

Chapter 1177

I have something to tell you. (2)

Several people gathered in the room – Hyun Jong, the Sect Leader of Hwasan, the elders of Hwasan.

Also present was Tang Gunak, who held the substantial position of the vice-leader of Cheonumaeng.

The four of them stared sternly at one person, yet the target of their gaze, Chung Myung, simply smiled brightly.

«Really...?»

Hyun Jong, struck speechless, cleared his throat and asked again.

«Are you sure it's okay?»

«Yes. Well,»

Chung Myung shrugged.

«Actually, the answer was decided from the beginning, wasn't it?»

«Even so...»

«Do you disagree, Sect Leader?»

Hyun Jong sighed deeply.

«My thoughts aren't that different, I suppose.»

«Yes. If my thoughts align with Sect Leader's, then there's nothing more to ponder,»

Chung Myung said, directing his gaze towards Tang Gunak.

«I feel the need to apologize to Lord Tang.»

«No need for you to feel sorry. It's not something you need to apologize for.»

Tang Gunak nodded.

«Our clan hasn't suffered any losses. Your status in Cheonumaeng is even higher now than during the time of the Five Great Families.»

Tang Gunak looked at Chung Myung with compassionate eyes.

«And it's not just about status. Tang clan, which used to think only of its own gains in Sichuan, learned through you and Hwasan what it means to stand righteously as a sect. This is an invaluable experience that can't be exchanged for anything.»

«Well, it's a bit embarrassing.»

«No, you have every reason to be proud...»

«To be honest, Sichuan Tang clan did have some of those traits. Selfish and ruthless. Ugh, just thinking about it.»

“...”

Tang Gunak's eyebrows twitched slightly.

«Anyway.»

«Yes.»

A small sigh escaped his lips.

«Other sect leaders from different factions of the Alliance have agreed to fully comply with Hwasan's decision, so there shouldn't be any resistance. But I have one thing I want to ask.»

«Yes.»

«Are you really okay with this?»

“...”

Tang Gunak spoke with utmost seriousness,

«Even if it's the right path, the decision to give up everything you've achieved so far is no small matter. Even if Hwasan regains the reputation of the old Gupailbang, it might not mean much, even if you attain an equal status with Shaolin.»

Chung Myung fell silent.

«What you've been building is not just about status, right?»

«Well, that's true... but it's okay.»

As those words lingered, Hyun Young, who had been sitting with a sulky face, muttered under her breath, 'What's okay about this? Damn it,' and then, upon seeing Chung Myung's determined expression, bit his lip.

«I know. Equal status, Gupailbang. It's all meaningless talk. In reality, it's like giving cash and receiving a promissory note. No matter how much is written on the note, it can turn into scraps of paper overnight, right?»

«I understand. But why?»

«From the start, Cheonumaeng wasn't the goal but the means,»

Chung Myung shrugged.

«We created Cheonumaeng not to make it a great place, but to gather under its name to protect at least one more person. But giving up a safer path by clinging to that 'tool' is like losing control of what's the most important.»

«Do you believe Beop Jong?»

«Of course not,»

Chung Myung bluntly replied.

«What I believe in is me, Hwasan, and the other sects within Cheonumaeng. Do you think I'd politely listen to what that great baldy thinks? Nonsense. He's utterly clueless!»

Chung Myung chuckled slightly and continued,

«So, for now, we're going in. Rather than standing in a field enduring a downpour, it's better to take shelter under the eaves of a house we don't like.»

Tang Gunak tilted his head.

«The more I hear, the less I understand.»

«What do you mean?»

«Wasn't Cheonumaeng our roof?»

Chung Myung met Tang Gunak's gaze straight on.

«It's a contradiction. As it stands, you could argue that Cheonumaeng might sacrifice everything for the sake of a righteous path, earning praise for making a grand decision for the future of Gangho. But aren't we losing the roof we should have never lost?»

Chung Myung closed his eyes without answering.

«I don't just think what we shared in Cheonumaeng was merely power. Didn't we see something beyond that? Yet now, we're choosing to just become stronger and safer...»

Chung Myung slowly opened his eyes, and they held an infinite depth.

«I've been feeling it for some time now.»

«What do you mean?»

«Perhaps I've been running toward a predetermined outcome, merely avoiding facing that result.»

Tang Gunak fell silent, the weight in Chung Myung's words too heavy to bear.

«Parents hope their children grow up right. They hope they don't yield to injustice, keep their principles, and become people who know how to help the weak.»

«True.»

«But no parent truly wishes for their child to die in place of others.»

«...»

«Though one may shed tears and praise the deed after it's done, no one would willingly let their child jump into the fire pit to save others.»

Tang Gunak closed his eyes.

He seemed to understand what Chung Myung was trying to convey.

«But at some point, I found myself pushing Hwasan and its disciples into that fire. As Hwasan's cries grew louder, as Hwasan became more formidable, they became more at risk.»

Chung Myung shrugged.

