

Chapter 1166

Have I really been wrong? (1)

Chung Myung glared at Beop Jong.

His eyes showed no change, but the meaning contained in his gaze has shifted for everyone.

«Do you know what you're saying right now?»

«I do.»

«But...»

«Listen until the end.»

«...»

Beop Jong, after cutting off Chung Myung's words, continued.

«Furthermore, I won't allow any faction associated with Shaolin to head south.»

«Abbot...»

«Of course, and...»

Beop Jong's gaze encompassed both Chung Myung and Hyun Jong seated behind him.

«Also, regardless of the outcome of this agreement, I will formally request Cheonumaeng to refrain from going into Gangnam.»

Chung Myung's face became expressionless.

«And if we refuse?»

«I'll stop you.»

Beop Jong answered calmly.

«I'll do everything in my power to stop anyone.»

And he adds a statement that need not be said.

«Even if the cost comes back painfully to Shaolin.»

A heavy silence descends in the room.

Not a single breath could be heard.

The weight of Beop Jong's words contributed to the silence, but more so, it's the gravity of Beop Jong's statement and the atmosphere that made it profoundly serious.

It didn't match.

What Beop Jong's statement implies is exceedingly harsh. It's not a statement that someone advocating righteousness would dare utter.

However, in contrast to the meaning conveyed in those words, Beop Jong's attitude while speaking seemed so solemn, almost to the point of reverence.

These two conflicting elements coexisted, creating an indescribable and eerie feeling for those observing Beop Jong.

«I told you so.»

Cold, emotionless, Chung Myung's voice shattered the eerie atmosphere as it reverberated through the room.

«Do you know what you're saying right now?»

Beop Jong, facing Chung Myung's frighteningly emotionless face, simply looked back with a calm expression.

«Of course, I know.»

«No, it seems like you don't.»

Chung Myung's lips slightly parted, revealing his teeth. Despite trying to contain it, an unstoppable rage emerged from him.

«You said you would do your best to save even one more person.»

«That's right.»

«Aren't Haenam's disciples people?»

Chung Myung's voice was so cold that it felt like it could freeze life itself. Faced with that voice, Beop Jong simply closed his eyes without responding.

Perhaps not pleased with that attitude, Chung Myung's voice became even more intense.

«I asked if those enduring each day surrounded by water in the southernmost part of the Central Plains, living in the midst of blood-drying encirclement of Sapaeryoen, aren't people.»

«...»

«They are people. And they are the ones who agreed to align their intentions with the Abbot. Those who have persisted within the confines of Gulailbang.»

Naturally, Chung Myung's sentiments toward Haenam were far from positive. From the beginning, he wouldn't have had positive feelings towards the sects belonging to Gupailbang. Moreover, isn't Haenam a sect that occupied Hwasan's rightful place?

While Chung Myung may not harbor particularly intense animosity towards Haenam, there is no reason for him to cast a favorable gaze upon them.

However, Beop Jong's attitude was enough to spark Chung Myung's anger.

«Do you consider it a contradiction?»

«A contradiction?»

The corners of Chung Myung's lip twisted, as if he was laughing.

«Not a contradiction, but rather sophistry. If not that, then hypocrisy!»

«Amitabha.»

Beop Jong utters a disapproving chant, slowly opening his eyes. In that moment, there's a subtle hint of surprise on Chung Myung's face, witnessing Beop Jong's gaze, unaffected by the harsh criticism.

Beop Jong looks at Chung Myung with dark sunken eyes.

«It may seem that way. No, perhaps your words might be right.»

«...»

«Yes, you might be right. Shaolin should rightfully save them. But let me ask you. Is that the only right thing to do?»

Chung Myung's face contorts slightly. It's as if he finds it difficult to understand what Beop Jong is saying.

«Why is that?»

«Why ask when you don't know? Well, that...»

«Because it's a natural thing to do.»

Beop Jong interrupts Chung Myung's words.

Nevertheless, instead of getting angry, Chung Myung nods. Beop Jong's words precisely convey what he intended to say.

Without needing the grandiose terms «righteousness and chivalry,» helping those in danger is an inherently natural thing.

«So, let me ask you one thing. Hwasan Geomhyeop.»

Beop Jong quietly opened his mouth.

«There's a way to save hundred people. In that case, should the people of Gangho naturally engage in that task?»

«Of course.»

«Even if, as a result, a thousand lives are lost?»

«...»

Chung Myung closed his mouth.

«Ask again.»

But Beop Jong didn't stop talking.

«You can only choose one path. The path to save a hundred or the path to save a thousand. Which one should you choose?»

«What sophistry...»

«Is it really sophistry?»

Beop Jong raised his head.

«Haenam is at the southernmost end of Sapaeryeon's territory. To help them, it's inevitable to clash with Sapaeryeon. It's no different from Gupailbang declaring all out war on Sapaeryeon to help them.»

«Are you afraid of that?»

«I am afraid.»

Beop Jong nonchalantly nodded.

«I am so afraid that my body trembles. Considering how many people might die in that war, it's a state when I can't even sleep.»

«...»

«Aren't you afraid?»

Chung Myung couldn't answer that question. Their sentiments were no different from each other.

«It's an inevitable war.»

«I know. I know it very well. Perhaps more than anyone.»

Beop Jong, too, didn't deny Chung Myung's words.

«But Hwasan Geomhyeop, even in an unavoidable war, there's a difference in approach. If we go into enemy's territory and execute reckless strategies, those who shouldn't die might die.»

«...»

