

## Chapter 1176

I have something to tell you. (1)

Chung Myung laughed.

«Anyway, Dong Ryong-ah, you should acknowledge your own confidence. Are you still lacking even after becoming stronger? Well, if we think about the past...»

«I told you not to talk about the past. I clearly said that.»

«Oops! Yes, yes. Will you forgive me?»

Feigning fear at Baek Cheon rolling his eyes, Chung Myung raised both hands pretending to be scared. When Baek Cheon sighed deeply, Chung Myung burst into laughter and took a sip of his drink.

After a while, as Chung Myung slowly lowered the bottle, he spoke in a slightly warm tone.

«Sasuks... and Sahyeongs are all doing well.»

«...»

«I'm not just saying this, I really think so. We can't do better than this. They endured hell so desperately.»

«I suppose so.»

«It's a bit complicated. Watching them, you sometimes think, 'How can they train so lightly? Are they really human?' And other times, 'They don't seem to do anything other than training. They really put in the effort.'»

«...»

«Decide on one thing, just one. Choose one.»

Chung Myung chuckled.

«I know. Everyone is working so hard that their bones break. And that I am trying to be even more helpful.»

Honestly, it's admirable.

Despite always feeling inadequate and lacking, Chung Myung knows. They are all doing their best to support him.

«But it's just that what we have to bear is too great. Even if we all share the burden, it's still overwhelming for everyone.»

«Still.»

«It becomes a source of strength.»

Chung Myung pressed his fist against his mouth as if he had said something he shouldn't have. Then, exhaling a long breath through his nose, he continued.

«I didn't do everything alone. I'm just someone who can't do anything if I'm alone.»

It was a sincere confession.

Chung Myung knows that whenever he does something, there's always someone by his side. When he stood at the forefront of Hwasan, Chung Mun led the way, and Chung Jin supported him from behind. When facing formidable enemies, Tang Bo protected his back.

Without them, Chung Myung would have been nothing more than a powerful swordsman. It was because of them that Chung Myung could become the Sword Saint.

«If it weren't for Sasuk, Sago, and Sahyeongs, I wouldn't have come this far. Of course, including Sect Leader and the elders, and all the other people from Hwasan.»

Words that he wouldn't normally say, spilled out.

Maybe when tomorrow morning comes, he'd want to erase the time when he said those words forever. But for now, he just wanted to speak his mind.

«Especially Sasuk, I have a lot to be thankful for.»

«Is this how you are?»

«...Erase that. I must have blacked out for a moment.»

Chung Myung chuckled slightly and shook his head.

«Anyway, there's no need to worry about useless thoughts. Sasuk is doing perfectly well in what he needs to do. Nothing more to wish for.»

«A young kid just flapping his gums.»

«I'm an adult.»

«Sure, keep blabbering.»

Chung Myung smiled softly, looking up at the moon.

Maybe he can never truly become an adult. That thought still remains the same. However, even someone like him needs to act like an adult at times.

When younger ones look up to him, their eyes filled with trust and belief. At those times, even if he hasn't completely grown up, he should at least straighten his shoulders and pretend to be a reliable person.

Maybe everyone is like that?

As more and more people come to believe in themselves as adults, even if they haven't truly become adults, do they naturally start living by pretending to be adults?

If there was Chung Mun, if there was Chung Jin, or if by any chance there was also Tang Bo, Chung Myung might still be the crazy guy of Hwasan who hasn't matured, only growing older.

But here, there is neither Chung Mun nor Chung Jin, not even Tang Bo.

All that remains for Chung Myung are children who are looking up to him, not yet fully grown, perhaps someday unfolding their talents like wings and shining brightly.

So, shouldn't he straighten his shoulders even though they are not fully grown yet? Shouldn't he stand up tall with his back straight, even if he feels incredibly immature?

'So this is what it felt like, Sahyeong.'

He seems to understand.

Why Chung Mun looked so imposing. Why he seemed so unwavering.

