

Chapter 1029

But please understand (4)

Hye Pyeong [慧平], who was gazing into the distance at the setting sun, unconsciously sighed. Lately, he had been feeling restless.

‘I don’t know what I’m doing.’

Why were they spending time in this distant place along the Yangtze River, leaving Songshan mountain? He just couldn’t understand. The idea of restraining those Sapaeryeon people didn’t make any sense to him, no matter how many times he heard it.

What they did when they came to the Yangtze was just watching the events at Maehwado from a distance. The actual confrontation with Surochae was led by Cheonumaeng, not them. So, he couldn’t help but feel empty when he heard that they can’t leave the Yangtze to confront Sapaeryeon.

Gazing at the thickly advancing twilight, Hye Pyeong sighed once more and then spoke.

«Sahyeong.»

«Why are you saying that?»

Hye Gong [慧空], who stood alongside him, responded without turning his head.

«Hye Bang Sahyeong – Has he arrived safely to Songshan?»

«...»

Hye Gong’s response wasn’t immediate. After some time, his heavy voice returned.

«Why? Do you want to return to Songshan too?»

«It’s not that... Just...»

Hye Pyeong sighed deeply without finishing his sentence.

«I don’t know, Sahyeong. It’s true that Hye Bang Sahyeong showed disrespect to the Abbot, but whether it’s really a mistake deserving of full repentance...»

«Hye Bang Sahyeong chose to enter the repentance hall himself. It’s not our place to judge right from wrong.»

«... Yes, you’re right.»

Hye Gong finally turned his gaze towards Hye Pyeong and asked,

«Do you regret not following him?»

Hye Pyeong remained silent.

In his heart, he honestly wanted to return to Songshan with Hye Bang. The orders he had received from the Abbot since their arrival at the Yangtze River were simply incomprehensible.

He knew it was all for Shaolin. No one doubted that these decisions were made out of concern for Shaolin. But...

«For the sake of all living beings, a true Buddhist does not hesitate to be a stepping stone.»

«If that’s the case, then we...»

«That's enough.»

Hye Gong cut off Hye Pyeong's words without letting him continue.

«Even if you have doubts, don't let them slip so easily from your lips. Once spoken, words cannot be retrieved.»

«...»

«If you have something to ponder, think deeply about it. Only when you are thoroughly convinced that your thoughts were not entirely wrong should you speak them aloud.

Otherwise, it's just a delusion.»

«I will keep that in mind, Sahyeong.»

A deep sigh escaped Hye Pyeong's lips. He occasionally thought that the reason he didn't follow Hye Bang was not merely a lack of courage. It might have been the fear of opposing the Abbot's orders and acting independently.

'I might not be worthy...'

As a Buddhist who had pledged to sacrifice himself for all living beings, he hadn't been able to act on what he believed to be right out of fear of the Abbot's anger. Did he have the right to question his judgment of what was right or wrong?

As Hye Pyeong was introspecting, Hye Gong spoke,

«Someone is coming.»

«What?»

Hye Pyeong raised his head to look at the people approaching the temple.

«Who... Why would someone come to this place at this time?»

He recalled the saying 'Good people don't approach first'* and his face tensed.

«Huh?»

However, in the next moment, a bewildered voice escaped his lips.

Among the approaching individuals, one at the front seemed familiar.

«Sahyung. It's Hwa... no, is that person?»

«It seems so.»

Hye Gong's face also stiffened.

«Why would that person be here?»

The person approaching was none other than Hyun Jong, the Sect Leader of Hwasan.

Of course, there was no reason why Hyun Jong couldn't come here. But given the current strained relationship between Shaolin and Hwasan, this visit was certainly an unusual one.

«How...?»

«Don't be nervous.»

Hye Gong calmed Hye Pyeong.

«Receive him with proper respect.»

«Yes, Sahyeong.»

In those few words, one could feel Hye Gong's deep respect for Hyun Jong. Despite the tension between Shaolin and Hwasan, Hyun Jong, as a leader of the Gangho regardless of affiliation, deserved respect and reverence.

