

Chapter 1090

In my past life, what sin did I commit? (5)

Not understanding the fear they feel is not the issue. No, Chung Myung understood their emotions more keenly than anyone else. He had already experienced it once.

When Demonic Cult began pushing into the Central Plains, the moment he understood the overwhelming power of their forces and their intentions, Chung Myung felt a suffocating fear and pressure as if he couldn't even breathe.

The fear that the Central Plains might perish if they did nothing. The pressure that Hwasan, too, had to share the responsibility. Under that weight, Hwasan eventually rushed forward and chose sacrifice.

It might have been the right choice. After all, the result was defeating the Heavenly Demon and blocking the Demonic Cult. However...

‘Sect Leader Sahyeong...’

Chung Myung, asking the tearful Chung Mun, wonders.

‘Does he still believe that the choice was right?’

There's no need for an explicit answer. The tears streaming down Chung Mun's face serve as the answer.

If the concept of immortal realm [선계 — there was no hanja provided but I think it's 仙界] truly exists, and Chung Mun watched the disgrace that the fallen Hwasan and its descendants endured with his own eyes?

Perhaps, for Chung Mun, that place should be called the infinite hell rather than an immortal realm. How could a place that makes one witness scenes where burning in the fires of hell seems more comforting be considered just?

And now, Hyun Jong is walking that path.

Chung Myung opens his eyes and looks at Hyun Jong. Hyun Jong's face, seated in front, seemed to overlap with Chung Mun's face.

«Sect Leader.»

«...Speak.»

«I understand that what I'm saying might seem absurd.»

«...You know it well, this rascal.»

Chung Myung's words, though just one sentence, slightly eased the immensely heavy atmosphere.

Chung Myung had always been like that. Even when everyone else hesitated, he would charge into the enemy lines without a moment's hesitation, because that was what he had to do. So, it didn't make sense for him to try to stop Hyun Jong now.

«Disciple, I've been pondering for a long time. Why did Hwasan collapse, despite protecting justice and doing what it should have done?»

«...»

«Why do tears have to be shed even when doing the right thing?»

Hyun Jong slightly closed his eyes. In truth, this question was like an unsolvable problem for those living in the current Hwasan.

Learn to uphold the righteousness. However, the price paid for keeping that righteousness was too cruel. The disparity between what they learned and what they experienced was a source of occasional doubt in the path they walked.

If sacrificing oneself to protect others from death was the task at hand, everyone here would carry it out without a moment's hesitation. However, the disciples of Hwasan know better.

What they are attempting now is pushing even those they most want to protect into the cursed cycle of sacrifice.

How can they accept that the price paid for trying to protect their loved ones is the sacrifice of those very people they sought to protect?

Can one truly laugh in the face of death?

Can one feel joy in preventing the demise of the Central Plains while witnessing the horrific sight of comrades they trained and laughed with dying one by one?

Right now, Chung Myung has brought to light a fact that the disciples of Hwasan have silently avoided mentioning.

«...Have you thought about it?»

«Yes.»

«So... Have you found the answer?»

Chung Myung slowly shook his head.

«No, Sect Leader.»

«...»

«I simply wished for it. Wished for us to become stronger. Wished for them to become weaker than in the past. So that, even if we repeat the same actions, the outcome wouldn't be as horrific as before.»

Hyun Jong closed his eyes.

It's a vain and futile answer. However, Hyun Jong was no different from Chung Myung. To maintain the facade of righteousness and justice, they merely wished for things. It was merely a hope that someday, they wouldn't find themselves in a situation where their own necks were at risk.

«That's why, when I heard news of the Demonic Cult's appearance, I had to go. Not to stop them, but to confirm. To see firsthand how strong they had become.»

Hyun Jong's eyes trembled.

Chung Myung's calm response hinted at the anticipated despair he felt when confirming the power of the Demonic Cult with his own eyes. No, it was clear from that gaze.

«... You must have felt despair.»

«Yes.»

Chung Myung replied calmly. It was so calm that it felt almost bitter. A sigh escaped involuntarily from Hyun Jong's lips.

Why does this child always keep such stories confined within himself?

Even if he was to reveal a bit more of those stories, somehow it would serve as strength. No, even if it couldn't be strength, he would at least make the effort to help.

«We fought without finding the answer. It seemed better to fight than not to fight.»

«...»

«But as I fought, I came to know. Why Hwasan failed.»

Hyun Jong stared at Chung Myung with a vacant expression.

«Why was that?»

«They didn't believe.»

«...didn't believe?»

«Yes.»

Chung Myung nodded slowly.

Chung Mun was undoubtedly remarkable. If we were to discuss strength not in terms of martial prowess but as a person, there might not be a single person throughout Chung Myung's lifetime that could be compared. Even Hyun Jong, acknowledged by Chung Myung, might seem like a fragile being in comparison to Chung Mun.

However...

«At that time, Hwasan was too powerful, and the one leading Hwasan was too outstanding. That's why... that's precisely why Hwasan couldn't trust anyone other than itself.»

It became clear now. Why they had to bear such a heavy burden alone.

Chung Mun always advised him not to go alone but to take care of his martial brothers. He urged him not to advance alone but to lead those who were lacking with his excellence. That was Chung Mun's approach. However...

Chung Myung bit his lip.

Perhaps, this could be the first time in his long life that he spoke such words.

«That approach was wrong.»