Maybe what depicted Chung Mun was Chung Myung's gaze upon him. When Chung Mun guided Chung Myung, he unknowingly pushed Chung Mun forward.

There is no such thing as a one-sided relationship in the world. Even seemingly meaningless things have their own significance.

Just like this seemingly trivial conversation and jokes are lifting the sense of oppression in Chung Myung's head, as if clearing away the fog of discomfort he used to feel.

'So, I should become a bit more of an adult too.'

A small smile formed on Chung Myung's lips.

"While living, there are times when even Dong Ryong helps."

"... Are you asking for a fight?"

"It's a compliment."

"You're a real pain."

Baek Cheon muttered with a bitter expression. Seeing him like that, Chung Myung chuckled.

"Don't worry. Everything will be fine."

"..."

"Whether it's Sapaeryeon or the bastards from Demonic Cult, I'm going to crush them all.

And someday, I'll make Hwasan the best sect in the world."

Chung Myung let out a deep sigh.

"Of course, knowing that the head of that sect will be Sasuk or Yoon Jong Sahyeong is quite heartbreaking."

"Then, it's up to you!"

"... Really?"

"No. Forget that. Please erase it from your memory. I beg you."

Chung Myung chuckled as he saw Baek Cheon, who was alarmed and serious. Then...

"Hutcha!"

He stood up abruptly.

"... Why did you get up?"

"My thoughts became clear."

"Huh?"

Chung Myung shrugged.

"I couldn't understand why I was worried like this. Thanks, Sasuk. I appreciate it."

"What are you talking about?"

Baek Cheon looked at Chung Myung with a bewildered expression.

"We still have some liquor left."

"Oh?"

Chung Myung, holding the bottle in his hand, took a sip, then leaned back, pouring the alcohol down his throat.

"Khaaaa!"

He emptied the bottle in one go, shaking the empty bottle with a smirk.

“You...!”

“Ahahaha!”

Chung Myung, who smiled slyly, jumped down from the eaves.

“Sasuk, don’t waste your time. Go and rest quickly. We’ll be training the same way tomorrow.”

“... Even if someone worries about you.”

“Who’s worrying about whom? Sasuk, about me? Oh, I’m so overwhelmed I don’t know where to put myself.”

“But what about this bastard?”

“Thanks.”

Chung Myung turned slightly.

“See you tomorrow, Sasuk.”

And without looking back, he briskly walked away.

“Hey, you! I haven’t finished talking yet...”

Although Baek Cheon called out, Chung Myung never looked back.

“That bastard...”

Baek Cheon, who had been staring blankly at his back, eventually lowered his head. Then, he raised his head to gaze at the moon.

The moon, obscured by clouds, emitted a faint light.

“... Leave some alcohol at least.”

His disappointed voice echoed emptily through the night.

Time passed quickly.

There haven’t been any significant changes in Jangwon’s daily life for those three days. The groans of people suffering from excessive training still filled the manor, and the voices tormenting those people grew louder.

Outwardly, life seemed calm, but it swiftly flowed, and soon the day the Abbot promised has arrived.

«Have you thought about it?»

Baek Cheon, who had gathered everyone early in the morning, asked, and Ogeom hardened their expressions.

«Have you found your answers?»

Yoon Jong sighed deeply and was the first to speak.

«Sasuk.»

«Yes, Yoon Jong.»

«...I naturally had a lot of concerns. To the point of tearing my hair out.»

At his words, the others nodded in agreement.

They could count the hours of sleep they had gotten in the past three days. Exhausted as if they would collapse at any moment, they couldn’t even find solace in their beds. Their minds were filled with worries.

Yoon Jong glanced at the others and then spoke.

«I don't know about others, but honestly, I still don't know. What's right and what's wrong.»

Baek Cheon nodded with a serious expression.

«If I have to risk my life alone, I'll gladly do it. If I can die to save others, even if it causes significant harm later, I would willingly make that choice.»

Some seemed to resonate with those words.

