

Chapter 1207

Now the sect is finally back on track! (2)

Hyun Jong looked at the person sitting in front of him with a pitiful gaze.

Unlike the depth of sorrow within him, the expression of the person sitting before him was remarkably composed, which only made his heart ache more.

‘I am truly inadequate.’

Looking back, Baek Cheon’s point was accurate. Hyun Jong was undoubtedly burdened by excessive responsibility towards Baek and Chung disciples, and that’s why he wanted to protect them by any means necessary. Until the day they could enjoy what they rightfully deserved.

But upon reflection, the ones he truly should have cherished and protected were not them, but rather the Un disciples.

Of course, while Baek and Chung disciples were worth pity and regret for entering the fallen Hwasan, the Un disciples were the ones who bore the full brunt of that downfall.

Despite still having some glory left, they poured all their energy into Hwasan while watching it collapse, ultimately unable to save it, embracing even the despair of that fact.

Yet still, Hyun Jong couldn’t cherish the Un disciples like he did Baek or Chung.

‘I am truly...’

As if he was speechless, or his throat was blocked, Hyun Jong hesitated slightly.

«Are you really going to be okay?»

In response to the resigned voice filled with helplessness, Un Am scratched his head as if feigning ignorance.

«It’s too late for that, Sect Leader. Isn’t it already over?»

«Perhaps for you, but not for me.»

Hyun Jong let out a deep sigh.

«Hey, you. Is there a place where the decisions on such matters are made without consulting me, Sect Leader?»

«I’m sorry about that. But the situation didn’t allow for such consultation...»

«Even so, you should have.»

Un Am scratched the back of his head awkwardly. Hyun Jong sighed again.

It wasn’t because Un Am was frustrated. It was because Hyun Jong felt like his own words to Un Am resembled the tantrums of an old man who had grown stubborn with age.

«You... Do you think being a Sect Leader is so easy?»

«I don’t think that’s the case.»

Un Am calmly smiled.

«The position of the Sect Leader of Hwasan comes with immense responsibility and demands. Only the most outstanding individuals in the sect are qualified for that position.»

«...»

«So, it's not my place to be the Sect Leader.»

«No, it's not that!»

Unable to contain himself any longer, Hyun Jong burst out in frustration.

«What is it that you are lacking! What makes you think it's not your place? It's obviously the position you should have taken!»

«Sect Leader.»

Un Am let out a small sigh, his face showing a hint of embarrassment. Though not one to easily yield, he found himself unsure of where to stand under Hyun Jong's gaze.

«Please don't hold me in such high regard.»

«What do you mean?»

«If this were a normal era, not necessarily peaceful, but still a reasonably stable time, I might have aspired to take the position of the Sect Leader.»

“...”

«But now it's not such an era, is it?»

His voice was composed. Despite Hyun Jong's outburst, there was no hint of regret in Un Am.

Was he an enlightened Taoist? No, that wasn't it. If he were an enlightened monk, he would have felt the position of the Sect Leader was worthless. Un Am understood the value of the position of Hwasan's Sect Leader perfectly well, yet he didn't dwell on it unnecessarily.

Hyun Jong found this fact both admirable and deeply regrettable.

«In the coming era, the one who leads Hwasan must be more trustworthy and quicker in judgment than anyone else.»

Un Am nodded with a smile on his face.

«But Sect Leader, I am not that person. While I am confident in making good decisions after enough patience, waiting, and careful consideration, such a role is challenging.»

«Why do you think that way? Can't those kids, your disciples, help you? Am I such a great person that I am the Sect Leader of Hwasan?»

«That could be true. But Sect Leader, is it really necessary?»

Un Am chuckled softly.

«They are good kids.»

“...”

«What troubles me isn't the fact that I couldn't become the Sect Leader. It's not the confusion about the path I thought I would take versus the one I will take in the future. What truly troubles me is the uncertain gaze of the sect's children as they look at me.»

Hyun Jong closed his eyes firmly. He knew from the start that persuasion was impossible.

In some ways, Un Am was the most stubborn person in Hwasan. If he wasn't, he wouldn't have been able to make the decision to stay and continue Hwasan's legacy, despite not having a strong attachment to it yet. Once he made up his mind, there was no turning back.

«Un Am.»

«You don't need to look at me with such eyes, Sect Leader.»

«...»

«I hope you don't keep dwelling on what I couldn't do. While it's natural for a teacher to look at their disciple or a parent to look at their child in that way, my perspective is different, isn't it?»

Un Am smiled warmly.

«Not becoming a Sect Leader doesn't make me unhappy. I am perfectly content being the martial arts instructor of Hwasan.»

«...»