The moment the words left his mouth, his tongue felt bitter. Denying Chung Mun was akin to rejecting everything about Chung Myung. However, Chung Myung had to endure this bitter task now.

Not for those left in the past but for those living in the present.

«The reason why Hwasan could fight at the forefront was that there were those supporting from behind.»

Chung Myung could fight at the forefront because there were those supporting him.

«Still, Hwasan believed it did everything by itself.»

Even so, Chung Myung believed he did everything by himself.

«If Hwasan had a little time to look back at those fighting behind...»

If Chung Myung had a little time to look back at those fighting behind...

«The result might have been different.»

Perhaps, they wouldn't have lost everyone.

Having said that, Chung Myung closed his eyes quietly.

Hwasan of that era was undoubtedly a powerful and great martial arts sect. However, precisely because of that, it was also an arrogant and self-righteous sect. Hwasan looked at those who couldn't understand its pursuit of righteousness with cold eyes. It was an undeniable fact.

Chung Mun always scolded Chung Myung, who couldn't fight with eve. However, Hwasan led by Chung Mun might not be so different from Chung Myung. The unity Chung Mun spoke of was perhaps just unity within the sect itself.

Nevertheless, Chung Myung believed that Chung Mun was always unconditionally right. Chung Mun was always the righteous one, and was too bug of a person for Chung Myung to follow.

However, he learned while fighting Danjagang.

There was Tang Bo behind him. But there is no one behind the current Hwasan.

Chung Mun, who Chung Myung had regarded as solid as Mount Tai, was not a perfect being. He too was merely a human who had endured suffering throughout his life. Now, Chung Myung finally steps out of the shadow that Chung Mun cast upon him for the first time, gazing at the world. It was warm, free from the heavy and dense shadow.

«Sect Leader.»

«Yeah... Yeah, Chung Myung.»

«When one's heart is in a hurry, they tend to forget what they possess.»

«...»

«What do we have?»

Hyun Jong couldn't readily answer that question. What do we have... What do we possess... Justice? Unity? Or... Strength?

Hyun Jong, with eyes deeply immersed in contemplation, looked around at those gathered in this place. Then, as if there was nothing more to think about, he spoke.

«Hwasan has so much, but if you were to ask for the most precious and significant thing, there is only one.»

Hyun Jong nodded with a slight smile on his face.

«Simply put, it's people.»

Chung Myung smiled back at his words, realizing that his wish to hear it from Hyun Jong had come true.

«It's different from the past. We have people. Not just Hwasan but also those who stand alongside Hwasan.»

Hyun Jong nodded thoughtfully.

Since Chung Myung arrived, Hwasan gained many things. But among them, the most significant would undoubtedly be relationships and bonds, no matter what others might say.

«I was the same. When oppressed by the power of Sapaeryeon, my first choice was simply to strengthen myself. I was willing to give up everything for that.»

«Yeah, that's right.»

«Originally, Cheonumaeng should have crumbled back then. Who would wait for someone who abandons all responsibilities just to enhance their power? However, Lord Tang took on even the tasks we had to do, silently waiting for us.»

Chung Myung turned his head to gaze at Tang Gunak. In response to that look, Tang Gunak awkwardly let out a smile, seeming embarrassed.

«Why did you do that, Lord?»

«Is there a specific reason? Just... «

The voice was unusually humble to be coming from Tang Gunak. So, instead of doubt, it felt filled with nothing but genuine sincerity.

«Because we're friends.»

As if finding it awkward to say such words, Tang Gunak let out a light cough. Chung Myung responded with a smile.

If only, at that time,

When they lost what they shouldn't have lost in the past.

If there had been a faction like Tang clan in alliance with Hwasan, if there had been someone like Tang Bo for Chung Myung, would they have just watched Hwasan's downfall? Would they have ignored the approaching danger like a pack of wolves converging on Hwasan?

No, that wouldn't have happened. Absolutely not.

If it was Tang Bo, he would have risked his life to prevent it. The current Tangga would not have allowed them to set foot on the mount Hwa, no matter what.

The current Hwasan possessed what the Hwasan of that time couldn't.

«Sect Leader...»

This is a message from Chung Myung, a disciple of Hwasan, to Sect Leader Hyun Jong. It is also a message from Maehwa Geomjon Chung Myung to the past Chung Mun.

«In the face of a formidable enemy, what a wavering swordsman should believe in is his own blade and the time spent in training.»

«...That's true.»

«In that case, what should a sect believe in?»

«Well...»

Hyun Jong once again looked at the people sitting before him, and with a gentle gaze, he responded to Chung Myung.

«The value of what you have preserved and confidence in the path you have walked.»

«Yes, Sect Leader.»

Chung Myung also smiled softly.

«The reason we created Cheonumaeng is that we needed people who we could trust and fight alongside each other. It was because we believed that we would be each other's strength and fortress.»

«Yeah, that makes sense.»

Chung Myung slowly nodded.

«So, Sect Leader, when you're in doubt about what to do, please reflect on what Hwasan has preserved. I believe all the answers are within.»

Hyun Jong silently observed Chung Myung as he bowed his head.

What they have done. What they have preserved.

«I understand what you mean.»

Chung Myung closed his eyes.

'Sect Leader Sahyeong.'

In the darkness, Chung Mun still gazed at him. However, his face was no longer filled with pain.

'Don't worry. The kids now are better than us.'

At that moment, a gentle smile appeared on Chung Mun's face as he looked at Chung Myung.

Chung Myung gazed at that smile for a long time with his eyes closed.