As Hyun Jong reached them, Hye Gong respectfully bowed and greeted him,

«I greet the Sect Leader.»

Hyun Jong also responded by bowing deeply, an expression of courtesy that came naturally.

«I am Hyun Jong of Hwasan. I hope you can understand my sudden visit without prior notice. I sincerely apologize for any inconvenience.»

«No, it's not an inconvenience at all.»

Hye Gong nodded and subtly inquired,

«May I ask the reason for your visit?»

Hyun Jong took a short breath and then spoke, «I have something to discuss. Hyun Jong of Hwasan... no, Hyun Jong of Cheonumaeng wishes to meet the Abbot. Please convey my request.»

«The Abbot?»

Hye Gong's face briefly displayed a puzzled expression. Beop Jong is currently not accepting visits from outsiders. However, the person standing before them was an outsider who couldn't be simply regarded as a common one.

If the leader of Cheonumaeng personally wished to visit, what use were principles?

After a moment of contemplation, Hye Gong nodded.

«I'm sorry, but could you wait here for a moment? Abbot is currently not receiving visitors from outside, so I need to inform him of the fact that the leader has come and request permission.»

«I can wait as long as needed.»

«Thank you. Then...»

Hye Gong made a gesture to Hye Pyeong and swiftly opened the door, entering inside.

As he watched the scene, Hyun Jong gazed at Jangwon with deep, sunken eyes.

«Sect Leader.»

Hyun Young, who stood behind him, spoke with a tone filled with concern.

«Wouldn't it be a good time to reconsider even now? At the very least, you should arrange some kind of agreement. Us rushing here and clinging desperately won't leave a good impression on others. If we continue like this and end up being turned away at the gate, we'll become a laughingstock.»

According to the etiquette of the Gangho, being turned away at the door without an appointment was an undignified situation. However, Hyun Jong had chosen to come running in the first place.

«I know.»

«But...»

«However, now is not the time to argue about such things.»

Hyun Jong continued to gaze at the peaceful Jangwon instead of looking at Hyun Young.

— But please understand.

There's no room for understanding. There's no room for following procedures. The fact that he becomes a laughing stock is not worth a dime compared to sacrifices of those who may be losing their lives at this very moment.

And...

“The situation in Gangnam is one thing, but...”

Hyun Jong bit his lip lightly.

“I'm worried about how long that child will put up with this.”

“Are you referring to Chung Myung?”

“Yes.”

“No matter how special he is, he won't be able to defy Sect Leader's orders. If such a thing were to happen, he should be severely punished.”

Hyun Young hadn't always been firm when it came to dealing with Chung Myung, but in this matter, he showed a resolute attitude. This could be because this situation might shake the foundation of the sect and the alliance.

However, Hyun Jong had a different perspective.

«It is not the duty of a leader to create a situation where there is no choice but to obey or disobey.»

«Yes, your words are correct, but...»

«The best option is to find a better path for each other. I do not want to be a leader who oppresses his disciples. I want to be a leader they can believe in.»

Hyun Young nodded.

However, no matter what they thought, it was still uncertain how this situation would unfold with Shaolin.

Just then, Hye Gong returned quickly and respectfully informed Hyun Jong,

«The Abbot is ready to meet you. I will escort you.»

«Thank you.»

With a tense expression, Hyun Jong stepped into the manor.

Hyun Jong's hand, resting on his knee, fidgeted slightly, as if feeling uncomfortable.

The true nature of a relationship often reveals itself when people sit face to face.

In that sense, the relationship between the person sitting in front of him now and Hyun Jong might be the worst possible. Even if it was the sect leader of Southern Edge... No, even if Jang Ilso was sitting there, he wouldn't feel as uncomfortable as he did right now.

However, the person sitting across Hyun Jong seemed comfortable, not displaying any unpleasant emotions despite his presence.

«Indeed...»

The person seated in front of Hyun Jong, while filling the teacup from a teapot on the table, spoke leisurely.

