffened.

«It's truly delightful to see you again. Although it's been a short time, I hope you've been well.»

Beop Jong responded with a gracious smile, facing Hyun Jong.

«Thanks to your concerns, I've passed the time without any difficulties. I didn't even step outside my quarters in case something might happen.»

Hyun Jong's lips curled slightly at Beop Jong's words. While others might not notice, there was a subtle bitterness in his smile evident to the eyes of Hwasan's elders.

Being the one to initiate banter in such a setting indicates a certain level of confidence – it's a sign that Beop Jong holds the upper hand.

«Please, come inside.»

«Yes, thank you, Sect Leader.»

Tang Gunak frowned slightly and spoke.

«Abbot, it might be more appropriate to address him as Alliance Leader for now.»

Beop Jong closed his eyes and nodded.

«That's right. I've caused you trouble. Please understand my oversight, Alliance Leader.»

«No, not at all. What does a title matter? I am the Alliance Leader of Cheonumaeng, but also Sect Leader of Hwasan. Both titles are accurate.»

With a nod from Hyun Jong, Beop Jong followed inside.

The atmosphere was noticeably different from his previous visit. The welcoming party seemed more cautious and perhaps slightly more uneasy than before. Even though the suppressed emotions might have been deeper at that time, the difference was palpable.

This change in atmosphere slightly lifted Beop Jong's spirits. It wasn't merely the fact that they were being more cautious, but it felt as if the answers had already been heard in that atmosphere.

'I'll need to gradually narrow the gap.'

Given the history and accumulated resentment, it wouldn't be easy to swiftly move past their differences. Hence, Beop Jong realized the importance of his role moving forward. If he failed to demonstrate genuine inclusivity, the unity they sought might remain elusive.

Despite the weight of such responsibility, Beop Jong found himself able to smile. Having crossed the highest peak, could they not handle the remaining smaller issues?

Observing the surroundings, Beop Jong spoke.

«By the way, has Hwasan Geomhyeop not come out?»

«Oh, that's...»

For a moment, Hyun Jong's face turned red.

«I apologize. That kid is not feeling well, so...»

«Alliance Leader, I'm not trying to make excuses for the discourtesy of not coming out to greet me. It's just that there's a bit of hesitation about whether that person will participate in this meeting.»

«No, he's waiting inside.»

«Oh, then, that's fine.»

Finally, Beop Jong nodded contentedly.

Not coming out for a welcoming but attending the meeting — emotionally, it might not be a warm acceptance, but it signaled compliance with the decisions of Hwasan's Sect Leader and Cheonumaeng, right?

'You are that kind of person.'

Of course, it would be ideal if Hwasan Geomhyeop rushed out to welcome him with open arms. Yet, Beop Jong knew better. It was merely greed. No one could wield Hwasan Geomhyeop as they pleased. Nursing such greed would inevitably lead to sad consequences. Handling the sword called Hwasan Geomhyeop required utmost delicacy.

Frankly, Beop Jong wasn't entirely confident in managing him perfectly. Usually, such individuals are referred to as a double-edged sword, but in Beop Jong's eyes, Hwasan Geomhyeop seemed more like a sword without a hilt.

Anyone attempting to grasp it should be prepared to lose a finger or two.

'But, Hwasan Geomhyeop, luckily, I have that hilt.'

Beop Jong's gaze was fixed on Hyun Jong's back as he walked ahead. Hyun Jong was the key to wielding Hwasan Geomhyeop, quite an uncontrollable force.

While wielding Chung Myung himself might be an impossible task, only Hyun Jong could move that sword. And Beop Jong was the one who could move Hyun Jong. Therefore, ultimately, it seemed inevitable that he would have a significant influence on Hwasan Geomhyeop.

'In this position, Sect Leader's choices were never wrong. Even if I were in Sect Leader's shoes, there would have been no other options. The weight that the chosen one must bear is inevitable, wouldn't you agree?'

Internally contemplating, Beop Jong closed his eyes and let out a small sigh.

It couldn't be easy for Hyun Jong to bow to Gupailbang again after rejoining them.

But realistically, Hyun Jong might not have had any other choice. The top priority for the leader of a sect is not achieving dominance or building stronger forces. It is maintaining the sect and helping it to continue in the future.

Especially for Hyun Jong, who witnessed the sect's descent into ruin and faced the scenario of hitting rock bottom, there might not have been any other viable option. Feeling a trace of sorrow, Beop Jong sighed again.

«Please, have a seat.»

«Yes, Alliance Leader.»

With cautious movements, Beop Jong entered the room. Already seated in the spacious room was one person. As their eyes met, Beop Jong smiled and initiated the greeting.

«It's been a while.»

«We met three days ago, didn't we?»

«Three days can feel long. Shouldn't we interact more frequently from now on?»

«Well, you're talking as if everything's already decided. What if you get into trouble?»

«That's irrelevant.»

«Really?»

Beop Jong smiled at Chung Myung.

«Even if I don't hear the answers I want today, isn't it better for us to continue respecting each other like this? So, it's better to interact more frequently.»