«Of course, it's not just Hwasan. Cheonumaeng is the same. Let's say it's like that.»

«I understand.»

«At some point, I began dreaming that we would overcome Sapaeryeon, defeat the Heavenly Demon, defeat everyone, and finally bring peace to Gangho. A moment where everyone could be happy.»

«That's what we all desire, isn't it?»

«But there's no place for Hwasan there.»

«Hwasan, Tangga, Namgung, Nokrim, and outer palaces – none of them.»

Chung Myung looked up at the ceiling with a heavy expression.

«In the end, it worked out well. We protected what everyone wanted to protect and achieved what everyone wanted to achieve. But... I couldn't smile when I saw that.»

His voice was calm, yet oddly desperate.

«Nothing changed. It's the same outcome.»

It was an incomprehensible statement, but the emotions within it were vivid. The deep bitterness and regret were evident.

«I've just been doing what I wanted to do, but somehow, Hwasan has turned into a formidable sect. And everyone has started to believe that they must risk their lives for the sake of upholding righteousness.»

«You...»

«What lies at the end?»

Tang Gunak couldn't bring himself to answer.

«In the future, events like the massacre in Hangzhou will happen repeatedly. Every time, because it's Cheonumaeng, because it's Hwasan, because it's Tangga, it will be natural for us to step forward and fight fiercely at the forefront.»

In response, Tang Gunak reluctantly nodded.

Even if he wanted to deny it, he couldn't. Hadn't everything about Cheonumaeng already started leaning in that direction?

«Then, someday, we might find ourselves facing the outcome where others enjoy everything we protected through our sacrifices.»

It was the path that Hwasan of the past had taken.

Chung Myung regretted it sharply and vowed to never repeat the same mistake. Yet, how ironically amusing. Despite all the resentment and regret, Chung Myung found himself walking the same path.

As he understood more and delved deeper into the past, his choices resembled those of the past Hwasan.

And he feared that the results might become the same.

«So what.»

Chung Myung shrugged once again.

«If I were truly a great leader, I might say it's fine. But honestly, I'm a narrow-minded and selfish person. I can't stand the thought of us sacrificing everything and others reaping the benefits. Maybe I just need to become a bit more cowardly.»

«You...»

«It would be the right thing to do.»

Chung Myung smirked.

«Those damn bastards won't change now just because they say they'll behave. They won't sacrifice themselves even if told to, fight only as much as others. So, I have to stop them. To make it less dangerous, less difficult.»

«But... didn't you say that by doing so, you can't defeat Demonic Cult?»

«I might find another way. There was never an answer to begin with.»

«Quite irresponsible.»

«I know.»

Chung Myung sighed.

«But this is my limit. It's getting too difficult. The only option left is to discuss it with that bald man. He may not be reliable, but he might see the situation from some angles better than I do.»

Tang Gunak looked at Chung Myung with heavy, sinking eyes.

«... You've become an adult.»

«It sounds like I've become cowardly.»

«If it's praise, then it's praise. You can't live on ambitious alone forever.»

A bitter smile appeared on Chung Myung's lips.

The answer came easily. He simply reflected on what he had always wanted to protect the most.

What he wanted to protect was not Gangho, not the Central Plains, not the whole world. It was Hwasan, Hwasan's disciples, and Hwasan's future.

Wasn't it Chung Myung who vehemently opposed Chung Mun's words that to protect the future of Hwasan, one must protect the whole world?

But at some point, he found himself on the same path as Chung Mun. Now, he needed to change that path.

«Do you share the same thoughts, Alliance Leader?»

«I am just a humble person.»

Hyun Jong nodded.

«As Chung Myung said. I may not dare to claim to be the parent of those kids, but is there any parent in the world who would wish for their child's blood to bring peace to the world?»

«...»

«I just wish even a little less blood would be shed by those kids. Even if it means others will shed more blood as the cost of my choices... That's the burden of guilt I have to bear.»

«I understand. Completely.»

Tang Gunak closed his eyes, lowering his head. They had to protect the commoners and safeguard Gangho. But just as Tangga was to Tang Gunak, the disciples of Hwasan were also those they had to protect.

Perhaps, even more precious than everything in the world.

Forcing them into danger while pushing righteousness might be an absurd act leading to an even more absurd result.

Therefore, Tang Gunak understood their decision. Both of them were individuals who found Hwasan the most important, which likely led them to make such a choice.

«I understand your intentions.»

Not much would change.

They were simply moving into a larger fence. There, Hwasan, now part of the Gupailbang, would be, and Tangga and Namgung clan, who had joined as the leaders of Five Great Families, as well as the outer palaces and Nokrim, would be there as well.

The connection wouldn't disappear just because the name changed.

So, there was only one thing that changed.

«All right.»

Tang Gunak spoke a bit sorrowfully, reluctantly parting his lips.

«So... Cheonumaeng ends here.»

Everyone who heard that statement simply closed their eyes.

As if they couldn't bear to look at each other's faces.