

Blackfield 181

Chapter 181: So just keep running (2)

The fog settled as dawn broke and the sun rose.

Having gone quite far up the mountain, the air around them was starting to become extremely cold. At five minutes past eight, they started going up the second peak.

Even though they had been walking for over five hours and had only drunk water once, none of the soldiers had fallen behind.

They had the patience and physical strength that Choi Seong-Geon would've been proud of.

Chk.

“Squads up front, stop.”

Upon hearing Kang Chan's orders on the radio, everyone felt a strange nervousness.

Chk.

“Daye, secure the area beyond the rock and have some of the men guard the perimeter,” Kang Chan said again.

Chk.

“Alright.”

Kang Chan could see a boulder on the mountain's slope, which had a sunken area in front of it. What Kang Chan liked the most about it was the huge pile of leaves on it.

Soek Kang-Ho and the rest of Team Two went around and stepped on the leaves. He then had three of his subordinates guard the area from three different positions.

Kwak Cheol-Ho's Team Three and Kang Chan's Team One, which brought up the rear, all gathered in one place.

“Kwak Cheol-Ho, station two soldiers up there. Everyone else, eat,” Kang Chan said.

At Kwak Cheol-Ho's signal, two soldiers quickly went up the part of the mountain where Kang Chan was pointing. Since the area both in front and behind it went downhill, the soldiers could easily spot anyone who approached them.

The soldiers sat back against boulders and drank some water.

Thud.

Seok Kang-Ho took off his military gear and sat near Kang Chan.

This time, they shared the water that Kang Chan was carrying. Afterward, they had C-rations composed of sandwiches, biscuits, chocolate, and thinly sliced ham. They had to eat and sleep whenever they could.

From guns to C-rations, the special forces team was equipped with everything they would need in this operation.

Kang Chan looked at the soldier sitting next to him. He was eating a biscuit with his hand, which had gone from blue to black due to his finger injury.

“How’s your finger?” Kang Chan asked.

The soldier swallowed the remaining biscuit in his mouth, then said, “It’s bearable.”

“Put a twig next to it and tie your finger to it. Get a shot of morphine if the pain gets too much.”

“Yes, sir.”

Finishing their meal in five minutes, some of the soldiers replaced those on guard duty so the latter could eat and rest.

“Kwak Cheol-Ho, split your team into pairs of two. They’ll each rest for ten minutes,” Kang Chan commanded, and Kwak Cheol-Ho skillfully relayed his instructions to his men.

At times like this, they felt much better even if they slept for just five minutes. The soldiers lay down on the leaves and turned to the side.

When the sun rose, they felt their damp body drying up.

“You’re not going to sleep?” Seok Kang-Ho asked Kang Chan.

“Sleep first—let’s switch in ten minutes.”

“Sure.” Seok Kang-Ho lay on his side and curled up.

Kang Chan leaned back against a rock.

He already expected that they would be discovered the morning after they infiltrated North Korea, but he didn’t expect they would face a battle so early into the operation as well.

They reached this area exceptionally quicker than he planned since the soldiers were so well-trained. If they kept going at this rate, then they would likely reach Sinpyeong within a day, which was where Jang Kwang-Taek was.

Even if their enemies sent their troops in the right direction to chase after them, Kang Chan and his team would still have at least two hours of extra time before their enemies could get to where they were.

Moreover, since they were deep in the mountains, their enemies would find it difficult to guess Kang Chan and his team’s next move. Could they even imagine that only twenty-four people came to North Korea to take down Jang Kwang-Taek?

They would come across two anti-aircraft forts before reaching Shinpyeong: One past two mountaintops and another past the third summit.

The best they could do was to keep things simple, accomplish their goals, and return alive as fast as they could.

Those sons of bitches have to be punished for messing with someone dear to us.

As Kang Chan took deep breaths, he heard a soldier say, "Time to switch."

In response, another soldier woke up Kwak Cheol-Ho.

Rustle. Rustle.

The soldiers near him, including Seok Kang-Ho, also woke and sat up.

"Phew!" Seok Kang-Ho said as he twisted his neck.

Crack. Crack.

This fucker is surprisingly good at that.

Seok Kang-Ho stood up and examined their surroundings. He then told Kang Chan, "Get some sleep."

"Got it. Don't laze around."

"Don't worry."

Kang Chan lay down on his side and fell asleep not long after.

Kang Chan woke up from the feeling of someone tapping him.

He felt much better than before.

With his rifle hung on his side, Seok Kang-Ho handed Kang Chan a water pouch.

How come those fuckers haven't used even just one helicopter to look for us?

Kang Chan thought hiding under all this cover seemed useless now.

It was a quarter past eight in the morning.

A soldier with a receiver in his ear held up a small radio in the air and glared at the sky.

Two minutes went by.

The soldier looked from side to side for about another minute, turned off the radio, and took out the receiver in his ear.

"According to the intel I received, military forces in downtown Pyeongyang seemed to have attempted to assassinate their supreme leader with a car last night. The military authorities apparently identified us as the disruptive forces sent here by the North Korean leader."

What on earth is going on?

"And because of that, Jang Kwang-Taek is now focusing the North Korean troops near Shinpyeong and the ceasefire line," the soldier added.

"Then we're at least sure that son of a bitch is in Shinpyeong, right?" Seok Kang-Ho suddenly asked.

"They didn't specifically say anything about that," the soldier replied.

“Gather around,” Kang Chan called everyone as he opened the map, put it in the middle, and pointed to a certain part of it.

“This is where we’re at right now. At our current pace, we should reach Shinpyeong in twenty hours.” Kang Chan then slid his index finger across the map. “This is Dokgeom-ri. If a problem occurs, then we are to rendezvous here. You’ll have to get here on your own.”

The soldiers looked up from the map as Kang Chan continued, “We have to be at Sinpyeong within fourteen hours. That means our estimated time of arrival is at ten this evening. We’ll carry out the operation in the dead of the night and escape before dawn.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho inhaled loudly.

“Our enemies are two hours behind us, and that gap will only keep growing since they have to get here first during their search. Now, our battle will be all about how quickly we can get to Shinpyeong. Any questions?” Kang Chan asked.

Silence.

Kang Chan picked up the map, folded it, and put it in his inner chest pocket.

“Team One and I will take the front. Kwak Cheol-Ho, have Team Three stay in the middle. Daye and Team Two will bring up the rear. We’ll head out once everyone is ready,” Kang Chan said.

The soldiers answered with their gazes.

We can do it. Let’s go!

Starting with Kang Chan, the soldiers patted each others’ helmets. Doing this made them strangely emotional.

Kang Chan then walked to the front and chose which path they should take.

The best option was to walk along the ridge, but that would make it easy for their enemies to see them. Fortunately, the mountain was tall and had large enough trees to negate that disadvantage for now.

Those who had no experience in increasing their pace—even a little bit—while walking or running didn’t know what it felt like. They wouldn’t notice anything at first, but as they picked up the pace, they would quickly tire out and their military gear would gradually feel heavier.

Those in front of the formation had to maintain their speed, keep their guard up, and choose the best paths to take all at the same time.

Clunk. Clunk. Crunch. Crunch.

The sounds of their rifle and military gear rang out in beat with their footsteps.

These soldiers had already gone on operations with Kang Chan before, so they already knew what to do during basic guard duty and were skilled enough to know how nervous they should be based on Kang Chan's reactions.

They had been walking for about forty minutes when, for the first time, Kang Chan's nerves stood on edge.

They were on a tall mountain, which made it difficult for their opponents to fend them off since they had no idea where Kang Chan and his team were. Nevertheless, he felt anxious.

When Kang Chan's aura changed, the soldiers behind him started becoming nervous, causing a chain reaction all the way to the back of their formation.

Kang Chan slung his rifle off his right shoulder and put his index finger on the trigger.

Click.

Stopping in his tracks, he then raised his rifle and supported it with his left hand.

Whish.

Unlike when they were walking, Kang Chan could now hear the wind blowing and the trees shaking.

They were now on the ridge of the mountain. Trees and bushes were all around them.

Kang Chan sent the soldiers to different positions. Two hid behind the trees a few steps down the ridge while those at the back hid on either side of the mountain and waited for Kang Chan's orders.

It was always the most dangerous when their enemy showed up where they shouldn't and when they fell into traps that they couldn't see coming.

With his rifle still up and ready, Kang Chan slowly moved forward.

Swish.

Their pants brushed against the branches of small trees.

Whish.

The wind then blew, then stopped as if it had gotten surprised.

What's going on? Why did my senses suddenly heighten up? Is there a sniper?

Kang Chan slowly swept his rifle from left to right.

They would have heard anyone coming up from the bottom of the mountain. Their enemies couldn't possibly hide from them in this terrain either.

Are the enemies lying in an ambush?

Kang Chan slowly swept his rifle again, this time from right to left.

Badum. Badum.

Damn it!

His heart was sending him warning signals.

Are the enemies behind us?