«Is there any particular reason why the leader of Cheonumaeng has sought an audience with us today?»

Steam gently rose from the teacup as they both observed the warm vapors. Without realizing it, Hyun Jong tried to suppress a sigh that threatened to escape.

In fact, the relationship between the Abbot and him had not always been like this. In their first encounter at the Great Martial Arts Competition there was no such animosity.

He even might have even felt a sense of admiration back then. After all, the leader of Shaolin, who managed the world of martial arts as the leader and the top Northern Star, was beyond his reach.

But now...

«Yes.»

The person across from Hyun Jong seemed to have sensed his feelings, or at least had a hunch, and smiled.

«It's been quite a few years since our first meeting.»

«Indeed, Abbot.»

«At that time, it seemed like I was sitting across from you while we shared tea.»

«Yes, Abbot. I still remember your words from back then.»

«Well, I wonder what I said back then...»

Hyun Jong spoke, looking directly at the Abbot.

«You said to me 'Tea is just tea. Whether it's the tea poured by an emperor or a commoner, it's still just tea'.»

Beop Jong nodded solemnly.

«At that moment, those words had a profound impact on me. The same words can carry different weight depending on who says them. When the leader of Shaolin spoke those words, it felt like a burden was lifted from my shoulders.»

A hint of emotion appeared in Beop Jong's eyes.

Hyun Jong might have been reminiscing about the past, but the question in Beop Jong's ears was: 'Are you the same as you from that time?'

What about it? Is the Beop Jong of then the same as the Beop Jong of now?

Abbot didn't feel the need to answer that question directly, but he said,

«A tree just stands there, but the wind won't leave it be.»

Hyun Jong nodded in agreement as if to express his consent.

«The ways of the world are truly amusing, my lord,»

Beop Jong said with a warm smile.

«Who could have imagined that we would become this awkward just sharing the cup of tea?»

«It's embarrassing,»

Hyun Jong admitted.

After a moment of awkward silence, Beop Jong gazed at his teacup in silence. The once-steaming tea gradually cooled. People are like that too. Even without doing anything, time changes everything.

«Indeed. So why did you come to see me? It must not have been an easy decision for you to make the journey.»

At Beop Jong's question, Hyun Jong let out a small sigh.

«Have you heard about what happened in Gangnam?»

«You mean the testimony from Sapaeryeon?»

«Yes, Abbot. The words of Magyo's appearance.»

Hyun Jong emphasized the word 'Magyo'.

However, Beop Jong merely smiled calmly upon hearing it.

«Did you come to discuss that matter?»

«Yes.»

Hyun Jong swallowed dry.

From the very beginning, the fact that he came to see the Abbot first indicated that Hyun Jong had lowered himself to enter.

Someone like Beop Jong might use this fact as an excuse to say anything.

But Beop Jong's next words completely caught Hyun Jong off guard.

«You've come at just the right time.»

«... What?»

To Hyun Jong's surprised response, Beop Jong nodded with a warm smile.

Beop Jong continued to smile warmly, nodding as he spoke,

«I was actually thinking that I should visit you in person and discuss the situation, so I am extremely grateful that you've come here. Indeed, my lord, your capacity as the Cheonumaeng's Leader is more than one can imagine.»

Hyun Jong, feeling somewhat uneasy, replied, «Oh... it's really not that great.»

«The matter concerning Demonic Cult is significant enough that it should be handled by all the sects whenever necessary. It is only natural to discuss it.»

«Yes, you're right.»

For a moment, Hyun Jong wondered if he had misunderstood Beop Jong all this time.

Perhaps the selfishness he had seen in him was actually born out of a different perspective on safeguarding the whole Gangho.

But then...

«However...»

A small smile formed at the corner of Beop Jong's mouth.

«There's a small issue, my lord.»

It was an oddly unfamiliar smile.

*The proverb “선자불래, 래자불선(善者不來 來者不善)” conveys the idea that good people often don't approach first, and those who approach might not be good. Essentially, it implies that it's challenging to meet genuinely good people.