

## Chapter 1170

Have I really been wrong? (5)

After the Abbot left, those remaining in the room scattered in uncertain silence, without discussing anything but silently agreeing on the need to organize their thoughts individually. Remaining in the room were only Hyun Jong, the Sect Leader of Hwasan, and the elders.

«Sect Leader.»

As Hyun Sang spoke up, Hyun Jong, who had been silently contemplating with a profound expression on his face, raised his head to look at him.

«...What do you think of the Abbot's words?»

Hyun Jong, still looking at a flickering lantern, opened his mouth with a heavy voice.

«Hyun Sang.»

«Yes, Sect Leader.»

«...Don't you think that wick in the lantern behind you is quite worn out?»

Hyun Sang glanced at the lantern and nodded.

«I'll replace it tomorrow.»

«If the wick is completely worn out, replacing it should suffice. But what if something that cannot be replaced wears out?»

Hyun Sang fell silent. He understood that Hyun Jong's concern went beyond a mere wick.

With a bitter expression, Hyun Jong murmured,

«It's a fact we knew but turned away from. That's why the Abbot's words hurt even more.»

A sigh escaped from Hyun Sang's lips. Even Hyun Young, who would usually retort at this point, now kept his mouth shut with a stern expression.

«We all knew, didn't we?»

«...»

«The current state of Hwasan is like a lantern burning Chung Myung as its wick. The more brightly the wick burns, the greater the light it emits. However, as the light shines brighter, the wick wears out faster.»

«Who said to burn it like that?»

Hyun Young burst out indignantly.

«Didn't I tell him to stop! I said it's not necessary several times! Yet, even when I told him, why does he keep acting recklessly? How are we supposed to handle him when he continues to run wild! There needs to be a way to stop him for him to actually stop!»

Hyun Young, who usually cherished Chung Myung more than anyone in Hwasan, was blatantly expressing such criticisms for a reason. He was concerned and worried about Hyun Jong, who was blaming himself.

«Hyun Young.»

«He was originally...»

«Was there really no way to stop him?»

Hyun Jong's words made Hyun Young briefly fall silent before he tightly sealed his lips.

«You know, and I know. There must have been some way to stop him.»

Hyun Jong knows. Chung Myung may resist his orders, and certainly, there might be attempts to rebel or persuade him. However, if the situation comes to a point where the gap in their opinions cannot be narrowed, Chung Myung will ultimately try to follow Hyun Jong's words.

That's why Hyun Jong has always lived with gratitude towards Chung Myung, hasn't he? 'It was consideration.'

No, perhaps it's a belief.

But at this moment, the consideration and belief that he had only felt grateful for until now were now piercing Hyun Jong's heart.

He couldn't deny it. It's a fact that the one who relentlessly drove Chung Myung and Ogeom to their death all these years is none other than Hyun Jong.

«Sect Leader.»

Hyun Sang sighed and spoke.

«Don't blame yourself. Anyone might have ended up doing the same.»

«...Right.»

«Chung Myung is not someone we can measure by our standards. Isn't he a child who is recognized as superior by the Abbot of Shaolin himself?»

Hyun Jong gave a bitter smile.

Indeed, it would be comforting to think that way.

But Hyun Jong knows. The person named Chung Myung possesses an incredibly strong side and, at the same time, an incomprehensibly weak one.

Hyun Young spoke with an irritated tone.

«So, what will you do? Will you accept the Abbot's proposal?»

«Well, I don't know.»

«I don't like it. That man may apologize and claim to acknowledge his mistakes, but how can we believe those words? It's probably just a scheme to pull Cheonumaeng under their control.»

«True. It could be seen that way.»

Hyun Jong sighed.

«But didn't the Abbot already respond to those suspicions? If their ambition is directed towards a cause like preserving the world, we have no justification to refuse.»

«Justification, justification! What's so important about those damn justifications!»

Hyun Young exclaimed with an irritated voice.

«I'm sick of hearing about those justifications. It's nauseating! Why should we be tormented so much by that damn justice and reasons that others don't even bother with?»

«Hyun Young...»

«How did we create Cheonumaeng!»

Hyun Young bit his lips tightly.

«Yes, I understand! It was not us who created Cheonumaeng, but that bastard Chung Myung! So, if he says we should do it that way, then we should. But shouldn't we be first to step forward and suggest dismantling Cheonumaeng?!»

Hyun Jong let out a deep sigh.

«Hyun Young... Chung Myung...»

«If Chung Myung is not the one to do it, should we be the first to throw everything away?»

Hyun Jong gave a bitter smile.

«Think carefully about what the Abbot said. Isn't Chung Myung the type who won't hesitate to carry the burden on his shoulders even if it's unbearable?»

«Then shouldn't we make sure he isn't carrying that burden! There are so many paths in the world. Do we have no choice but to follow the path of dismantling Cheonumaeng and crawling into Gupailbang?»

Hyun Jong was about to say something, but Hyun Young, with an expression that suggested he still had more to say, glared at him with an angered look.

«There's a way to compromise while protecting what needs to be protected. Why does it always have to be so extreme!»

«It's not just about protecting Chung Myung. Don't you understand? The Abbot's words about Cheonumaeng and Gupailbang uniting to save the people of the Central Plains, isn't there truth in that?»