Seok Kang-Ho was in charge of their rear. He was the only soldier that Kang Chan trusted.

Still, no one knew what could happen.

As Kang Chan looked behind him...

Du-du-du-du-du-du-du.

They heard a helicopter coming up the mountain.

How could those fuckers come here?

Kang Chan quickly gestured to the soldiers behind him; he pointed to the trees just below their formation.

Rustle. Rustle. Crunch. Crunch.

The trees, leaves, and rocks made noises whenever the soldiers moved.

They descended a few steps down the mountain as the helicopter grew louder and got closer.

Seok Kang-Ho got into position beside Kang Chan. With his eyes, he asked, 'Are they coming this way?'

Kang Chan understood the question behind his gaze.

Badum badum. Badum badum.

Kang Chan nodded, his instincts yelling at him to be careful.

The damn helicopter moved based on how the fucking pilot pulled the lever.

Du-du-du-du-du-du-du.

Damn it!

Kang Chan quickly looked back at the soldiers. All of them had to have heard that—there was more than one helicopter.

'Get ready!'

If the helicopters just flew past, then they wouldn't spot Kang Chan and his team. No, even if the enemies were here to search for them, they would have trouble finding them.

The sound of the helicopter gradually got closer.

Du-du-du-du-du-du-du.

What? Why are the choppers getting so close?

The helicopter noises were now loud enough to make them feel as if their ears were going to burst.

Swoosh!

Violent winds rushed toward them from the front.

Could it be?

Grumble.

Before they knew it, a helicopter soared up before their eyes. It was a Mi-2, a Russian helicopter[1].

Click. Pew! Pew!

BANG!

The moment the pilot's head snapped, the helicopter closest to the South Korean special forces team let out loud mechanical noises as it fell down the mountain.

Du-du-du-du-du-du-du.

Ta-da-da-da-dang! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Pew! Pew! Pew! Ta-ta-ta-tang! Ta-da-da-dang!

There were five helicopters in total.

Enemies were rappelling from the farthest helicopter down to the mountain.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

With each pull of the trigger, Kang Chan sent a soldier on the ropes dangling to the ground.

Ta-da-da-dang! Ta-da-dang! Ta-da-da-da-dang!

The enemies in the two other helicopters provided intense cover fire.

Pow-pow-pow-pow! Pow! Pow-pow-pow-pow-pow!

The bullets shredded the trees that the soldiers were using to hide and the rock that Kang Chan was leaning on.

Pew! Pew!

BANG!

The second helicopter flew away when Kang Chan started shooting at it. The helicopter at the back also did after dropping off soldiers.

Kang Chan urgently looked behind him.

About three to four of his subordinates had their heads limply hanging down. Among them, two had their upper bodies covered in blood.

“Kwak Cheol-Ho!” Kang Chan called and quickly pointed to the fallen soldiers, signaling him to keep them safe.

Three of the helicopters successfully dropped off enemy soldiers. Considering Kang Chan had killed about seven of them, they still had at least twenty-three enemies right in front of their noses.

“Daye!” Kang Chan called Seok Kang-Ho with a nod as he changed magazines.

Haah. Haah. Haah. Haah.

How did these sons of bitches know our exact location?

Kang Chan approached the area where their enemies landed. If he and his team got surrounded here and the helicopters returned, they would definitely get killed.

With Seok Kang-Ho at the lower part of the mountain, Kang Chan climbed up the ridge.

Clank. Crumble. Clank.

No matter how careful they were, stepping on gravel and leaves inevitably made noises. Those sons of bitches only had to stay where they were, though.

Haah. Haah.

They had advanced by about ten steps when someone's head momentarily came into view from between the trees.

Pew! Thud!

Ta-da-dang! Ta-dang! Pew! Pew!

Kang Chan shot an enemy right in the forehead, but others fired at him in retaliation. Seok Kang-Ho shot twice where the bullets were coming from.

Motherfuckers! We've done this so many times that we got bored of it!

Pew! Pew! Thud! Thud!

Ta-da-da-da-dang! Ta-da-dang! Ta-da-da-da-dang! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Do you really think we'll let you hide and camouflage yourselves? We'll be right in front of you before you know it!

Haah. Haah.

Whish!

Pew! Pew! Thud! Thud! Pew! Thud!

These sons of bitches!

If their enemies had seen Kang Chan and his team during live ammo training, they would've never approached them like this.

Kang Chan thought that he had gone crazy at first. Time slowed down around him and he could hear others' breath whenever his nerves were on edge. He experienced it the first time during his second battle—when nine of the twelve members of his unit died and his subordinate's head exploded next to him, sending blood splattering on Kang Chan's face.

Kang Chan was the first in the history of the Foreign Legion to become a captain in his third battle and a captain of its special forces in his fifth battle. If he showed no shame when he lost his subordinates, he probably would've gained many stars by now.

Kang Chan saw an enemy moving in front of him.

Pew! Thud!

You dare kill my men while I'm still around?

Kang Chan's senses were far more heightened than when he was in Mongolia, France, and China.

Ta-da-da-dang! Pew! Pew!

A thin spray of blood gushed out from the forehead of the soldier that Kang Chan shot. As if a faucet was turned on, blood also spurting out from the exit wound behind his head.

Pow-pow-pow!

Seok Kang-Ho leaned against the tree in front of him.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Kang Chan shot five times.

If this was a mock battle, there would've been five consecutive 'beeps' from a laptop. Instead, he put a hole in five of the enemies' foreheads, causing them to collapse to the ground.

Rustle! Pew!

“Argh!”

Pew! Thud!

Kang Chan immediately sent a bullet flying to the forehead of the enemy whose eye Seok Kang-Ho had shot.

Tap tap.

Kang Chan lightly tapped the front part of his gun while hiding behind a rock. When Seok Kang-Ho quickly looked at him, he pointed in a direction with his thumb and turned his fist to the side, ordering Seok Kang-Ho to turn and go down the mountain.

Rustle! Rustle!

Pew! Pew! Pew!

Kang Chan shot down three more soldiers, each one spraying out blood.

You all must be frustrated to death by now. We approach if you stay still and kill you if you try to fight us, but you can't just watch Seok Kang-Ho get around you either, can you?

People wouldn't understand the way Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho hunted their prey if they didn't know how much those two trusted each other. That was why all the enemies could do was wait for death to claim them.

We have been doing this for close to five years, motherfuckers!

So far, Kang Chan had saved Dayeru from certain death three times, and Seok Kang-Ho had stopped Kang Chan from killing the cocky member from the unit next to them more than five times. Only Seok Kang-Ho could do such a feat, considering he was the only one who had felt the same loneliness that Kang Chan did, and he was the only one in the entire world that Kang Chan could depend on.

Pew! Pew! Thud! Thud!

Ta-da-da-da-dang! Pew! Thud!

That's it! You should at least fight back so we can kill you all faster!

Clank! Clank!

Ta-da-dang! Pew! Pew! Pew! Thud! Thud!

Grinning, Seok Kang-Ho looked at Kang Chan with glinting eyes.

Chapter 182.1: The worst of luck (1)

Pew! Pew!

“Keegh!”

Seok Kang-Ho shot an enemy through the cheek, making the latter shout in pain.

Pew! Thud!

At the same time, Kang Chan put a hole through the same bastard’s forehead.

That seems about all of them.

Kang Chan nodded at Seok Kang-Ho.

Patter. Crunch. Crunch.

People often had three kinds of reactions to the sudden emergence of combat. Some soldiers stood their ground and remained unwavering instead of getting intimidated. During conflicts that involved multiple enemies, they were the ones who could be trusted never to back down from a fight.

Naturally, Kang Chan shot all of those soldiers in the forehead. There were also soldiers who waited for the right opportunity or bid their time until their opponents finally launched the first attack. However, Seok Kang-Ho eliminated all of them earlier when he took the lower ground.

The most bothersome and annoying bastards during these cleanup operations were the ones who were neither—those who would make their bed and never move from that spot. They would do everything in their power to stay alive until the very end of the conflict even if that meant hiding throughout the entire battle. Once their opponent’s guards were down, they would finally let bullets fly. The shots fired while everyone was smoking because they thought the battle was already over usually came from these punks.

Swish!

Kang Chan had never failed to land a bullet in his opponent’s forehead. Others could not help but be fascinated by the fact that he could perform such a feat, but the reason he could was simple: everything just moved more slowly for him. The split second that the branches of the trees and the waist-high grass tilted in the wind in slow motion was enough for Kang Chan to see the enemies’ foreheads, eyes, or even throats.

Today was no different.

Click! Pew! Pew! Thud! Thud!

Seok Kang-Ho immediately bolted forward after Kang Chan pulled the trigger again. He raised his index and middle fingers twice at him.

‘Twenty-two enemies? That means we’re still missing one.’

Realizing the meaning behind Kang Chan’s expression, Seok Kang-Ho turned around and raised his gun.

Pew! Pew!