«And not becoming a Sect Leader doesn't mean my responsibilities in Hwasan disappear. Perhaps I might even end up busier than before. Running the sect alone wouldn't be an easy task for Baek Sang. Although Baek Cheon has potential and strong reputation he lacks certain qualities in that area, doesn't he?»

«Un Am...»

«Sect Leader.»

Un Am looked straight at Hyun Jong.

«I wanted to embody the plum blossoms in the past.»

«...»

«I wanted to inherit the legacy of resilience from you and bloom brilliantly like a plum blossom, ending your winter.»

Un Am shook his head quietly.

“But eventually, I came to realize. That role wasn't mine, and I'm not the person who can fulfill it.”

Hyun Jong let out a faint sigh, while Un Am's expression remained serene.

«So, I wanted to become the roots. I realized that for a flower to bloom brightly, its roots must be strong. If the children who follow me can bloom like beautiful flowers, then what's the problem even if I'm buried in the ground?»

«The position of the Sect Leader is like those roots, Un Am.»

«Yes, indeed. However... as time passed, I came to realize once again. Even those roots weren't my role to fulfill.»

Pain flickered in Hyun Jong's eyes. Unable to become a flower or even the roots. Then what should Un Am become?

Sensing the emotions reflected in Sect Leader's eyes, Un Am smiled gently.

«Sect Leader.»

«Yes.»

«So, do you know what I want to become now?»

«What do you want to become?»

Un Am nodded solemnly.

«I didn't know in my younger days. When my heart was filled with ambition and I was striving to keep my vigor, I couldn't see it. All I saw back then was just a large plum blossom tree.»

“...”

«But now I understand. Hwasan is like a plum blossom. But isn't it true that no plum blossom can bloom without a solid foundation?»

Those words weighed heavily on Hyun Jong's heart.

«That's why I want to become the soil. I want to be the foundation where those children can plant their roots and bloom like the most beautiful flowers. While soil may not be a plum blossom, how can a plum blossom exist without soil? That's also an important role.»

Hyun Jong closed his eyes.

A vessel of Tao.

Such thoughts occurred to him. Perhaps, because of his obsession with the prosperity of the sect, he failed to recognize the true master who could bring out the essence of Hwasan.

If it were a peaceful era... Un Am would undoubtedly have become a Sect Leader who would spread the essence of Hwasan's Tao throughout the world. He would have become a Sect Leader acknowledged by both past and future generations.

Just as a flower blooming on barren land becomes even more beautiful, Hwasan's harsh times had eventually allowed Un Am to bloom the flower of the Taoist way.

«So, there's no need to feel regret. If Baek Cheon becomes the Sect Leader and spreads the fame of Hwasan, that would also be my achievement. And if Yoon Jong becomes the Sect Leader and spreads the way of Hwasan, that would also be my achievement, wouldn't it?»

«What about Chung Myung?»

«...What nonsense...»

Hyun Jong cleared his throat and then looked directly at Un Am again.

«Are you okay with that?»

«It was sudden, but as you know, it's something I've thought about for a long time. Each person has their own role, even some unknown forces may have led Chung Myung to Hwasan.»

“...”

«Just let it flow naturally, Sect Leader. Considering something natural as unnatural is simply human greed, isn't it?»

Hyun Jong tightly closed his eyes.

«You're... «

«...»

«You're a Taoist, a Sage. I'm just ashamed.»

Un Am smiled faintly.

«If you think so, don't be ashamed, be proud. You made me who I am today, and you made Hwasan what it is today. The predecessors would surely think the same.»

«Yeah... maybe.»

A heavy sigh escaped Hyun Jong's lips.

He understood Un Am's perspective, knew that his thoughts weren't wrong, and even accepted it as fate. But still, the lingering regret in his heart remained because he was only human.

'Letting go of attachments is indeed a difficult task. Perhaps that's why enlightenment seems elusive.'

Hyun Jong gently called out to Un Am.

«Un Am.»

«Yes, Sect Leader.»

Hyun Jong suddenly deeply bowed towards him. Startled, Un Am reached out to hold Hyun Jong's shoulders and straightened him up.

«Why, why are you doing this, Sect Leader! You shouldn't do this.»

«... Thank you.»

Un Am couldn't respond and simply kept his mouth shut. Even he, who had always remained composed, felt something welling up in his chest at that moment.

«As the Sect Leader of Hwasan, as someone who is also a Taoist, and foremost as a person, let me say this. Just... thank you.»

Un Am fell silent, unable to reply. His shoulders trembled slightly. Hyun Jong silently patted his shoulder.

The master and his disciple, who had spent most of their lives together, comforted each other in silence. And they remained like that for a little while longer...