

Chapter 1033

We won't be by his side. (3)

Sometimes the sky made Chung Myung sad.

Sitting by Hyun Jong's side right now and looking at the sky is no different from what he saw when he poured harsh words on Chung Mun and turned away.

Chung Myung occasionally felt confused. Despite living so diligently without a moment to rest, he always carried a deep sense of alienation in his heart. Even if he wanted to break free, this stubborn sense of unease clung to him.

Waking up at the usual time, getting dressed out of habit, and going outside sometimes made the faces he saw seem unfamiliar, causing his body to tremble for a moment. These unfamiliar faces, both familiar and strange, sometimes left his heart in turmoil.

He lived in the present, but still dwelled in the past, living in the past but isolated from this reality. Why did he have to come back to life? Why did it have to be this way?

Chung Myung, staring blankly at the sky, slowly spoke,

«It's not because of Hwasan, Sect Leader.»

What if it had been Chung Mun's response? Chung Myung felt like he knew that answer, but he intentionally didn't bring it to mind.

Not now. Because it's not the right time. It's not time to follow Chung Mun's response, but a time to give his own response.

He is Hwasan's sword, the one with the sharpest blade, cutting down Hwasan's enemies.

However, at this moment, he must not be the sword of Hwasan.

He is the disciple of Hwasan, as well as the predecessor of Hwasan. Follower and leader alike.

And above all, he is just a person named Chung Myung.

Chung Myung spoke calmly,

«Hwasan's responsibilities, the reputation it must achieve, and the spirit it must carry forward... At least to me, they are not worth more than the life of a single disciple.»

Without necessarily following the answer that Chung Mun would have given, he sought his own response.

He incorporated all the thoughts he had about the Hwasan he gazed at, and in doing so, it was an amusing thing.

The answer he arrived at was not much different from what Chung Mun might have said.

«Righteousness, you say?»

Chung Myung mumbled and smiled.

— Perhaps there was such a thing at the beginning.

«At first... Yes, maybe there was.»

— But now, all that's left is worn down. Do you know what it is?

«But now, I think it doesn't really matter. All that's left for me is just one thing.»

Chung Myung's calm response made Hyun Jong ask quietly,

«What is that?»

Chung Myung's lips parted, just like Chung Mun's on that day.

— The future.

«Hwasan's disciples.»

Back then, he didn't understand what Chung Mun meant by 'the future.' But now, he knows.

For Chung Mun, the future were the young disciples left in Hwasan.

For him, it was something he must have protected at all costs, even if it meant sacrificing anything else.

With his eyes tightly closed, Chung Myung continued,

«Sect Leader, you said.»

Hyun Jong's question echoed the doubts he had in the past.

«Is our pride in our righteousness we're about to obtain more important than the days those kids have to live in the future?»

- Can what we gain fill the void of what was lost?

- I don't know what meaning there is in gaining something while losing what we shouldn't lose.

Chung Myung had said it like that. And he had also said harsh things that he didn't need to say.

- I won't be able to accept this decision until the moment I die.

That's right. It was like that.

He couldn't accept it because he couldn't understand it. Their visions of the world were different.

But now, he has to answer.

The answer he couldn't give Chung Mun that day. The answer he can now give as the present him to the past Meahwa Geomjon, who needed it.

«If I could.»

His true feelings, which he had never revealed to anyone.

«...I want to run away too, Sect Leader.»

Hyun Jong stared at Chung Myung in a daze for a moment.

His emotions also surged as he poured out his words, but he never imagined that Chung Myung would say such a thing.

It was unimaginable because it was Chung Myung, no one else.

«If running away could solve the problem, if it was something that could be avoided by running away, I would want to turn around and go back to Hwasan right now without looking back. I want to close my eyes and ears right now.»

«...»

«Because it's scary.»

Chung Myung's fingertips trembled.

«I'm scared, Sect Leader. I'm so scared. I'm scared of those inhuman things, and the one behind them. The one who will come someday... I'm terrified.»

«...Chung Myung.»

«But what's even scarier than that...»

He bit his lip.

«Is the sight of me, unable to protect anything, facing everyone's death with my own eyes.»

He could only hope for the day when he could escape from that nightmare.

The day when everyone he had tried to protect were dying at the hands of Cheonma. The nightmare from that time when he alone survived and screamed at the Heavenly Demon.

But...

Recent nightmares have become even more terrifying.

Everyone dies at the hands of Cheonma who came to Hwasan.

Hyun Jong, Hyun Young, Hyun Sang. Baek Cheon, Yu Iseol, Yoon Jong, Jo Geol. Hye Yeon and Tang Soso too.

Their lives crumbled in the face of that fierce evil. His blood-stained hands couldn't protect anything.

Yes, once again.

When he woke up screaming, the cold air hit his face.

He would shiver until the sun came up.

How could he not be scared?

He was afraid that the dream would become reality, afraid that he would lose everything helplessly once again.