“Where do you think you’re going, motherfucker?” Seok Kang-Ho shouted.

Their last opponent seemed to have attempted to go back down the mountain alone. His death marked the end of the battle.

Kang Chan’s heart rate slowed down, and he no longer heard anyone’s breaths. Most importantly, his gut feeling didn’t nag at him anymore. To him, that was enough evidence that they avoided imminent danger.

Crunch. Crunch.

Seok Kang-Ho walked back over to Kang Chan with a look of disbelief on his face. He felt as if he was watching a monster that evolved with every operation.

I can’t believe I picked a fight with someone like him!

The Algerian Dayeru was big and bulky, so it hurt his pride when he first met and was put on the same level as Kang Chan, a slim Asian male. He couldn’t understand why people put him in the same league as that man. However, when they finally traded blows, Dayeru felt as if Kang Chan was beating him up with a steel hammer; Kang Chan had been so fast that he couldn’t even see the punches coming.

Seok Kang-Ho remembered the pain he felt when Kang Chan landed a jab to his side, throat, and solar plexus. When he curled up on the ground, spit drooling from his mouth, Kang Chan mercilessly stepped on him.

‘I can’t let some Asian punk keep beating me up! That’s embarrassing as fuck!’

When Dayeru woke back up, he found Kang Chan leisurely drinking some beer. The same thing happened two more times. After all, Kang Chan wasn’t the type to back down from the fight either.

On the third time, Dayeru couldn’t even raise his fists when he saw the look in Kang Chan’s eyes. At that moment, he realized he would actually die if he pushed Kang Chan any further.

That incident happened in a small bar in Paris.

Seok Kang-Ho still didn’t know why, but he felt terribly upset at the time. He even sobbed like a little baby. Kang Chan told him something as he handed him a beer back then, but he didn’t understand what it was.

Fuck. How was Dayeru supposed to know that Kang Chan would take him as a mercenary after beating him to a pulp?

After that, they went to a place where carrying guns around was legal and killing people didn’t have repercussions. Kang Chan turned a blind eye when Dayeru beat up people who ordered him to make some coffee. After that, Dayeru went against Kang Chan’s commands two more times, one of which was during an operation called Mission Mangala.

Instead of listening to Kang Chan, who told him to stand down, Dayeru trusted his own gut and ended up taking a knife to his shoulder in a small room. A curved knife—one reminiscent of a crescent moon—that was tied to a pillar swung toward his throat.

Dayeru would never forget what he witnessed that day. Kang Chan leaped into the room with a bayonet in hand and confronted the enemy with fierce determination. When their eyes met briefly, Dayeru saw it.

‘Don’t you dare die, motherfucker! Live!’

Fuck. He didn’t expect the same person who beat him up as if he planned to kill him would try so goddamn hard to save him.

That was when Dayeru realized that Kang Chan was extremely lonely as well. From that moment on, he began to genuinely depend on him.

“You motherfucker!” Kang Chan, who was covered in blood, cursed in Korean as he slashed the knife from the rope.

After that day, Dayeru learned just how legendary of a figure Kang Chan was in Africa and in the Foreign Legion’s special forces. Kang Chan destroyed anyone who looked down on him because he was Asian.

Compared to the others, Dayeru’s encounter with him was one of the milder incidents.

The bastards who mocked Kang Chan the day he failed to protect rookie chicks had to quite literally crawl away to escape from him.

Some people would likely think Dayeru was exaggerating, but he wasn’t. He learned that the hard way when he used his own arm to block the knife that Kang Chan was swinging at those punks. Kang Chan wasn’t trying to scare them off—he was actually trying to kill them.

Dayeru could not help but bow down to him in respect.

On the battlefield that nobody wanted to remember, Kang Chan kept the rookie chicks and his comrades in his heart.

Seok Kang-Ho was now much older than Kang Chan, yet he still felt the same way.

Kang Chan would always be worthy of admiration. After all, he wasn’t just the one who decided who lived or died on the battlefield. He would never abandon Seok Kang-Ho for as long as he lived either. Even if he died, Kang Chan still wouldn’t brush him off or forget about him.

“What is it?” Kang Chan suddenly asked.

Seok Kang-Ho jumped, having been brought back to reality.

“What’s going on? Are you okay?” Kang Chan continued. He even turned around to check if something was behind him.

Moon Jae-Hyun and Hwang Ki-Hyun sat on a wooden bench that didn’t have a backrest in the middle of a path. Jeon Dae-Geuk was standing next to them, glancing at the security guards.

“We believe some forces in China are supporting Jang Kwang-Taek by providing him with information,” Hwang Ki-Hyun said.

Moon Jae-Hyun stayed silent, his lips tightly pressed together in a stiff expression.

“We have noticed signs showing that Jang Kwang-Taek is preparing to take military action. His attempt to assassinate the Supreme Leader is likely also related to his plan. If a war breaks out on the Korean Peninsula, it will be difficult for Yang Bum to maintain his influence over the Chinese intelligence bureau,” Hwang Ki-Hyung added.

“Regardless, these issues could be resolved with Jang Kwang-Taek’s death,” Moon Jae-Jyun grimly stated.

A short moment of silence followed right after.

“Considering Jang Kwang-Taek has control over the military, it is also highly possible that the North Korean leadership gave him the information,” Hwang Ki-Hyun explained.

“What is the United States’ reaction to all this?” Moon Jae-Hyun inquired.

“At present, the United States Forces in Korea are under a curfew and have strict restrictions on leaving the base. It appears that they consider it a priority for us to confess and offer our apologies to North Korea first.”

Moon Jae-Hyun let out a quiet sigh before speaking up again.

“We have to avoid war at all costs. Failure to do that would not only result in too many sacrifices among our people. It could also lead to the Korean Peninsula becoming a spoil divided among the powerful countries. Changes in culture, language, and customs would mean the end of our nation.”

Moon Jae-Hyun paused for a moment to look around.

“Is there any way to bring our soldiers back through our line with North Korea?”

“Mr. President, at the moment, those men are our only hope,” Hwang Ki-Hyun replied.

“They have already been exposed. Doesn’t that mean the chances of their success are almost non-existent?” Jeon Dae-Geuk questioned.

Hwang Ki-Hyung surveyed their surroundings as well before replying.

“We are planning to bring the second highest-ranking member of the North Korean leadership to South Korea from Europe.”

Pretending not to hear anything, Jeon Dae-Geuk checked if the security guards were all in their correct positions.

“All of our agents in Europe have been mobilized. So far, we have found more than five high-ranking North Koreans who have expressed their intentions to seek asylum. Jang Kwang-Taek is also aware of that, which is why he can’t

proceed with a military confrontation immediately. However, your most important task seems to be smoothing our relations with the United States soon, Mr. President.”

Moon Jae-Hyun slowly stood up from the bench and began to walk back to his office. Hwang Ki-Hyun followed behind him.

“I will contact the agents again tonight. But even when I do, it will still be difficult for us to use our assets in North Korea since everyone has their eyes on each other right now,” Hwang Ki-Hyun said.

“Hmm.”

“Tomorrow afternoon, the Aigle will be entering our waters. The United States, China, and Russia will all be on high alert. The best we can hope for right now is for you to improve our relations with the United States by then.”

“Did France really dispatch the Aigle expecting this kind of situation? This incident really highlights the importance of information warfare. Whew! Look what we’re doing, though. We forced the next leading figure of the information world into operations...” Moon Jae-Hyun trailed off.

“Mr. President, Russia’s Vasili, Britain’s Eaton, and France’s Lanok are all former special forces with experience in the field and a couple of operations under their belt. In Europe, those who have gone through such difficult missions are often respected the most. The harder the operation, the more respect they are given. I’m sorry to Mr. Kang Chan for saying this, but if he returns alive from this operation, the way intelligence bureaus around the world view him will definitely change.”

“That’s why we have to do our best to save Mr. Kang Chan. He is our only hope.”

Moon Jae-Hyun looked up at the blue autumn sky and then turned his gaze toward the horizon again.

“I became the president of South Korea to create a proud nation where everyone is happy, but all I’m doing right now is putting all the burden on Mr. Kang Chan’s shoulders. I feel bad, and this may sound foolish, but I miss him too. I feel energized when I see that trademark smile of his,” Moon Jae-Hyun mumbled under his breath, staring toward the north.

Chapter 182.2: The worst of luck (1)

Kang Chan gritted his teeth. They lost four of their men.

They laid the fallen out straight and folded their arms across their chests. As they did, he noticed that the soldier with the broken fingers was one of the fallen.

Even with an injured hand and only filling his stomach with just dry biscuits and chocolate, the man still managed to come all the way. However, he did so only to die in vain. He could not even groan the pain away because he did not want to dampen the morale of his fellow soldiers.

This was why Kang Chan tried not to let anybody get close to him. Westerners who were accustomed to operations were quite adept at letting go of dead comrades, but for Kang Chan, it was incredibly hard to endure these moments.

