

Chapter 1149

I've done everything I needed to, but you know. (4)

An elderly man sat cross-legged with closed eyes.

From the long white hair cascading down to his waist, the beard covering his chest, the snow-white eyebrows, to the entire attire in pure white, he bore the characteristics that evoked the saying «demeanor of a transcendent being [선 풍도골(仙風道骨)*].»

Moreover, an aura surrounding the old man was beyond the reach of ordinary people, inducing an atmosphere of reverence and awe in those who observed him. Even those who didn't believe in the existence of sages would be compelled to acknowledge the presence of such transcendence when they laid eyes upon him.

Parting his slightly faded lips, the old man whispered what seemed to be Mantras [진언(眞言)].

Amidst the dimly lit room flickering with numerous trembling candles, there sat the sage-like old man in the center.

Interrupting this solemnity was the sharp creaking of an aged door being pushed open.

Kii-ii-ik.

The rough sound intermingled with the sage's chanting, yet the old man seemed oblivious, continuing his recitation undisturbed.

Step by step, the distinct sound of footsteps drew nearer. As the tranquility enveloping the old man dissolved into the approaching footsteps, a hushed voice penetrated the old man's ears.

«I'm back.»

The only presence in this place was the old man, so surely these words were directed towards him. Strangely though, he showed no particular reaction upon hearing the words. The only response he displayed was the cessation of his rhythmic chanting.

«Took longer than expected. All because of those damn slugs,»

the voice echoed, causing the candles to flicker erratically. Yet, the old man's serene demeanor remained undisturbed.

«Killed the fool as instructed.»

Death, for anyone, is never a trivial matter. However, there was no change in the old man's silent expression.

«But... seems like it was a futile action. Almost didn't need to do it.»

A hint of sharp emotion seeped through the voice.

«Even if I hadn't gone, he'd have died at the hands of the Central Plains' bastards.»

Instead of a response, the old man resumed his chanting. It seemed almost impossible for any voice or occurrence to disturb his composure.

«At the hands of that Hwasan's brat.»

In that moment, the continuous chanting from the old man seemed to subside. As the old man sealed his lips shut, a heavy silence enveloped the room. After a prolonged pause, the old man finally spoke in a faint voice, as if murmuring to himself.

«Hwasan...»

He closed his eyes and muttered softly.

«Such a nostalgic name.»

«Hmph.»

The man behind the old sage, Heavenly Executioner, frowned and started at the old man's back.

«Looks like the word 'Hwasan' does ring a bell in your ear.»

«Yes. A nostalgic name indeed. Seems they're still lingering around.»

A soft smile graced the old man's lips.

«If possible, I'd like to see it once. How that Hwasan Sect has changed. It'd be wonderful if it remained as it was in the past. Because there aren't many things left that connect me to the past.»

Upon hearing this, a slight twitch appeared at the corner of Heavenly Executioner's mouth.

«Not much has changed.»

«That's good to hear.»

«There is even someone like Geomjon.»

In that moment, the old man's head, which had remained fixed until now, slowly turned back. Simultaneously, the slightly closed eyes of the old man opened.

His eyes were markedly different from those of ordinary humans.

They were crimson and dark as coal. At the instant those crimson and black eyes met the snow-white exterior, the divine appearance of the old man transformed in an instant.

Those who witness this old man now would never consider him a sage. Eyes are the mirrors of the soul, yet in these, all one would find was an impenetrable darkness.

«... What did you say?»

«Ahahaha!»

Heavenly Executioner covered his mouth and laughed.

«Have you lost your hearing altogether?»

«I asked what you said.»

«I mentioned seeing someone like Geomjon.»

«Geomjon?»

The candlelight began to tremble. No, strictly speaking, it was the entire space around the old man that started to shake.

«Are you referring to that cursed bastard, that Geomjon?»

«Are there any other Geomjon's in this world?»

The calmly seated old man's head started to jolt backward. Watching this sight, Heavenly Executioner chuckled and shook his head.

«Calm down, Archbishop. It's just a feeling. An inkling, really. He was a kid. Yes, just a kid.»

«...»

«Well, who knows. Give it fifty years, he might become a real Geomjon.»

«That's impossible.»

Archbishop's jolting movement subsided in an instant. Regaining composure, he sharply remarked in a voice that had now turned somewhat harsh.

«Such a person cannot possibly exist in this world.»

«...That's true.»

The old man sighed softly.

«Hwasan has revived and is raising someone like Geomjon again.»

«One person may stand out, but... certainly, there must be others showing potential.

Troublesome scoundrels.»

«That's a sign of how much time has passed.»

Regret lingered in the old man's voice.

«A hundred years is never a short time. There should be sufficient time for even a sect that has lost its foundation to bloom anew.»

«While we rot here.»

At this statement, the corner of the old man's mouth twitched slightly.

«Heavenly Executioner.»

«I'm aware, so spare me your tiresome lectures. After hearing it for a century, it's become nauseating.»

Archbishop gazed silently at Heavenly Executioner for a moment, then turned his head forward again.

«What about believers?»

«They simply followed the instructions of that fool, but it's not as if they are entirely blameless. They've been charged and sentenced to spend a month in the Demon Valley [마곡 (魔谷) — magog].»