«Why do you have to fight?»

«...»

«Because there are things you need to protect.»

When he closed his eyes, it felt like Chung Mun was smiling at him.

A face filled with concern, and a calm smile on his lips. It was a face that Chung Myung knew, yet didn't know.

«If no one else can do it, then I have to do it myself. If no one will protect us, then I have to protect myself. It's not because it's Hwasan.»

«...»

«It's because it's me, Sect Leader. That's why I have to go.»

Hyun Jong lowered his head. What could he say in response to this?

«Sometimes...»

Chung Myung hesitated for a moment and then continued.

«Not avoiding may seem foolish. There may be times when it seems slow and foolish. But... as time passes and you look back, you'll realize that the path of the seemingly foolish is the fastest.»

Has he changed? Well, he is not sure yet.

Chung Myung simply understands now. He has simply found the reason to fight.

When he hears the word «Magyo,» his blood still boils. But now he knows. It's not just because of a desire for revenge against the past.

It's because they will once again try to take away the things he's trying to protect.

Chung Myung gritted his teeth.

«I'm still afraid, I'm terrified. Crossing that river is scarier than jumping into a pit of fire.»

«...»

«But... waiting in a seated position for the inevitable outcome is scarier than that. The ending that I will eventually face because I didn't do what I should have done at this moment, the regret I will feel at that moment... that's a hundred times scarier.»

This time, it won't be taken away like it was back then. Never.

That's why he must go.

Hyun Jong slowly nodded.

There were so many things omitted from Chung Myung's story, making it seem as elusive as catching a cloud. But he understood what Chung Myung wanted to say.

Some things can't be conveyed through words and logic alone.

«It's difficult.»

«...»

«Truly... it's truly difficult.»

Hyun Jong's voice was filled with deep contemplation.

He still couldn't fully understand. What's right and what's wrong.

But he was certain that he couldn't break Chung Myung's determination. So...

Just then, Baek Cheon's voice was heard from behind.

«You have to go because of what you said. It's your will.»

Hyun Jong and Chung Myung looked back at Baek Cheon. Despite their gaze, Baek Cheon remained composed.

«If that's the case.»

He raised his firm resolve.

«You can't stop me from heading across the river on my own will.»

«.....Huh?»

Baek Cheon shrugged his shoulders.

“Aren't you being presumptuous to say that only you have the qualification to protect the disciples of Hwasan?”

“That's a valid point.”

“That's certainly a valid point.”

“But even so, it’s about the Three Great Disciples, right?”

Upon hearing that, Chung Myung asked in a daze.

“...No. What do you mean, you are the youngest...”

“You’re the youngest one, you bastard.”

When Jo Geol got annoyed, Baek Cheon patted his shoulders a couple of times and continued speaking.

“I get what you’re saying. If you don’t run to Gangnam right now and do something, someday, they’ll become an unstoppable force, and it will swallow even Shaanxi, isn’t that what you’re saying?”

“...Right.”

«Then I’m going too.»

«No...»

«Listen to me carefully, you idiot.»

Baek Cheon firmly interrupted him.

«It’s not just you who can’t stand waiting in the background, hoping someone will protect you.»

Chung Myung fell silent, momentarily unable to speak. Baek Cheon continued.

«The reason I learned the sword is that I wanted to be the one to protect.»

«Sasuk.»

«If you want to fight by your will, then fine. I won’t stop you. Instead!»

Baek Cheon’s voice struck Chung Myung’s heart like a sharp blade.

«I’ll also choose to fight by my will.»

Everyone who had been standing behind Baek Cheon nodded.

Yu Iseol, Yoon Jong, Jo Geol, Tang Soso. Even Hye Yeon, who had stayed on the sidelines during the conversation, now looked at Chung Myung with a firm determination in his eyes. Watching them blankly, Chung Myung unconsciously nodded.

«...Those little chicks...»

«If you want to stop it, try to stop it.»

With a deep sigh, Chung Myung slowly got up.

Baek Cheon instinctively placed his hand on his sword. He thought that with that guy, he could knock them out and head across the river alone.

But Chung Myung just turned his head to look at the river.

«Let’s finish the rest of the talk later.»

«...Huh?»

«Because the guest is here.»

At those words, everyone stared toward the river. In the thick night, a small boat appeared in the middle of the river. It was approaching them at a not very fast pace.

Chung Myung muttered,

«Even though he's annoying to call 'the guest'... I guess we should at least hear what he has to say. Let's decide after listening. Whether I should tear that big mouth apart or...»

Baek Cheon's face hardened.

It was now clearly visible in his eyes.

A little boat floating on the dark, ink-colored river, and on top of it, vivid blood-red clothing fluttering like feathers. It seemed like the only vivid thing in the whole world.

«...Jang Ilso.»

Baek Cheon murmured as if in pain.

Chung Myung stared at the approaching Jang Ilso with a cold gaze.