They charged right into enemy territory. He was already expecting that they would have to make sacrifices, but that didn't make it any less painful to witness.

“Our enemies somehow know the path that we're taking. It's either someone betrayed us or we have been spotted by satellites that we can't detect,” Kang Chan said, breaking the silence.

Everyone's gazes instantly shot to him.

“Given the situation, we have two options: either escape toward Dokgeom-ri or give up on the route we intended to take and find another path,” Kang Chan continued.

Kang Chan chuckled wryly as he looked in the direction they were planning to go.

“Since the operation has been compromised, it would certainly be best to withdraw. Unfortunately, you all have the worst of luck for ending up with a commander like me,” Kang Chan said sarcastically.

Kwak Cheol-Ho audibly gulped.

“Still, I'll give you a chance to go back. If any of you want to go to Dokgeom-ri, step forward,” Kang Chan declared.

Not a single person looked around to observe what the others were doing.

Smirking, Kang Chan continued, “Alright. Let's split into two teams. First, Seok Kang-Ho, you'll be joining me in the team that will be taking the front.”

Although Seok Kang-Ho had no idea what Kang Chan was asking him to do, he still grinned widely in response.

“Now, who's the soldier who had been in an operation here,” Kang Chan continued.

“Yes, sir,” Hong Ki-Yoon replied.

“Me, you, Seok Kang-Ho... We need one more person.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho's hand immediately shot up.

“You have to command the other team,” Kang Chan refused.

Every single soldier was holding up their hands like they were madmen on a mission to die.

“Yoon Sang-Ki,” Kang Chan named.

“Thank you, sir!” Yoon Sang-Ki replied shortly and directly.

Kang Chan then pulled out a map.

“Kwak Cheol-Ho, I will be running to Sinpyong as quickly as I can. In the meantime, you and the rest of the soldiers are to avoid combat with the enemy for as long as possible and take care of the AA guns located here,” Kang Chan ordered.

“What should we do after that, sir?” Kwak Cheol-Ho asked.

“Hide and confuse the enemy. If you don’t receive any further orders by twenty twenty-seven, head to Dokgeom-ri immediately,” Kang Chan instructed him.

Kwak Cheol-Ho remained silent.

“Think coldly and logically as you did in France, China, and North Korea,” Kang Chan said.

Pat.

Kang Chan thumped Kwak Cheol-Ho’s helmet.

Pat. Pat. Pat. Pat.

The soldiers hesitated when they first did it, but they now tapped Kang Chan’s helmet confidently. As they did, they looked into each other’s eyes. They would have to part ways for now, but they planned to meet again and have a smoke together once all of this was over. However, they could also be reunited as corpses. A few soldiers’ eyes turned red, overwhelmed by emotion.

The soldiers placed their fallen comrades’ military gear and rifles on the bodies of the deceased, then took all their C-rations. They also tore off their pants and sleeves to block the bodies’ noses and ears.

I’m sorry. If only I could make judgments a little faster! If only I was more capable! Don’t worry. I will do whatever it takes to take Jang Kwang-Taek’s head.

Kang Chan lifted his gaze from the fallen soldiers.

“Let’s go,” he commanded.

Once he began to move, Seok Kang-Ho, Yoon Sang-Ki, and Hong Ki-Yoon followed after him.

“What did you just say?”

Jang Kwang-Taek’s thin body was covered in wrinkles. At first glance, he looked like a kind neighborhood uncle, but his sunken eyes told an entirely different story.

He wore the North Korean military uniform over loose pants, and he had medals pinned all over his chest and sleeves.

“Say that one more time,” Jang Kwang-Taek ordered.

“Our communication has been completely cut off,” replied his subordinate.

Jang Kwang-Taek looked surprised.

“With three platoons of light infantry soldiers, we shouldn’t face communication issues even in the DMZ, but you’re not telling me that as soon as they arrived, we instantly lost not just communication with them but two helicopters as well?” Jang Kwang-Taek asked in disbelief. He lifted his menacing gaze toward his aide.

“Send two light infantry companies!” he ordered furiously.

“Yes, sir!” the deputy said before leaving the room.

Now alone, Jang Kwang-Taek approached the window and looked out at the mountains. Even though he was in a building for the Ministry of the People’s Armed Forces, it was really just an old thirty-year-old concrete four-story facility. The department had influence because they were the core of the North Korean military power, but their building wasn’t large or perfect in any way.

If they were in good relations with the North Korean leadership, they would’ve been on the emergency base in Pyongyang instead.

Jang Kwang-Taek frowned. The North Korean leadership had no idea how dangerous the current situation was. Their young, naive leader had no idea how significant it was for South Korea to have a young commander acknowledged by both Russia and China.

The guy instantly subdued Wui Min-Gook, assassinated Jang Kwang-Taek’s source of pride, annihilated the soldiers in Mongolia, and foiled various other plans.

That wasn’t the end of it.

He also killed Huh Geuk, one of North Korea’s most avid supporters, and even made the Beijing Capital International Airport go up in flames. What was more surprising was the fact that he lived through all of that.

And the Eurasian Rail? The moment South Korea was connected to it, the political system in North Korea would be ruined. Their young Supreme Leader had no idea. If the dedicated people of North Korea learned all about the outside world and reality, everything could change.

Jang Kwang-Taek lit up the cigarette on his desk.

“Whew.”

Should I avoid him?

No. The attention of the military was focused on him right now. If the leader of the People’s Armed Forces ran away from a South Korean special forces team of only twenty people, he would lose their trust.

“That damn bastard!” Jang Kwang-Taek cursed as he crushed the cigarette butt.
“Come at me if you dare.”

He glared at the mountains again.

Once he captured the young punk, he would have South Korea in the palm of his hand.

Why else would the People's Armed Forces be in Sinpyeong? They had the 820 tank regiment and three light infantry battalions nearby. They also had four mechanized infantry units surrounding them.

"I will control South Korea with your head and get revenge on our fallen children in Mongolia."

When Huh Geuk died, China was engulfed by a strange turmoil. However, Jang Kwang-Taek planned to return everything to their rightful place.

The sun was about as high in the sky as Kang Chan's forehead.

"Haah. Haah."

Even amid the rough sounds of breathing, the clinking of rifles, and the crunching of gravel under their feet, Kang Chan never slowed down.

Yoon Sang-Ki couldn't help but think that they could end up dead at this rate.

As he ran, he thought of their fallen brothers, Choi Seong-Geon, and his wife. Even so, he still couldn't stop fatigue from gripping his legs.

He ate a packed dinner last night, slept an hour, and slept for ten more minutes this morning. They had undergone three days of non-stop training, marched a thousand li[1], and endured harsh winter training. However, none of their training prepared them for sprinting through mountainous terrain without even an hour of rest.

"Haah. Haah."

He felt embarrassed and apologetic to his dead comrades. Still, he could never run like Kang Chan.

His lungs were on the verge of exploding, his waist felt like it was about to snap, and his shoulders, bearing the weight of his rifle and gear, hurt so much that he felt as if they were being torn apart.

'I've reached my limit now.'

They had been running for a little past an hour now.

His mental and physical strength were gone, and his legs no longer listened to him.

Rumble! Crash!

Even so, he wouldn't give up. He would probably faint and collapse, but he would never give up.

Not long after, someone grabbed Yoon Sang-Ki's chest and neck.

"Haah! Haah!"

It was Kang Chan. His shoulders were heaving, and he was taking large, labored breaths just like Yoon Sang-Ki himself.

"Let's take a short break," Kang Chan said.

Yoon Sang-Ki plopped down to the ground with a thud.

Rustle. Rustle.

Kang Chan pulled down his military gear, looked for his water pouch, and handed it to Yoon Sang-Ki.

Gulp. Gulp. Gulp. Gulp.

As Yoon Sang-Ki collected himself a little, Kang Chan drank water that Seok Kang-Ho gave him.

“Fuck! This is goddamn exhausting!” Seok Kang-Ho cursed loudly.

Hong Ki-Yoon was lying down in the direction that Seok Kang-Ho spoke.

Chapter 183: The worst of luck (2)

After resting for about three more minutes, Kang Chan addressed his team. “I heard a helicopter flying a moment ago. Our men have probably run into them by now.”

‘There was a helicopter nearby?’

Momentarily confused, Yoon Sang-Ki—who didn’t even hear the helicopter—followed Kang Chan’s gaze and looked toward the direction where the soldiers could be.

“Remember how you felt while we were all waiting for our men to succeed back in China?” Kang Chan asked.

How could they forget about the time they kept an armored car and a helicopter at bay and sprayed jet fuel all over a part of the airport?

“Our fellow men who stayed behind have to be in the middle of a horrific battle to protect us by now. As they face the embrace of death over there, they are probably hoping in desperation that we’ll kill Jang Kwang-Taek for them,” Kang Chan added.

‘Fuck!’ Yoon Sang-Ki swore.