«More people than those we're trying to save in Haenam might die, maybe several times more. Yet, is it truly 'righteousness' to carry out such actions?»

«If it's not done without consideration for personal gain, then it doesn't qualify as 'righteousness'.»

Hearing this, Beop Jong slowly nodded.

«See, Hwasan Geomhyeop.»

«...»

«I won't die.»

A soft sigh escaped Beop Jong's lips.

«I can't be on the front line.»

«Well, that's...»

«Is it really the right thing for someone who will not die no matter what plan he implements to force people into danger in the name of 'righteousness'?»

Chung Myung's eyes slightly flared up.

«It's always been like that.»

«...»

«I've heard those excuses countless times. It's the path for everyone. It was an unavoidable deed. To save more people, we have to endure. So what happened?»

«...»

«Aren't you just scared, Abbot!»

A hollow laughter emanated from Beop Jong's mouth.

«Did you say I was scared?»

«Yes.»

«That's a ridiculous question. Isn't it an obvious statement?»

«...»

«Aren't *you* scared?»

«...»

The eyes of Beop Jong and Chung Myung met in the air. However, in that moment, both of them felt it together.

The depth of their gazes conveyed an unavoidable fear, the fear that only those who understand people can die by the choices they made.

«I've pondered over Maehwado many times. Many times indeed.»

«...»

«What wrong have I done? What mistakes have I made? Was my choice really a mistake?»

Beop Jong turned his gaze towards Namgung Dowi.

«I've finally reached a conclusion. Hwasan Geomhyeop and Namgung's Young Lord. Even if I could go back to that time, my choice wouldn't change. Even then, I would have simply watched Namgung's death.»

«...Abbot!»

Namgung Dowi gritted his teeth.

But facing him, Beop Jong simply shook his head.

«I've said it, Hwasan Geomhyeop.»

«Tell me. Where?»

«Do you really think I should have led others to Maehwado before you came?»

«Isn't that obvious?»

«Then I'll ask. If I had led Shaolin and Kongtong and launched an attack on Maehwado before you arrived, what do you think would have happened?»

«Well...»

Chung Myung fell silent. They would have rescued them. Shaolin was never weak. However, if they had rushed in without considering the consequences, there would have been substantial bloodshed.

First, Shaolin's encampment along the river in front of Jang Ilso would disappear — he might have strategically attacked from all sides.

«More people than Namgung who stayed on the island would have died. Isn't that right?»

«...»

“And that's just a story about numbers. If we speak in terms of power, there wouldn't even be a comparison. To save the surviving young ones of Namgung, we would have lost countless warriors who were to become swords aimed at Sapaeryeon. Do you truly believe I had to choose that path?”

Namgung Dohwi's face contorted upon hearing these words.

«Abbot.»

«Speak, Young Lord.»

Beop Jong lowered his voice slightly and tilted his head. Speaking such words in front of Namgung Dowi was not an easy task.

«Perhaps Abbot's words are not entirely wrong.»

«However, Hwasan came. And Tangga risked their lives.»

«...»

«That's not just the difference between two factions, do you not think so?»

Beop Jong chuckled.

«You see, Young Lord.»

«Yes, please tell me.»

Namgung Dowi glared at Beop Jong, as if challenging him to say something.

«That's why I pondered. What I couldn't do, why could Cheonumaeng do it? Do you know what answer I found?»

«Well...»

Namgung Dohwi was prepared to reject whatever answer Beop Jong might give. Whatever he said would just be an excuse.

But Beop Jong's response left Namgung Dohwi dumbfounded.

«Because I was stupid.»

«Uh... yes?»

Beop Jong replied calmly.

“It's because I was dumber than Hwasan Geomhyeop and couldn't find a way to deal with them without sustaining terrible losses.”

“...”

Namgung Dowi's eyes got even bigger.

“A-Abbot...”

«Similarly, Shaolin couldn't find a way to win without shedding blood because it was inferior to Hwasan. It's just because we are not good enough.»

Namgung Dowi's body trembled. He never imagined hearing such words from anyone, let alone Beop Jong.

Isn't Beop Jong the one whose noble pride alone cannot be compared to anyone else in the world?

«Not admitting that, everything becomes distorted. Hwasan and Tangga should have become places where unimaginable deeds were performed, and we should have become a place where we do right things but still receive unjust criticisms. So, it's not strange for my heart to feel heavy. It was wrong from the beginning.»

“...”

«But now, I just accepted it. We simply didn't have the ability. So, I'll ask again. Young Lord, do you really think we should have headed to Maehwado, staining the Yangtze river with blood, due to our inadequate abilities, just to save Namgung clan?»

Namgung Dowi couldn't bring himself to answer.

Seeing his reaction, Beop Jong closed his eyes and let out a deep sigh.

«In this world, there exist those who are beyond the reach of the ordinary people. They effortlessly achieve things that are impossible for others to follow, and they easily accomplish tasks that ordinary people cannot. They are the ones who are beyond the reach of ordinary people, no matter how hard they try to catch up.»

Everyone looked sideways at one person, knowing exactly whom Beop Jong was referring to.

«That's it.»

Beop Jong's piercing gaze met Chung Myung's.

«Forcing someone to align everything with oneself, unable to distinguish what one can achieve alone and what one cannot, is nothing but another form of violence.»

«Let me ask you, Hwasan Geomhyeop.»

Beop Jong's voice flowed slowly.

«Have I really been wrong?»

Chung Myung's lips pressed tightly together. The subtle quiver at the end of those closed lips seemed to express his feelings at this moment.