«But... I can't send others to their deaths to save more lives. If Jo Geol says he's going to die to save commoners, I wouldn't be able to send him off willingly.»

Jo Geol bit his lip slightly.

«This isn't a matter of right or wrong from the start. No one in this world can answer that question. Sasuk, I've seriously pondered this, but... I'm sorry. I couldn't find an answer.»

Yoon Jong, with an expression of deep regret, bowed his head. However, Baek Cheon, far from blaming him, simply smiled calmly and nodded.

«Well done.»

«... Yes»

«What about others?»

As no one immediately spoke up, Baek Cheon's gaze naturally turned to Yu Iseol. She hesitated for a moment, biting her lip before responding.

«I don't know.»

«Is that so?»

«Whatever happens, I'll fight at the forefront. But... I can't tell Sajils to do the same.»

«That's right.»

Baek Cheon nodded again. Now, his attention turned to Jo Geol.

Jo Geol scratched his head.

“How can I find an answer that even Sahyeongs and Sago couldn't find?”

«I can't expect you to go that far.»

“Yes?”

«No. So?»

«To be honest, I thought it was just a matter of putting my life on the line. However, it occurred to me that risking my life to uphold the righteous path could be perceived as forcing it on someone who doesn't want me to do so.»

Everyone looked at Jo Geol with surprise. Perplexed by their reactions, Jo Geol asked,

«What? Why are you looking at me like that? I didn't say anything I shouldn't have.»

«...Looks like even he has some thoughts.»

«He's growing, he's growing.»

«These bastards!»

When Jo Geol got too agitated, Baek Cheon chuckled and tried to stop him.

«Good job. What about Soso?»

«Sasuk. Honestly, I might not be able to tell someone to go out and die, but I think I could say, ‘Let’s die together.’»

«Is that so?»

«Yes. As long as I don’t survive alone.»

«I see. So, is this your way?»

«But... Sasuk, I could ask Sahyeongs to die together, but I might not be able to do that when the disciples come in later. They need to live. Even if we die.»

After her words, some nodded in agreement.

«So, I don’t know. I only thought about having to protect, but I haven’t thought that those who truly want to protect something might end up sacrificing themselves. But... what I want to protect and what Hwasan wants to protect may be different...»

As Tang Soso bowed her head, Yu Iseol gently comforted her by patting her shoulder.

«What about monk Hye Yeon?»

«Amitabha.»

Hye Yeon closed his eyes and quietly chanted.

«Siju. The Buddha taught us to spread the Dharma everywhere to save sentient beings.»

«Yes, that is the teaching of Buddhism.»

«Dividing the importance of what we want to protect is nothing more than attachment to minor connections. It’s more correct to save more people.»

When Baek Cheon nodded, Hye Yeon smiled bitterly and said,

«But... if that were to happen, how could I be considered a human being, let alone a Buddhist?»

«Of course.»

«...When you think about it, that guy is not an ordinary person.»

«He’s an apostate monk.»

Hye Yeon’s face quickly turned red.

«W-when did I become an apostate?»

«Isn’t that right?»

«Everyone knows that!»

«Well, uh...»

Hye Yeon, flustered, recited the Buddha’s name repeatedly. Baek Cheon sighed and then looked at everyone.

«Did everyone seriously contemplate the matter? Did you find any answers?»

«No.»

«To be honest, I couldn’t find one.»

«There is no answer to this in the first place»

Baek Cheon nodded.

«That's right. This is an issue without an answer. But you need to know. We might be able to say there is no answer, but Sect Leader and Chung Myung — they have to somehow find that nonexistent answer.»

Those who had a glimpse of the ones in charge feelings nodded solemnly.

«So, today, no matter what answer we hear, there should be no resentment or regret whatever the choice was made. Understand?»

«Yes, Sasuk.»

«We will do that.»

«Do we have the right to say that?»

«Indeed.»

With that, Baek Cheon turned around, his gaze deeper than usual.