Just like what they had done in China, his colleagues were desperately keeping the enemy occupied, yet here he was complaining that he was going to die because his feet felt heavy and his legs were no longer listening to him.

Gritting his teeth, Yoon Sang-Ki stood up.

Clank.

He straightened his back, fixed his military gear, and tightened his grip on his rifle.

Smirking, Kang Chan looked ahead of them. “Those fuckers are probably thinking that we’ll take at least eight hours to get to them. We have to do better than that if we want to Kill Jang Kwang-Taek and save even just one more of our men.”

With a sigh, Yoon Sang-Ki and Hong Ki-Yoon strengthened their resolve.

“Let’s go,” Kang Chan said. He was just walking at first, but he had already broken into a sprint before they knew it.

Did he even have anything in his bag?

Yoon Sang-Ki couldn't help but have cheap thoughts about Kang Chan. From what he had heard, Kang Chan was just a high schooler, yet the young man spoke informally to Seok Kang-Ho, and Seok Kang-Ho respected Kang Chan enough to speak half formally and half informally to him.

Honestly, Yoon Sang-Ki himself treated Kang Chan, his commander, with respect. Why did he do that?

Fuck, how can I not accept him as our commander when I have seen the look in his eyes, the terrifying skills that he shows us when we run across our enemies, and his iron will to never give up?

Yoo Sang-Ki could not help but think of Kang Chan as one of those people who could make others naturally surrender to them.

“HuffHuff. Huff Huff.”

The fatigue and breathlessness that Yoon Sang-Ki accumulated before this came back to him all at once. It hadn't even been five minutes since they started running.

‘I should just die instead!’

Despite his self-criticism, Yoon Sang-Ki hoped his body could endure this whole operation.

‘If I can't even get through this, it's better for me to just faint and die!’

He would never give up.

Should he let Kwak Cheol-Ho die?

Yoon Sang-Ki was aware of how desperate and valuable each second was to the soldiers they left behind. How could he even think that running was difficult when their comrades' blood was spilling because they were fighting to accomplish the mission?

“HuffHuff. Huff Huff.”

I'd rather die than give up! My heart should just explode if I can't endure this!

He would never stop unless his back snapped or the tendons on his legs snapped and broke.

Yoon Sang-Ki only looked at Kang Chan's legs, following after his steps as closely as he could. He kept telling himself that he would not fall behind even if he died.

“Cough! Cough!”

They heard Hong Ki-Yoon breathing so hard he seemed about to throw up. Nevertheless, none of them slowed down.

Yoon Sang-Ki knew that he was crying. For some reason, that made him feel better.

‘Fuck! Yeah—it's fine even if I cry, throw up, or die later! Right now, I just have to keep running! I don't care even if I can't ever walk again after this operation! I can't stop now!’

Yoon Sang-Ki's eyes filled with so many tears that his vision became blurry. Missing that he would lose sight of Kang Chan, he blinked it all away.

Pew! Pew!

Kwak Cheol-Ho positioned the soldiers far apart from each other.

As they fought their enemies, he once again realized how terrifying Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho were. How those two could kill more than twenty enemy soldiers and come back unscathed was beyond him.

Ta-da-dang! Ping! Pow-pow! Pow-pow-pow!

As if they were complaining about getting shot as well, the dirt and trees let out loud noises as they exploded.

If the South Korean special forces team hadn't gone through the live ammo training or gone to the operations in France and China, Kwak Cheol-Ho would not have been able to survive this long in a battle like this.

He aimed the barrel of his gun in between the branches and the grass that went up to his waist.

Whish!

Their enemy was moving in front of them.

Pew! Thud!

Sons of bitches!

Kwak Cheol-Ho immediately pointed his men to new positions.

His enemies would be mistaken if they thought he would get excited just because he had killed one of them.

He had to be level-headed if he wanted to keep his men alive—No, even after this battle, he should still remain calm and collected if he survived.

Ta-da-dang! Pow-pow-pow! Pew! Thud!

Kwak Cheol-Ho thought that he now knew why Kang Chan kept telling them to fire only one bullet at a time.

The point was to focus.

During practice shooting, Kwak Cheol-Ho would switch between single-fire, full-auto, and semi-auto, but in actual combat, he found it best to fire in bursts of three.

However, Kang Chan told them to fire just one bullet at a time, which meant they had to kill their enemies with only one shot. As a result, they focused on making that one shot count—be it by shooting their target in the forehead or the neck.

This wasn't live ammo training, so there was nothing stopping them from aiming for those parts.

Ta-da-dang! Pew! Thud!

You motherfuckers! I'm Kwak Cheol-Ho, one of South Korea's special forces!

Kwak Cheol-Ho crouched down and aimed, which was the position that Kang Chan showed them. He scanned the area from left to right.

Kang Chan told them to hide in the mountain again after holding their ground. However, a little ways from here was their goal—the anti-aircraft fort.

Whish!

Pew! Thud!

His men followed right beside him, all in similar stances.

Fuck! This is the actual combat experience that we have been so desperately hoping for! How nice would it have been if General Choi Seong-Geon and Chan Dong-Gyun were here to see us?

Pew! Pew! Thud!

A soldier to his left fired first, but Kwak Cheol-Ho shot at the enemy as well anyway to make sure they were dead.

‘Good job. Don’t let your guard down, but don’t get excited either.’

Kwak Cheol-Ho passed that on to the soldier when their eyes met.

Ta-dang! Thud! Pew! Pew! Thud!

However, as he did, one of the soldiers to his right dropped to the ground.

Kwak Cheol-Ho gritted his teeth, finding himself still lacking. Kang Chan never would have allowed his subordinate to get shot.

The sun was high up in the sky.

Yoon Sang-Ki was beginning to feel as if the pain had disappeared when it returned unimaginably worse. Right now, he was feeling of reaching his limit the same way he did at the training center, but it was far more intense this time.

Clank! Clank!

Fortunately, Kang Chan finally slowed down to a stop just a few moments after.

“Huff! Huff!”

They were all trying to catch their breath.

“Let’s have lunch and get some rest before we continue,” Kang Chan said.

We’ve been running for quite some time now. Are we even going in the right direction?

Yoon Sang-Ki couldn’t even guess what direction they were running to since they were in a dark mountain.

Clank! Clank!

Kang Chan put his left foot on top of the rock on a downhill slope, then lowered his rifle in front of him.

They took turns drinking water, then took out C-rations. Seok Kang-Ho ripped two open and handed one to Kang Chan.

They were eating while standing guard.

“How long can we rest?” Seok Kang-Ho asked Kang Chan.

“Ten minutes.”

Seok Kang-Ho ate his meal so fast that it seemed as if he was stuffing everything in his mouth. He then drank water and lay down on his side again.

‘Can he really sleep in this situation?’

Seok Kang-Ho snored, answering Yoon Sang-Ki’s question.

Just as Yoon Sang-Ki looked up in surprise, Kang Chan said, “Even if it’s just ten minutes, you should still get some sleep.”

It was as if Kang Chan read his mind.

They kept eating.

Yoon Sang-Ki also stuffed a biscuit, sandwich, and chocolate into his mouth. He then pushed them down with water.

Thud.

Yoon Sang-Ki then laid down with Hong Ki-Yoon.

This wasn’t sleeping—this was fainting.

After having a sandwich for lunch, Lanok returned to his office.

All he did was read and shred the DGSE’s reports that Raphael handed to him every twenty minutes. Nevertheless, he stayed at his desk all day except for when he was sleeping for two hours every morning.

Click.

Raphael came in and put a new report on Lanok’s desk.

The report was just an article from the daily newspaper Libération[1]. The article contained codes that only the DGSE and Lanok knew. Hence, even if someone else saw it, they wouldn’t understand what it was actually trying to convey.

Lanok traced each line with his pen as he read through it, then immediately threw it into the shredder

“Order the DGSE to request cooperation from South Korea’s National Intelligence Service. Where’s Anne?” Lanok asked.

“She’s downstairs.”

“As soon as the code is issued, take her to Osan and fly back to our country.”

“Understood,” Raphael bowed, then left the office.

Ring. Ring. Ring.

The phone on his desk rang.

Lanok waited for it to ring five times before picking it up.

“Ello?”

- Lanok, it's Vasili.

“I've been hearing your voice a lot lately.”

- Isn't that because you and your Korean colleague have been too active lately? Anyway, now that you have killed one of the United States' DIA agents in the Korean Peninsula, it would be a problem if you keep messing with them. Let's not push things too far, Lanok.”

“Vasili, now is the best time to reveal our true colors.”

- I believe that our Russian troops rescuing you is enough to pay for my mistakes in France. Monsieur Kang Chan doesn't seem to be in a good situation. Have you heard that all of China's satellites are searching for him?

“The choice is yours. China's behavior will change based on the results Monsieur Kang will produce, which is why I doubt the United States can do anything in this situation either.”

Lanok heard Vasili sighing deeply over the phone.

- Do you really believe that Monsieur Kang can kill Jang Kwang-Taek and get away with it?

