

## Chapter 1162

What should we do? (2)

The atmosphere in the room was peculiar.

Certainly, Beop Jong was not a stranger to those present here. Hadn't Beop Jong come to Hwasan and initiated conversations several times before?

However, those conversations were usually with Hyun Jong or Chung Myung. This was the first time he had sat with so many people, making the atmosphere inevitably strange. No one could readily open their mouths first.

Naturally, it was Hyun Jong who broke the ice and spoke.

«I should have at least prepared tea, but I'm unprepared.»

«No, Alliance Leader, it's not necessary.»

Beop Jong smiled.

«Looking around, it seems this is your lordship's residence, and it's truly humble. It feels like your lordship's character is laid bare here.»

«I simply haven't properly furnished my abode due to living in this foreign land. How could it be considered humble?»

«Haha. You remain humble. Seeing you, I feel truly ashamed as a monk.»

«That shaved head needs a needle in his mouth... Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!»

Those who instinctively blocked Chung Myung's mouth exchanged awkward glances, Yu Iseol and Tang Soso pinned Chung Myung's from both sides.

«...»

When Beop Jong looked at Chung Myung with an expression that seemed to say, «You too,» Hyun Jong spoke apologetically with a flushed face.

«I apologize... I know, but...»

«No need for apologies.»

Beop Jong chuckled softly.

«Actions of an ordinary person may be considered impolite, but the deeds of a hero become folklore, don't they? Hwasan Geomhyeop already possesses those qualifications.»

Hyun Jong let out a deep sigh. Proud as he may be, sometimes he feels truly, really, ashamed of his disciple.

«I have no words to...»

«It's not just words.»

«Yes?»

Beop Jong spoke with a smile.

«Considering what Hwasan Geomhyeop has accomplished in Hangzhou, and the deeds done for the world, it is I who should show respect before him. It's evident who has helped the common people more, isn't it?»

«...»

«So, please don't feel awkward.»

«T-Thank you for your kind words.»

Hyun Jong's hesitant response left his mind a bit unsettled.

'What is he thinking?'

Of course, he couldn't fully grasp Beop Jong's thoughts, but for now, there was no hint of pretense in his words and demeanor.

Therefore, Hyun Jong couldn't quite grasp what attitude he should adopt towards Beop Jong. Despite his emotions being already quite bruised, was it not unavoidable to show some courtesy?

«Abbot.»

«Please, I'm listening, Lord Tang.»

Tang Gunak, with a stern expression, addressed Beop Jong.

«Sharing pleasantries is good, but what brings you here?»

«Hmm!»

The uncomfortable sound of a fake cough came from none other than Jongli Hyeong.

«Lord of the Tang clan is said to be second in command within Cheonumaeng, and it seems Cheonumaeng's prestige is quite remarkable. Seeing the Abbot bow to someone who isn't even the Alliance Leader is quite a sight.»

Tang Gunak glared silently at Jongli Hyeong. However, Jongli Hyeong, without flinching, met his gaze.

«That's right. Let's not get too carried away with joy.»

But their short confrontation could naturally dissolve thanks to Beop Jong's gentle voice.

“First of all, on behalf of Gupailbang, I would like to express my gratitude to those who helped resolve the Hangzhou incident.”

“How... ..”

«It was a long journey. I didn't realize your abilities were so splendid, and you would handle things so well.»

“...”

«And forgive me for not expressing my gratitude earlier due to being narrow-minded.»

«That's unnecessary, Abbot. Just your visit alone is worthy of gratitude.»

As Beop Jong continued to humble himself, Hyun Jong had no choice but to lower his own posture.

Witnessing this, everyone present felt the weight of the position of Shaolin's leader. Despite all the criticisms and gossip, just having the Abbot sitting in front of them brought such tension. Especially with the Abbot who conducted himself with such decorum, the tension heightened even more.

«If you plan to thank us after everything is done, you should have helped from the beginning.»

«Chung Myung!»

«What did I say wrong?»

As Chung Myung seemed to have quieted down a bit, so they have let their guard down. So he quickly snapped at it. As Baek Cheon was about to cover his mouth again, Beop Jong simply nodded in agreement.

«You speak the truth. I was foolish.»

«...»

«And you, more than anyone, should receive this gratitude. Thank you.»

As Beop Jong bowed his head, Chung Myung, who had been staring blankly at him for a moment, suddenly widened his eyes, which sparkled strangely.

«Ah! I got it!»

«Huh... huh?»

«You, you rascal, Haomun's Head!»

«...Huh?»

«How dare you, a Sapa bastard, impersonate the Great Baldy here... Ugh! Huh!»

Chung Myung was dragged away again. This time, Yu Iseol and Tang Soso were joined by Hye Yeon, who slammed Chung Myung's side.

«Muh-huh-huh!»

However, those restraining Chung Myung felt equally bewildered. Especially Jo Geol and Tang Soso, with expressions that didn't hide their thoughts, looked at Beop Jong as if wondering, 'Did this guy eat something wrong on his way here?'

«Is there something strange?»

Understanding their sentiments, Beop Jong, with a smile, asked Hyun Jong.

«It's not that strange, but...»

