

Chapter 1116

I've already prepared for that! (1)

Generally, the way people look at each other tends to be somewhat consistent.

Whether it's a mother looking at her grown up child, a father looking at his lovely daughter, or a teacher observing an impressive disciple, most often, the expressions are somewhat uniform in various situations.

However, the way these individuals here were looking at Chung Myung was immensely complicated.

"Why?"

And Chung Myung seemed entirely unable to comprehend why they were giving him such looks.

"Why do you look at people like that?"

Finally, a groan escaped from Hyun Jong's lips. He felt a surge of frustration seeing Chung Myung looking back with innocent, bright eyes, as if saying there is no fault on his part.

But Hyun Jong was a Taoist. Therefore, he carefully voiced his thoughts as calmly as possible.

"Chung Myung..."

"Yes?"

"It seems like there might be a slight problem in the Alliance right now."

"A problem? Here?"

Chung Myung tilted his head, completely oblivious to what was going on.

Unconsciously, Hyun Jong found himself looking at Chung Myung's expression again, and he lamented his own foolishness. What was the use of looking at that face? Was he trying to overturn his already turned-over insides once more?

"Sigh..."

Unable to continue due to his frustration, Hyun Jong's distress erupted, and with a bitter smile, he began speaking. Wasn't that a part of an elder's role to articulate words when needed?

"I am concerned about what's happening within Cheonumaeng."

"Oh, that?"

Chung Myung nodded as if understanding.

"Definitely a cause for concern. I understand what Sect Leader is talking about."

"You do?"

Hyun Jong gave Chung Myung a skeptical look. This kid wasn't usually so quick to catch on...

And once again, Chung Myung didn't disappoint Hyun Jong's expectations.

“You’re concerned that due to focusing only on practical combat, the fundamental training might be lacking. I’ve been thinking about that aspect too.”

“...”

“Huh. It’s not easy. Both aspects should be balanced. If you lean too much towards one side, it’s not good... Maybe I should cut back on sleep.”

“If you do that, you’ll end up dead...”

“Ah, people don’t die that easily. They don’t, they don’t.”

Chung Myung waved his hand as if to say there was no chance, and Hyun Jong thumped his chest in frustration as he glared at Chung Myung.

“Hey, you! Do you have any idea how our disciples have been treating each other lately?”

“Huh?”

“It’s lucky they’re just fighting in the training ground! There have been three stabbings in the dining hall in the last three days! Two brawls broke out in the next hall and side courtyard instead of them being asleep!”

“...”

“And! If they fight, they should fight decently! Instead, they destroyed walls in rented manor, smashed roofs, and even set fires?”

“Huh, the fire part is a bit extreme.”

Hwasan’s disciples already had an experience of their sect being blown up due to those damned demonic bastards setting fire on mount Hwa. Just hearing about fires made them wake up drenched in cold sweat even while asleep.

Ah, so that’s why.

It must be Im Sobyong. This is undoubtedly Im Sobyong. He’s someone not to be underestimated...

“What on earth are they doing? This! It’s gotten to the point where the repair costs more than renting the manor!”

“Well, we are earning a lot of money too.”

“Is this about money? Money?”

“Yeah!”

At that moment, Hyun Young burst in with a loud shout, rushing to assist Hyun Jong. Startled, Hyun Jong turned his head to look at Hyun Young. This person usually never sides with him?

“Hey, you! No matter how much money you have, if you spend it recklessly, you’ll end up like a beggar! The more you have, the more you should know how to save! That way, your retirement will be comfortable!”

... Was it directed at him?

Hyun Jong exhaled deeply, wearing a face that suggested it might have been.

“Chung Myung.”

“Yes, Sect Leader?”

“I am genuinely worried.”

Hyun Jong’s expression turned serious, but Chung Myung’s face remained endlessly cheerful.

“Fights break out almost every day.”

“Well, kids usually grow up fighting.”

“And there are quite a few injuries.”

“Kids can get hurt while fighting.”

“...Emotions are deteriorating between them.”

“Well, kids often have their grudges but then reconcile the next day...”

“Listen seriously for once!”

Seeing Chung Myung respond by picking his ear, Hyun Jong finally exploded. He grabbed the back of his stiffening neck.

“Argh!”

“Oh, Sect Leader! You’re old, why do you keep getting so excited?”

“Sigh...”

Hyun Jong breathed heavily and looked at Chung Myung. But whether Hyun Jong did or didn’t, Chung Myung remained as innocent-looking as ever, as if asking, ‘Did I do something wrong?’

‘That abominable... ‘

At times like this, he really wanted to kick something. For Hyun Jong, the greatest misfortune lay in the fact that the being giving him joy and the one causing him most distress were the same.

“Hey, you!”

“Yes?”

“What kind of place is Cheonumaeng?”

Hyun Jong spoke partly admonishingly, partly indignantly.

“Didn’t you clearly say with your own mouth that it’s a place where everyone becomes friends with one another?”

“Did I... say that?”

“Yes!”

“Oh, I remember now. Do I remember?”

“Sigh...”

Hyun Jong, as if restraining himself from bursting into anger, took a deep breath and continued.

“But what did you actually do after gathering everyone? All you did was provoke fights and incite division within the Alliance! Isn’t that causing Cheonumaeng to be divided even more?”

“Divided?”

Chung Myung’s eyes widened upon hearing that.

“Yeah! Isn’t it being divided?”

“No, Sect Leader. What do you mean by that?”

Chung Myung asked, as if hearing such an absurd statement for the first time in his life,

“They’ve never properly bonded in the first place, and you talk about division? No, one should raise their offspring first, whether to marry off or to send them to a household.”