“That's for you and Russia to judge.”

- If the Korean Peninsula gets engulfed by a battle for France, you, and even the grand Eurasian Rail, then it would be all over.

“It's not like you to talk a lot.”

This time, Lanok heard Vasili's ragged breathing.

- We'll dispatch the Kuznetsov[2]. However, we have no intention of actually interfering in the battle. We don't want to have a power struggle with the United States right now.

“That's sound judgment, Vasili.”

- I don't know why you're betting on something so reckless when you're so cold-hearted. Good luck, Lanok.

After Vasili expressed his displeasure, the call ended.

Lanok's lips stretched into a mask-like smile as he put down the receiver. “What you fail to see is that the ace up my sleeve can change the entire narrative, Vasili.”

As Lanok muttered to himself, his pinky finger faintly trembled.

“France’s DGSE has requested for us to deploy all of the airborne troops and for the Armored division and the fighter wing to be put on emergency standby,” Hwang Ki-Hyun said.

Moon Jae-Hyun looked at Hwang Ki-Hyun in surprise.

“Will the United States just stand around and let us do that?” Moon Jae-Hyun asked.

“Everything until now has been the French President’s instructions.”

“Did the report say anything else?”

“At the end, it said, ‘France trusts South Korea’s hidden power.’”

Jeon Dae-Geuk—who was in front of Moon Jae-Hyun—quickly looked back at them.

“Do you know what they mean?” Moon Jae-Hyun asked.

Could France be talking about that?

Jeon Dae-Geuk told Moon Jae-Hyun about the trust that Lanok put in Kang Chan at the presentation hall.

“They’re talking about Kang Chan’s capabilities that France recognized but South Korea wasn’t aware of! Considering they also sent their aircraft carrier, we shouldn’t hesitate,” Moon Jae-Hyun replied.

Hwang Ki-Hyun and Jeon Dae-Geuk didn’t know what to say. If they failed here, the consequences would be too much to bear.

Moon Jae-Hyun held up the emergency phone.

Kwak Cheol-Ho ordered the soldiers to move back again. The battle had been raging for close to two hours already. They had suffered one injury and two fatalities, but they had killed more than twenty of their enemies.

If Kang Chan was here, then he probably would have cut through their enemies already.

If this standoff lasted any longer, North Korea’s regular army would have enough time to come up the mountain and trap them like rats.

‘Should we cut through them?’

Kang Chan told them to disturb their enemies and hide themselves as much as possible. Despite how determined Kwak Cheol-Ho was, however, he still could not eliminate all his enemies.

Ta-da-dang! Pow-pow! Pow-pow-pow!

We shouldn’t let them take the upper part of the mountain from us!

It would be fatal if Kwak Cheol-Ho and the soldiers went down the ridge to hide.

Pew! Bam!

The only consolation they had was that their enemies couldn't recklessly pounce on them during this standoff either.

Kwak Cheol-Ho pointed to two locations with his index and middle fingers, repositioning two of his men.

Ta-da-dang! Pow-pow-pow! Pew! Pew!

The others covered fire when the soldiers moved, and the enemies returned fire.

Kang Chan told them to attack the anti-aircraft fort, but just handling the enemies blocking them was already proving difficult.

'They've got to be halfway there, right?'

Kwak Cheol-Ho quickly checked on his men. Their eyes were still full of life.

There were only sixteen of them, yet they were fighting a hundred enemies for over two hours.

Kwak Cheol-Ho glanced at the sun in the sky, which was about to set to the other side.

Ta-da-dang! Pow-pow-pow! Ta-dang! Pow-pow! Pew! Pew!

Those sons of bitches have to lean forward and show their foreheads before we can do something.

What would've Kang Chan done in this situation?

With the absence of the lion, the wolves were the only ones left to fight.

Kwak Cheol-Ho hoped that the lion would return quickly.

He felt lonely.

"Huff! Huff huff! Huff!"

Yoon Sang-Ki resented himself for not fainting yet.

They only slept for ten minutes, so he didn't expect that they would run for two hours after that.

"Huff! Huff! Huff!"

He didn't even know if he was still breathing or if his lungs were already coming out of his body.

Like a rabid dog, saliva went down his chin and continuously dripped down. Even his groin area was wet. He had peed himself as he was running—no, his urine came out because he couldn't control his bladder anymore.

If they kept going at this rate, he knew he would eventually die.

He had done every preparation he could think of—including running on a mountain. Still, sprinting like this didn't make any sense.

"Huff! Huff! Huff!"

Yoon Sang-Ki was about to cry.

For some strange reason, he felt as afraid as he did when it was already the first day of school after a holiday and he still hadn't finished all of his holiday homework.

However, his colleagues were fighting desperately. How could he be afraid of dying when all he had done was run?

Was he afraid of dying helplessly?

Kang Chan stood guard for ten minutes.

He was the only one who didn't sleep among the four of them. Seok Kang-Ho grumbled about it when he woke up, but Kang Chan only smirked in response.

Yoon Sang-Ki would even sell his soul to the devil if one existed. He would burn in hell forever in exchange for running over and killing Jang Kwang-Taek.

“Huff! Huff! Huff!”

It was unfair.

Yoon Sang-Ki hadn't even fired a single bullet yet. He found it unfair that he would die after drooling and peeing himself while his colleagues were fighting for their lives.

It was about two in the afternoon. The sun was behind their heads now.

They probably still had to run for another three hours.

‘I'm sorry!’

The faces of the soldiers flashed across Yoon Sang-Ki's mind.

If General Choi Seong-Geon could see them, he would've definitely looked at the faraway sky while pretending that he wasn't crying.

All of the soldiers knew that when Choi Seong-Geon looked at the sky after he received the helmet from them, the tough gentleman tightly gritted his teeth and hid his tears.

‘I'm sorry!’

Yoon Sang-Ki found it a bit easier to breathe when he thought of Choi Seong-Geon. What was more fascinating was that his legs kept moving.

Is this what it would take to be a world-famous special forces team? Do soldiers of teams like that have to be as equally skilled as Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho, who keep running like machines?

“Huff! Huff! Huff!”

Bam!

Yoon Sang-Ki struck his chest.

Thud.

His legs gave out, and he collapsed to the ground.

Is this how everything ends?

When Yoon Sang-Ki shook his head, he saw Hong Ki-Yoon lying down in exhaustion on the ground, gasping like a dog.

What's going on? I'm not the only one who collapsed?

Yoon Sang-Ki forced himself to look up even though he couldn't open his eyes properly anymore.

Kang Chan had bent forward and put his hands on his knees. He was also gasping for breath.

'Is he resting? Are we finally going to rest?'

What was the point of doing that now? Yoon Sang-Ki no longer had any strength to run.

"Let's rest for ten minutes before cutting Jang Kwang-Taek's head off. You guys did well," Kang Chan said.

What's he saying?

Yoon Sang-Ki turned his head.

"Cough! Cough!" Seok Kang-Ho was retching. He only drooled, though, since there was nothing for him to vomit.

"Huff! Huff!"

Yoon Sang-Ki looked at Kang Chan again. He was still breathing heavily.

Kang Chan grinned. When their eyes met, Yoon Sang-Ki got a feeling so ominous that it was as if he got covered in ice.

"It took us only four hours to get here. Huff! Huff!" Kang Chan explained.

Fuck!

Yoon Sang-Ki couldn't believe it.

Their enemies expected them to take eight hours. They would've definitely considered their best speed when they calculated that.

But it only took us four hours. How is Kang Chan still alive even after running that fast?

Yoon Sang-Ki laughed heartily. He felt bad for their enemies because they had to fight someone like Kang Chan.

Jang Kwang-Taek, you fucking dickhead! How did you end up getting targeted by such a man?

Chapter 184.1: I Am Happy (1)

"Send the Songun-Ho[1]!" Jang Kwang-Taek angrily ordered.

"Commander! That could be seen as an act of provocation from our side!" his subordinate protested.

"But the South Korean bastards are all there! I'm sure the Party leadership is also aware of that!" Jang Kwang-Taek shot back.

“South Korea has issued an emergency deployment decree for air support, armored units, and combat aviation brigades. Russia has sent over an aircraft carrier as well! If we launch helicopters now, South Korea will send their fighter jets over, and if we send tanks or mortars in the vicinity of those South Korean soldiers, the Party leadership will claim that you incited the situation, Commander!”

“Argh!” Jang Kwang-Taek moaned in frustration.

“No one came to the base today, sir! If you provoke South Korea any further, those traitorous bastards will run straight to the Party leadership.”

Jang Kwang-Taek tightly gritted his teeth. He had just received a report that the two light infantry companies that they had sent to fight off South Korea’s invasion could barely hold their opponents at bay right now.

South Korea only sent twenty or so special forces soldiers, yet the bastards were proving more than capable enough to hold their own against a hundred light infantry soldiers. It was a clear demonstration of how formidable the young punk was.

The soldiers were still fighting as they spoke.