Hyun Jong, covering his mouth, coughed lightly and continued.

«You seem to have changed a bit from before, and it's a bit perplexing.»

«There's no need to be concerned. I simply took a step back and observed the situation from a different perspective.»

«A step back?»

«Amitabha.»

Beop Jong nodded.

«Even though a monk should be most wary of arrogance, I found myself ensnared by it without realizing. I only came to this realization recently.»

«...»

«Everyone has a virtue they pursue. It's not wrong if that virtue differs from mine. But I, forgetting that, was imposing only my virtue.»

«Abbot.»

«If what I thought was wrong is ultimately proven right, then I should have admitted I was wrong... Yes, Alliance Leader. I couldn't admit it. Therefore, I shouted it was wrong about something that wasn't wrong. The more I did that, the more I became ensnared in delusion.»  
Hyun Jong's body trembled. What Beop Jong was saying now resonated deeply with the Taoist principles of Hwasan.

Beop Jong smiled.

«So, I let it go. Isn't it just emptiness?»

«Yes, Abbot. Yes.»

Hyun Jong nodded in agreement.

«So, for today...»

«I came to apologize and also to make a proposal.»

«A proposal, you say?»

«Yes, a proposal.»

Beop Jong spoke with a smile.

«As I let go of everything, I came to realize what I've been doing, and that everyone is on the wrong path because of my arrogance.»

Hyun Jong paused briefly and asked,

«Are you saying all of us are on the wrong path?»

«Yes, that's right.»

«How...?»

«Amitabha.»

Closing his eyes, Beop Jong, slowly opened them again. With unwavering gaze, he met Hyun Jong's eyes. The gravity within his eyes made Hyun Jong involuntarily tense his back.  
«I believe you, Alliance Leader, are more aware of the current situation in the Central Plains.»

Confirming Hyun Jong's nod, Beop Jong continued,

«Gangnam is plagued by Sapaeryeon, and they will attempt to invade Gangbuk at any time. And appearance of the Demonic Cult for the first time in a hundred years. The situation is so dire that phrases like 'a sign of turmoil' and 'a crisis at the doorstep' wouldn't be too exaggerated.»

«Well, yes.»

«However... in such a situation, how are we supposed to protect the Central Plains? Aren't we just repeatedly antagonizing each other?»

When Chung Myung's eyes narrowed again, Beop Jong spoke with a hint of self-reproach.

«Of course, I am well aware that most of the blame lies with me. That's why I came here to apologize. I apologize once again. I, as it appears, am utterly lacking...»

«Oh, no, Abbot. How could it be solely your fault? My mistakes are significant as well.»

Beop Jong smiles once again.

«Alliance Leader, hearing you speak like this makes me even more ashamed. Living in a well for so long, I thought the world would flow according to my will. Only now do I realize that I should have reflected and accepted things that didn't go my way. However, my tiny bit of pride wouldn't let me abandon that thought, so it distorted my view of the world.»

«Abbot...»

Hyun Jong looked at Beop Jong with eyes full of uncertainty.

If the leader of Shaolin speaks so humbly about himself, shouldn't one believe in the sincerity contained in his words? Even Jongli Hyeong, sitting beside Beop Jong, seemed surprised, as if he hadn't expected him to say such things.

«Well, then, about this proposal...»

«Naturally, when Sapa strengthens, and Demonic Cult moves, what should we do? The task at hand is so evident. We just took a long detour due to not acknowledging each other.»

«...»

«Thus, I would like to propose something to you, Alliance Leader. It might not be too late. Before irreversible events unfold, how about reconciling now?»

Hyun Jong nodded without hesitation.

In truth, this was something he had not anticipated. He simply couldn't trust Beop Jong and Gupailbang, but if they sincerely wanted to mend relations, why would he refuse?

«If you suggest reconciliation, naturally...»

«No, Alliance Leader.»

«Yes?»

But Beop Jong shook his head firmly.

«That is not enough. Do you know why I couldn't acknowledge and rejected Hwasan?»

«Well, I'm not sure.»

«Because it wasn't mine.»

His words led to momentary change in the atmosphere among Hwasan's disciples. However, Beop Jong clarified their misunderstanding in his following words.

«More precisely, it was not within my territory. I thought it was, but it wasn't. Now that I know, I was angry and resentful. Yes, it's all because of my shortcomings. However...

Alliance Leader, the world isn't a place only for the capable. Someone, like me, might also be lacking.»

«...It can happen.»

«For those people, the reconciliation of Gupailbang, Five Great Families, and Cheonumaeng would merely appear as a superficial gesture. It would seem like a brief show of friendliness, but eventually, they would drift apart again,»

Beop Jong stated.

Everyone present nodded in agreement. Even for them, breaking free from such perceptions might be challenging.

«So, what do you suggest?»

«We need to let it go. We must release what we're holding onto. And, first of all, we need to break down the fence. The only way to do that is quite simple.»

Beop Jong smiled. It was a smile and perhaps an unexpected statement.

«Disband Cheonumaeng and return to your original place. Shaolin officially requests Hwasan's return to Gupailbang.»

A gust of disbelief echoed through the room, the sound of empty wind escaping from the mouths of those astonished.