«If that's the right thing to do, should we just throw away everything we've done so far and bow our heads now?»

«Hyun Young... we are Taoists.»

«Yes, Taoists. Where in the world would there be Taoists like us? Fellow Taoists from Wudang are gathering wealth and power, and the inviolable Shaolin is standing tall in the North, yet we, Taoists, are rolling our rice bowls and kicking them away. Yes! Why wouldn't we?»

“...”

«What has changed by protecting that pride as a so-called Taoist? Do you know it's been just a few years since we couldn't even properly feed the disciples who came in as novices?»

«Enough.»

«Sect Leader! Honestly, have you never harbored resentment? Have you never resented those predecessors who turned the once prestigious sect into a mess, who irresponsibly took in disciples and then cast them aside? Not even once?»

Hyun Jong tightly closed his eyes.

Why wouldn't he have? The nights spent in resentment were countless, and with just ten fingers, he couldn't count them all.

«The current Hwasan is not that bad.»

«Yes. But the previous Hwasan was great. It was even more formidable than now.»

«...»

Hyun Young bit his lips and continued.

«I don't know, Sect Leader. I really don't know.»

«Hyun Young...»

«I've lived my whole life as a Taoist of Hwasan. But now, I don't even know what being a Taoist means anymore. When I first entered Hwasan, my purpose was clear, but now, I can't even remember why I became a Taoist.»

A sigh escaped from Hyun Jong. It wasn't disappointment in Hyun Young's words. On the contrary, he empathized with them.

«Do we have to sacrifice our children again for this unknown Tao? Do we have to tell them to give up? Do we have to say that?»

Hyun Jong lowered his head.

«Hyun Young, Hwasan... Hwasan we intended to create, wasn't it supposed to be a place like that? Even our predecessors...»

«Yes, Sect Leader. Our predecessors thought so too. So we have to do the same. We have to tell the children that they should give up and let go. It's the path and righteousness for everyone.»

«...»

«But Sect Leader, because of the principles and morals Hwasan sought to protect, the sect was completely ruined. And miraculously, we've come back to this point.»

Hyun Young bit his lips.

«And... the choice you made now will also be a guide for the children left behind in Hwasan. That's what they should learn, the right thing to do.»

«I...»

«Someday, this choice might lead to the downfall of Hwasan again. If that happens, our descendants will have to go through the pain we experienced all over again.»

Hyun Jong closed his eyes. This statement was more painful and bitter than any words he had heard before.

«No, it might be worse. At least, we were lucky enough to meet Chung Myung and avoid seeing Hwasan's downfall with our own eyes. But will the future children have someone like Chung Myung? If luck doesn't favor them like it did for us, they might have to witness even worse outcomes.»

«Stop it, you bastard!»

«What! Why should I stop?»

When Hyun Sang yelled, Hyun Young faced him without backing down.

«Don't be delusional, Sect Leader! Sect Leader, who can discuss and argue about the Tao and righteousness in that place, is not because Sect Leader has been guarding and passing

down the Tao for a long time. It's because, thanks to the kid who fell from the sky, Sect Leader, who should have been kicked out like a beggar, can pretend to be a great Taoist.»

«You little...»

«Hyun Sang!»

«No, isn't it too much to say?»

As Hyun Sang went wild, Hyun Young glared at him, clenching his teeth.

«Did I say something wrong?»

«Hey, you. Even if it's like that, there's something to say...»

«Are you uncomfortable hearing the preachings of those who follow such great Tao, righteousness, and conscience? Do you not want to hear the fine words of those who have been living off the toil of the children?»

Hyun Sang fell silent. Hyun Young glared at Hyun Jong with slightly bloodshot eyes.

«If you want to discuss righteousness, Tao, and conscience so much, achieve something with your fancy righteousness and principles. Before you sit on that luxurious bed earned with the children's blood and discuss your greatness!»

Hyun Jong's head involuntarily lowered.

And in that moment, Hyun Young's voice reached his ears.

«What is right for the current Sect Leader may not have been the same for the Sect Leader from a few years ago. For the Sect Leader who was having sleepless nights because he had to take down the plaque of Hwasan.»

«...»

«If it's not the same, there's only one reason. The things the children earned with their blood have now bore the results that made Sect Leader's stomach full of oil. Isn't that the only reason?»

«Can't you shut up, you!»

Unable to endure any longer, Hyun Sang rose, his eyes emitting a sinister energy.

«You keep saying listen, listen, and you have nothing decent to say! Since when did you become so insolent? How dare you say that to the Sect Leader?»

«Yes, truly 'dare.'»

However, Hyun Young only stared at Hyun Sang and Hyun Jong with cold eyes.

«How could I dare to say such things to His Excellency Sect Leader Hyun Jong, who is acclaimed throughout Gangho for his righteousness and principles? After all, regardless of the choice made, it is we who will have to follow. But, Sect Leader, at least please think before making a decision. Whether throwing away what those children have earned in the name of righteousness is just the self-satisfaction of a Sect Leader who wants to be upright.»

Having said that, Hyun Young opened the door forcefully and left.

Hyun Jong, watching Hyun Young's departing figure in the chilly wind, closed his eyes tightly. A heavy sigh escaped his lips.