The old man remained silent. Heavenly Executioner glanced at his back and spoke bluntly.

«I certainly believe that brat was wrong too, but...»

«...»

«There's one thing among his words that I agree with. Our time is also running short. If the Heavenly Demon doesn't return before our deaths...»

«The Heavenly Demon will return.»

«True. But if the Heavenly Demon doesn't find themselves before we die, wouldn't that be no different from not returning?»

«What are you trying to say?»

The old man shot Heavenly Executioner a sharp look, to which he responded with a twisted smile.

«I've always thought that waiting patiently here was a testament to my faith. However... I've had a slightly different thought. Perhaps waiting blindly here might be considered too complacent.»

«I've told you many times...»

«The situation in the Central Plains is intriguing.»

The old man's eyes narrowed slightly as he stopped speaking.

Heavenly Executioner ceased mocking the old man. Instead, he spoke more seriously than.

«There's a high probability of a major war. It might sweep through the entire Central Plains.»

«...»

“Do you understand? The Central Plains will be engulfed in chaos even if we don't intervene. Do you grasp the significance of that?”

The old man's lips tightened, albeit subtly, unlike before.

«It might be trivial to them, but not to us.»

Heavenly Executioner clenched and unclenched his fist slightly.

«But is simply waiting here really enough?»

«My heart feels heavy.»

The interruption in their conversation stiffened Heavenly Executioner's expression as the old man spoke.

«You mentioned the kid from Hwasan?»

«Right now, that story...»

«It's even more intriguing now. Even if someone hasn't lived for more than a hundred years, what kind of person could shake you to the core?»

«...»

«Even if it's just an assumption, the title of Geomjon is not something anyone can just claim.»

The place that hates Geomjon the most is Demonic Cult.

Believers, rather than descending into the infinite hell, would not hesitate to leave a scratch on someone who dared to desecrate and shatter the absolute divinity that should never be violated. That someone is Geomjon, the one who has damaged and undermined the sacred one.

However, on the other hand, the place where Geomjon is most recognized is also Demonic Cult.

When they belittle Geomjon, the divinity of the Heavenly Demon, who lost his life at the hands of Geomjon, also collapses. Hence, for them, Geomjo must exist as an absolute evil that should never be violated.

Yet, setting aside doctrinal issues, anyone who has experienced Geomjon during the war may find it difficult to belittle him. One might curse, curse vehemently, and even scream, but the words won't come out.

«Listen carefully to what I'm about to say, Archbishop.»

«...»

«I'm not doing this because I want to fight. It's not because I'm bored of being here.»

«...»

«I'm just concerned. If countless people are swept up in that war, even the great one who hasn't yet awakened might not be guaranteed safety. I just thought that some measures should be taken...»

«It's merely a lack of faith in Him.»

«...Are you doubting my faith right now?»

A glimmer of murder flickered in Heavenly Executioner's eyes.

However, the old man just received that spark with a composed gaze. Unwavering, like a tranquil, still lake.

Heavenly Executioner's expression twisted momentarily.

«It's just that I don't like how the capacity to endure and wait has become the measure of faith.»

«That's an excuse.»

«Oh, is it?»

Heavenly Executioner's eyes drew a mysterious line.

«Indeed... I am curious myself. Whether you insisting on merely trusting and waiting truly stems from your belief that the Heavenly Demon will seek us out.»

His lips twisted slowly.

«Or... are you merely afraid, not firmly convinced of Heavenly Demon's return?»

«Well...»

In that moment, an immense amount of demonic energy erupted from the old man. His pure white robe instantly turned black, and malevolent energy swirled around him like hungry demons.

«Oh, did you get stabbed where it hurt the most?»

«Heavenly Executioner!»

«So, do not attempt to stop me. We merely differ in our thoughts. If our beliefs differ, then I shall find my own path.»

«The Heavenly Demon will...»

«At my final moment!»

Heavenly Executioner abruptly cut off the old man's words with a fierce shout.

«I do not wish to die regretting my failure to personally seek the Heavenly Demon when my breath ceases. Rather, I shall willingly face a bright and glorious death at the hands of the

Heavenly Demon who returned as a punishment for the sin of moving without their permission.»

«...»

«If you can stop me, try. But there's no way to stop me other than by killing me, Archbishop.»

Heavenly Executioner turned around.

«That wouldn't be so bad either. We've been friends for a long time.»

Without hesitation, he departed from the room.

Archbishop, now left alone, stared intently at the closed door Heavenly Executioner had exited through, letting out a deep sigh.

'This is why one should not set foot in the Central Plains.'

That place shakes the human heart.

Hence, unable to send other believers and having to send Heavenly Executioner personally, but could it be that even that man was shaken?

“Oh, the Heavenly Demon...»

The old man closed his eyes.

«...How can you, who are perfect, understand our imperfect suffering? Please... Please return as soon as possible. Please...»

From the old man's lips, mantras flowed once again. Continuously resonating, like a song or like a cry.

*선 풍도골(仙風道骨) — it can also be translated as sage-like type/one's outstanding behavior like that of immortals. This phrase refers to the ideal of embodying the virtues of a sage and adhering to the principles of the Tao.