A flicker of a smile appeared on Chung Myung's lips.

Seeing that, Beop Jong forced down the urge to let his own mouth curl upwards.

Is it because he won a small victory in their verbal sparring?

No, it's not that. The reason Chung Myung remained silent was none other than Hyun Jong. Even without winning the argument logically, just Hyun Jong's presence was enough to silence him.

In the past, Beop Jong might have felt a tinge of jealousy seeing Chung Myung's allegiance to Hyun Jong, evaluating him so highly despite his lack in everything except his personality. But now, this scene looked incredibly reassuring and good to Beop Jong.

«Let's save our discussions for later.»

«As you wish.»

As Beop Jong attempted to take the central seat, Hyeon Jong gestured towards the head of the table.

«Abbot, please come this way.»

Beop Jong glanced at the indicated seat and nodded.

«No, Alliance Leader. My place is here.»

«But...»

«That's where I feel comfortable. Please understand.»

«If you insist.»

Hyun Jong nodded and headed towards the head seat. Others followed, entering the room and finding their places.

Thunk.

As the door closed, silence settled in the room. Beop Jong observed the faces of those who had entered without breaking the silence.

There were Sect Leader and elders of Hwasan, Hwasan Geomhyeop, Ogeom and Hye Yeon. Additionally, the head of Tangga, Tang Gunak with young lord Tang Pae. Namgung Dowi,

along with the two lords from the outer palaces. The presence of Im Sobyong, the King of Nokrim, was also noted. Even though he maintained a spot near the door, ready to leave at any moment.

‘These are the central figures of Cheonumaeng.’

Participating in the discussion that determines the direction of Cheonumaeng requires both position and qualifications.

Although it may seem odd for the representatives of Hwasan, Ogeom, and Shaolin’s Hye Yeon to be present here, if others recognized it, it wasn’t for Beop Jong to question.

This is still Cheonumaeng.

Beop Jong took a deep breath.

‘Now, the final step.’

In terms of time, it might have been a sudden development, but looking deeper, Beop Jong had been contemplating for a considerable time. This moment marked the result of his long and arduous deliberation.

«Alliance Leader.»

Beop Jong spoke. Allowing them to speak first wasn’t a matter of courtesy — keeping them in this atmosphere for too long wouldn’t be courteous either.

«While it may not be appropriate, I’d like to dispense with formality today. Our situation is far from leisurely, and above all, it’s becoming increasingly challenging for me to endure.»

«I understand, Abbot.»

«Alliance Leader, and everyone present here.»

Beop Jong looked at each person in the room, deliberately taking his time.

«Firstly, I express my gratitude. With the presence of those here, we were able to resolve matters that couldn’t have been handled solely by the strength of Shaolin and Gupailbang. We could save those who might have been beyond salvation.»

“...”

«And for the clumsy and tactless actions in not fully accepting these facts, I want to formally apologize.»

As Beop Jong bowed his head, Hyun Jong quickly interjected.

«Please, Abbot, don’t do this.»

«No, Alliance Leader.»

Beop Jong raised his head.

«Regardless of the response, it’s something we can’t undo once time passes. So, before hearing any answers, I wanted to address it directly. The responsibility lies with Shaolin for bringing things to this point. No, not Shaolin, but it’s my fault.»

«Abbot...»

«I apologize.»

Beop Jong bowed deeply once again. Those surrounding him, displayed complex expressions.

While it was indeed a positive development to formally receive Abbot's apology, the current circumstances prevented them from wholly embracing it with joy.

After lifting his head, Beop Jong spoke with an exceptionally stern expression.

«What Cheonumaeng pursuit is something Gupailbang won't forget. The fact that you've reminded us of what Gangho was losing won't be easily forgotten.»

“...”

«If we were to discuss what Cheonumaeng has accomplished, even a whole day wouldn't be enough, but as you all know, the current state of the world is far from relaxed. So...»

All eyes remained fixed on Beop Jong.

«As the leader of Shaolin, and also representing Gupailbang and Five Great Families, I want to seek an answer regarding the proposal I made earlier.»

The words came from Beop Jong sooner than expected. Hyun Jong couldn't help but close his eyes momentarily.

«Alliance Leader, can I hear your response?»

Beop Jong looked at the expressions of Hyun Jong and Chung Myung simultaneously. Even though he knew the result was more or less certain, it felt as though his throat was parched, and a burning sensation lingered in his stomach.

Nonetheless, he refrained from rushing Hyun Jong. He understood better than anyone how crucial this response was. It was a fundamental decision, and the weight of it was felt more acutely by him than anyone else.

«Regarding the proposal you made...»

Finally, Hyun Jong's lips parted.

«I will give you an answer to said proposal.»

Unbeknownst to himself, Beop Jong clenched his fist tightly. Every ounce of his attention was focused on Hyun Jong's lips.

«Cheonumaeng...»

A sigh, almost irreversible, flowed from Hyun Jong's lips.

«Will accept the proposal you made, Abbot.»

As those words concluded, Chung Myung's eyes closed firmly, as if they would never open again.