“What kind of analogy is that for a Taoist monk?”

“But that’s the truth.”

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders.

“It’s an exaggeration. Have we ever been close with Nokrim or Namgung? We haven’t even been close with Tangga.”

“But we’re close.”

“Sect Leader and the Lord are close.”

“No, even the kids...”

“Huh?”

Chung Myung chuckled, looking at Hyun Jong.

“Oh my. They’re such good friends, yet they fight as if they want to strangle each other over a small jab. Hiya! The dignity of the Central Plains’ Tao has fallen. There’s no need for curses against those young rascals.”

Hyun Jong became speechless, staring at Chung Myung as if struck dumb. Actually, that statement wasn’t entirely wrong. If Cheonumaeng had truly been on good terms, this situation wouldn’t have escalated this far.

In truth, Cheonumaeng was a place where friendships couldn’t exist naturally.

No matter how much the leaders of the factions decided about the affairs of the sects, it didn’t mean hearts followed suit. Just because the leaders of each sect had agreed to unite didn’t mean the barriers in the hearts of their disciples would break down.

However, agreeing with Chung Myung’s words wasn’t something he could do.

“So, shouldn’t we make sure these kinds of incidents don’t happen at all?”

“Why?”

“If they aren’t close, shouldn’t we make them closer? But instead, engaging in unnecessary fights will only worsen their relationship, won’t it?”

“What are you saying?”

“Huh?”

This time, Chung Myung tilted his head genuinely puzzled, it seemed like he was not joking.

“Is there a better way for people to become close than engaging in fights?”

“Uh?”

“Usually, after exchanging a few punches, people become quite close.”

Hyun Jong, staring blankly at Chung Myung, suddenly seemed to grasp something.

“Is it possible that, Chung Myung...?”

“Yes?”

“That thing you mentioned about getting close... could it be when the other party doesn't object or suddenly becomes more friendly...?”

“That's right. We even share drinks.”

“...”

“And meals.”

“...”

Hyun Jong closed his eyes tightly. Tears gathered at the corners of his eyes.

What kind of life did this kid lead before stepping into Hwasan? What kind of underworld did he live in to acquire such a mindset?

«Isn't that submission rather than getting close?»

«That's the same thing, isn't it?»

At that moment, Chung Myung smirked.

«Sect Leader, what do you think is the fundamental reason these guys are fighting right now?»

«Because of your meddling.»

«...»

«Isn't it?»

«Well... to a certain extent, a very small part, that might be true, but it's not the fundamental reason.»

Chung Myung cut in sharply.

«Sect Leader, we might be Taoists, but before that, we are martial artists.»

«What's that supposed to mean?»

«Martial masters are a type of people that live by the spirit of wanting to test who is stronger out of sheer competitive spirit.»

Hyun Jong fell silent. Chung Myung chuckled as he saw his expression.

«Gathering these energetic youngsters and expecting them to just respect each other and live peacefully? If there's an underlying issue waiting to explode someday, it's better to burst it sooner and clean it up.»

Hyun Jong stared at Chung Myung incredulously.

“So, are you saying... they're competing for hierarchy?”

“In a way, yes.”

“No, they're not some village dogs vying for hierarchy...”

“Nah, it's the other way around.”

Chung Myung waved his hand.

“How can humans not engage in what even village dogs do? That's just too natural.”

“...”

“The notion of ‘our side is stronger’ never disappears, regardless of time or place. It's better to let them fight than to forcibly suppress it.”

Hyun Jong was left speechless.

“This... No, this...”

If said by someone else, it had a certain coherence with the logic of Taoism. Taoism naturally doesn't go against the flow. Be it the flow of the world or the human heart, forcibly resisting it only fans the flames of anger.

‘If someone else had said these words, they would have been praised for their wisdom...’

The problem is, this guy here sees the sacred Taoist philosophy as some sort of twisted excuse to reinforce his own sophistry.

“The words... well, they make sense. Ahem!”

However, Hyun Jong, the devoted follower of the Tao, found it too difficult to counter this argument. After carefully choosing his words multiple times in his mind, he finally managed to speak up.

«But... yes. Even so, wouldn't it be better for us to get along well? Wouldn't it be more like following the natural order?»

«What?»

Chung Myung displayed a peculiar expression.

«So, are you suggesting that we should pretend to be close on the surface, regardless of what we truly think inside? Is that what you mean?»

«Well, not to that extent.»

«That's good. Of course, that's not a bad idea.»

«Huh?»

Hyun Jong tilted his head in surprise at the unexpected response. What on earth was this child trying to say?

Sure enough, a wicked smile appeared on Chung Myung's lips.

«However, maintaining appearances, boasting about their own greatness while outwardly pretending to be close, that's the place I know very well. That... place where they are hypocritically laughing and pretending to get along while carrying on about their self-proclaimed achievements.»

«...»

«I know that place quite well. Have you heard of the 'Gupailbang' by any chance?»

For a moment, Hyun Jong's inner turmoil erupted, and he covered his face with his hands.

«Oh, if the Sect Leader wishes to be like the Gupailbang, what can a disciple like me do about it? You might step into the world of hypocrisy and pretense, with tears, beyond...»

«Enough, you rascal!»

Chuckle, chuckle.

Chung Myung, having thoroughly stirred up Hyun Jong, cleared his throat and spoke with a hint of seriousness,

«Sect Leader wouldn't truly wish for that, right?»

Unable to do anything else, Hyun Jong simply nodded his head.