“That cowardly Ruske fucker!” Jang Kwang-Taek griped with fury.

Russia didn’t tell him anything before they sent their one and only Kuznetsov aircraft carrier, which could only mean that if a war were to break out on the Korean Peninsula, they would support South Korea in the fight. Even if they chose to side with North Korea, they would not be supporting him specifically but the Party leadership.

China, the primary support that North Korea relied on, still couldn’t make a move, and their next biggest supporter, Russia, was openly endorsing either South Korea or the Party leadership.

As the deputy commander told Jang Kwang-Taek, sending tanks or artillery units to the battlefield would be interpreted as an act of war or even rebellion. The moment he mobilized the troops, the Party leadership would gain a justification to stop him. To make things worse, there was no knowing what South Korea would do. Moon Jae-Hyun was nothing like the South Korean presidents who preceded him.

This is why I supported Huh Ha-Soo!

“That motherfucker!” Jang Kwang-Taek squawked.

He was left with no other choice but to rely on the light infantry troops. If South Korea was putting their trust in their young punk, then the only thing he could do was believe in the light infantry soldiers whom he raised like his own children.

Jang Kwang-Taek turned his head to look at the vast mountains spread outside the window.

There’s no way that guy can break through the encirclement.

Even if the South Korean soldiers ran like hell to where he was, he would have had finished dinner before they could reach him. Otherwise, he would have already been out there himself, barking commands at his subordinates.

“Our light infantry soldiers will take care of them all, sir,” his subordinate said in an attempt to reassure him.

Jang Kwang-Taek glared sharply at his deputy commander. His subordinate’s voice sounded a little weak. It was as if he didn’t believe his own words.

“Get out of here!” Jang Kwang-Taek shouted at him.

This wasn’t it. This wasn’t what he wanted and planned for. He hoped for the South Korean president to change, and he intended to borrow the powers of China and Russia after. He wanted the idiotic and corrupt Party leadership to regain their senses and refuse the Eurasian Rail or, at the very least, demand massive compensation for letting it be built.

That would start the reconstruction of the great North Korea and their military’s rise in power again. For a while, he actually felt that everything were going his way.

Where did things go wrong?

The Ministry of Defense building should be bustling with people at this time, but it was deserted instead. The so-called military officers were busy calculating what would be best for themselves and making all sorts of excuses so they didn’t have to show up to work.

Jang Kwang-Taek picked up a cigarette and put it in his mouth. He bit on it to keep it from falling before lighting it up.

“Whew!”

Blocked by the window, the smoke spread out to the side instead of escaping out into the open.

Bang bang bang bang bang! Pew! Pew!

Kwak Cheol-Ho steeled his resolve. Facing over seventy soldiers with just thirteen men was too much, but it would bother him if he descended from the ridge and gave the enemies the advantage.

Chk.

“The enemies will end up surrounding us from down below at this rate, but if we surrender our position and retreat from here, they’ll eventually learn about the assassination team. I can’t let that happen,” Kwak Cheol-Ho said over the radio as he leaned his head against a tree.

He didn’t care if the enemy soldiers surrounded and killed him. He was determined to do whatever it took to buy time.

Chk.

“I’m sorry,” Kwak Cheol-Ho apologized to his team.

Bang bang bang bang bang! Pow pow pow! Bang! Pow! Pow!

Having gained the upper hand, the enemies kept the South Korean soldiers under constant fire.

Chk.

“Enough talk! We should focus on taking down more of those bastards, sir!”

Chk.

“Who here said they wanted to retreat, sir?”

Chk.

“Are you saying low-ranking soldiers are only concerned with running away from combat, sir?”

Chk.

“That’s obviously not what he meant, man. He just feels sorry that we’re here.”

Chk.

“Still, he’s the coolest when he’s acting all serious and macho.”

Chk.

“I can’t believe you just said that. You really don’t think we’re getting out of here alive, huh?”

Kwak Cheol-Ho’s lips curved into a bitter smile. Amid the hail of bullets above their heads, his team was chattering aimlessly and lightheartedly. He understood why they were attempting to crack jokes now.

Chk.

“Bear with it. Let’s get through this. The more we act up here, the more time the assassination team will have,” Kwak Cheol-Ho encouraged through gritted teeth. Then, the radio began to crackle again.

Chk.

“If I can...”

Bang bang bang! Pow pow! Pew. Pew.

Chk.

“Protect the country with my blood...”

Bang! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Chk.

“I am happy.”

Pew! Pew! Pew!

The soldiers took turns chanting the motto on the radio.

The soldiers all knew only four people had gone to kill Jang Kwang-Taek. It was an outrageous operation. Nevertheless, Kwak Cheol-Ho was waiting for Kang Chan to hurry and return soon. It wasn't because he wanted to survive but because he wanted to save the lives of his fellow soldiers who were fighting alongside him.

Bang bang bang bang! Thud!

“Kegh! Agh.”

One of the soldiers jerked forward and fell to the ground. A bullet had hit him in the neck.

‘Fuck!’

Pew! Pew! Pew! Bang!

Kwak Cheol-Ho wanted to dash over to him. He wanted to run out like Kang Chan always did and kill all the enemies. If he wasn't the commander in charge, he would have already bolted out there.

Pew! Thud! Bang bang! Pow! Bang Bang! Pow! Pow!

The special forces team took down the enemy soldier, exploiting the mistake he made. The enemy seemed to be spreading out to surround the South Korean special forces team, but they weakened their formation because they left no support down below.

The remaining South Korean soldiers formed a circle with each one guarding a certain direction.

Kwak Cheol-Ho was ready to face death here if that was what it took to accomplish their objective.

Much to the enemy's confusion, they endured everything thrown at them, showing no signs that they wanted to retreat or surrender.

Clack! Click!

Kwak Cheol-Ho swiftly reloaded his gun. It was currently two in the afternoon, which meant there was more than six hours left before the radio communication that Kang Chan had ordered him to wait for.

He was thirty and hungry.

Pew! Thud! Bang bang! Bang!

Why would you try and fucking surround us, you assholes?

Would they have been fighting like this if they didn't go through the live ammo training? He thought not.

Kwak Cheol-Ho's bitter smile remained as he sharply looked ahead.

Only five of them had to make it out alive. Since Cha Dong-Gyun was still alive, for as long as five of them survived, they would be able to successfully pass down the knowledge that they had gained from the live ammo training and their accumulated operations. They would still have have a team of soldiers—who had blown up a Chinese airport and infiltrated North Korea—for any mission.

Their fellow soldiers were taken by surprise during the mountain warfare training that they had after Choi Seong-Geon died. After all, the gap between the troops who had already gone on missions and those who hadn't was clearly evident.

However, if he was being honest, there wasn't much of a difference between their skills. At most, their concentration and perhaps the ability to adapt to the ever-changing situation was all that made the difference. Nevertheless, the results of the mock battles were still like night and day.

Kwak Cheol-Ho wondered if Kang Chan would've thought their mock battles were cute child's play.

'Hurry and come back, please.'

This critical standoff was the only reason the North Korean soldiers couldn't advance any further either. The North Korean military had to have a reason why they still hadn't climbed higher on the mountain. Maybe it was because of Kang Chan, but it could be something else entirely.

Kwak Cheol-Ho wasn't hoping to get out of this alive. However, at the least, he wanted to send back his men, who were standing off against the enemies with their camouflaged faces and determined gazes. He hoped that they could go back home and teach the new recruits.

Bang bang bang! Pow! Pow!

'Stop with the ridiculous bullshit!'

The enemy's bullets seemed to be screaming at him to get his head back in the game.

Chapter 184.2: I Am Happy (1)

Kang Chan and his team headed downhill and stopped just before a barbed-wire fence. He immediately noticed four guard posts spaced a hundred meters apart.

"That's where Jang Kwang-Taek is? Really?" Seok Kang-Ho asked, looking at the building with a dubious expression. The whole establishment was composed of two two-story buildings to the left and three one-story buildings to the right.

Unfortunately for them, they happened to be at the front of the building. In this situation, they had to use the mountain to go toward the back of the building as much as they could, but there was a goddamn road behind the compound.

If there was a silver lining, it was that the structure didn't seem to be big.

"Let's clear and occupy that guard post first. I'll head straight into the building, so support me from that tower," Kang Chan said, eyeing the guard post that resembled a two-story lookout tower. Among the guard posts, it was the only one equipped with a machine gun.

"That looks like a KPV heavy machine gun. Guess I'm finally getting my hands on one," Seok Kang-Ho remarked.

"Can you do it with Hong Ki-Yoon?" Kang Chan confirmed.

"Without a doubt," Seok Kang-Ho confidently replied. He then looked at Hong Ki-Yoon with a nod. "Or we could leave the guard posts to them so I can accompany you inside."

Kang Chan considered the idea but eventually shook his head.

“This operation won’t work if the rear is unstable. We have to work perfectly in sync together if we want to quickly get back to the mountain.”

“Got it.”

“Let’s head in after having some C-rations,” Kang Chan ordered.

Remaining in crouching positions, Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho backed up and sat on the ground. The terrain allowed them to relax a little because it was sloped down on both sides.

Yoon Sang-Ki and Hong Ki-Yoon had become so pale that they looked as if they had changed races.

Kang Chan opened his military gear and tore open a C-ration.

Crunch, crunch. Munch, munch.

Yoon Sang-Ki and Hong Ki-Yoon initially shoved the food into their mouths, but they slowed down when they saw Kang Chan. After drinking enough water, the time had come to get back to work.

Kang Chan drew on the ground with his finger.

“Seok Kang-Ho and Hong Ki-Yoon, you guys take this area. Yoon Sang-Ki, take charge of the guard post here,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Understood, sir,” Yoon Sang-Ki responded and lifted his gaze to look at Kang Chan, silently questioning if it was okay for him to go in alone.

“If things get dicey, unleash hell,” Kang Chan instructed them.

“Will do,” Seok Kang-Ho replied.

The enemies could fire six hundred rounds of ammo per minute. Anyone who carelessly rushed toward them would be torn apart before they could even pull the trigger. However, Kang Chan and his team were on the mission to kill the head of the North Korean Ministry of Defense. The assassination seemed unlikely to succeed, and even if it did, surviving would still be nigh impossible.

Clack. Click.

They cautiously checked their weapons and their spare magazines.

“Let’s be quick about it. The faster we get this done, the more of our comrades survive,” Kang Chan said, looking at Seok Kang-Ho, Yoon Sang-Ki, then Hong Ki-Yoon.

Tap, tap.

Kang Chan extended his hand to pat Yoon Sang-Ki’s helmet. He then reached out for Hong Ki-Yoon’s helmet.

Thud! Thud!

He beat Seok Kang-Ho’s helmet a bit harder.

“Let’s go.”

Yoon Sang-Ki felt shivers run down his entire body upon hearing Kang Chan's command. Kang Chan's eyes showed how certain he was about Jang Kwang-Taek's death.

They were back at the spot where they were looking down from earlier. The terrain made it so that if they carefully descended, the guard posts wouldn't notice them.

Who could have imagined that someone would attack the Ministry of Defense? Especially now that the sun was still setting behind the mountain?

Maybe it was because they had taken off their military gear, but they seemed so unnaturally light that they felt as if they could fly off into the sky.

"Be careful with the gravel," Kang Chan warned.

The descent was about forty meters in length. With every step, they risked sliding, rocks rolling, or branches breaking. Making any notable noise meant being shot at with six hundred bullets per minute.

It wouldn't just end with their bodies being shredded apart—that wasn't the worst part. It was that they would fail the mission and get their fellow soldiers killed. The possibility of that outcome weighed down on their minds.

Because it was autumn, there were plenty of fallen leaves and the trees themselves were bare. Kang Chan chose to take the road that was deeply eroded by the water that used to stream through it.

Crunch, rustle.

They relied on the roots of the trees and the rocks to support their weight. They could grab onto them like hikers, but that could cause rocks to roll down because they put too much weight onto the spot. It could also lead to branches breaking, which meant immediate death.

It took normal hikers any time between five to ten minutes to descend forty meters. However, considering Kang Chan's team had to infiltrate the compound without making any sound, they would likely take twenty to forty minutes at most. After all, they had to use their military boots' heels to create makeshift steps by digging into the ground and also find areas that could support their weight by pushing with their hands.

About ten meters down, Kang Chan looked up. Seok Kang-Ho was up next.

Naturally, they couldn't go down a path like this all at the same time. If someone were to slip halfway through, someone would have to be ready to provide cover. They also had to push aside dry branches hidden between the fallen leaves with their feet and grind the soil to create steps so they could move further down.

On the bright side, they were deep in the fallen leaves, so their enemies wouldn't find them that easily unless they were searching closeby.

Rustle. Rustle.

As Seok Kang-Ho descended, soil broke off from underneath his foot and rolled down on Kang Chan's back.

Kang Chan quickly glanced at the guard posts. They were still quiet, but there was a chance that they heard the commotion, so he observed them for about ten seconds. Fortunately, they showed no movement

They resumed their slow descent.

Rustle.

Kang Chan swiftly looked below him. Snakes and other creatures like Asian badgers, raccoons, and other goddamn beasts that he'd never even heard about before could be underneath the fallen leaves.

Still, for as long as it wasn't a venomous snake, they should be fine.

Rustle. Rustle.

The sounds gradually faded away.

It took them about twenty-five minutes to descend. With the sun behind their backs, the shadows cast by the mountain made it easier to conceal themselves.

Kang Chan glanced up at the guard posts. About twenty meters away from them was the watchtower-like structure. It was two meters high and two stories tall. It had no windows, which meant any screams would echo outside.

It made sense there weren't any windows, though. No fool would leave a KPV machine gun indoors.

The machine gun was likely placed there as a means to intimidate.

Kang Chan gritted his teeth. His surroundings were so quiet that he could hear a pin drop.

This was the Ministry of Defense building. Shouldn't there be trucks and jeeps coming and going? Where were the small noises and people clamoring? Damn it.

Maybe it was because they came from the mountains, but the guards didn't look their way. That just made things even more annoying, though. If they were regularly looking this way, Kang Chan could have pinpointed when there would be gaps. The guards at the left and right posts were openly engaged in other activities.

Kang Chan turned his gaze toward Seok Kang-Ho.

'You ready?'

'Yep, ready.'

Looks were enough for them to exchange words.

Kang Chan gestured at the enemy who was on the two-story guard post.

Swish swish swish.

Seok Kang-Ho quickly made his way below the guard post. They would put the operation at risk if anyone saw him move no matter if they were inside the building or at the other watchtowers.

The guard post was on a large platform constructed with big planks and rounded logs. Seok Kang-Ho tightly pressed his body against the structure. When he glanced back, Kang Chan nodded at him.

Swish. Swish.

Using the planks and logs for support, Seok Kang-Ho began to climb. He was managing to carry himself up with just the strength in his arms.

Creak, creeeak.

However, the damn tree started to make noise.

“Did you hear that?” someone suddenly asked, the voice coming from above.

Kang Chan silently aimed his gun at the guards.

Swish. Swish.

“Whatever. Forget it. If we bring it up to the higher-ups, they’ll ask us to fix it,” the other guard complained.

The conversation between the two sounded as if they were speaking right next to each other.

Whoosh!

Not long after, a gust of wind swept through, seemingly taunting Kang Chan.

The goddamn post was just two meters, and Seok Kang-Ho was just two arms away from the top. The wide planks concealed his body a little, providing him some comfort.

Creak.

The planks began to cry and shriek again when Seok Kang-Ho extended his arms to resume climbing.

“Is this thing falling apart?” another guard asked.

“Ugh, motherfucker! Go investigate after your shift is over. Stop looking around. The higher-ups could be looking in through the opening,” his fellow guard grumbled.

Creak.

Seok Kang-Ho hung his arms right below the platform’s floorboards.

The two guards grew silent again.

Swish. Swish.

Kang Chan waited for Seok Kang-Ho’s next move. After a while, Seok Kang-Ho climbed a little bit higher.

The two guards sat facing the front of the building. They turned their muzzles pointing diagonally upward toward the sky and shifted positions.

The railing was waist-high.

Swish. Swish.

Everything felt as if it was moving in slow motion.

One, two.

Whoosh!

Seok Kang-Ho bent his arm, propelling his body upward. The moment he slid under the railing, the enemy turned their heads.

Pew! Pew!

A faint spray of blood spurted from their foreheads.

Seok Kang-Ho immediately lunged forward to grab the falling enemies.

At the same time, Kang Chan gave Hong Ki-Yoon a signal.

What about our surroundings?

As Kang Chan scanned the area, Hong Ki-Yoon quickly climbed up to the platform, took off the enemy's helmet, and wore it. The blood that collected in the helmet flowed down his back.

Hong Ki-Yoon sat down first. Seok Kang-Ho took a seat after.

All of this happened in less than thirty seconds. Half of the mission was a success now.

Kang Chan looked at Yoon Sang-Ki and pointed at the other guard post that they were targeting.

After about five minutes...

Chk. Chk. Chk. Chk.

... Yoon Sang-Ki signaled that he had reached the guard post.

It was time to begin.

Kang Chan quickly dug under the guard post. There was an iron mesh surrounding the tower, but the gaps were wide enough for him to slip through with ease.

Chk.

"Daye, I'm going in," Kang Chan radioed in.

Chk.

"Got it, Cap," Seok Kang-Ho replied.

Kang Chan clenched his teeth as he glared at the four-story building.

Chapter 185.1: I Am Happy (2)

Kang Chan focused on nothing but his target.

What if he got shot? What if there were a lot of enemies waiting for him inside the building?

Worrying his brains out wouldn't change anything anyway. Their enemies wouldn't withdraw either.

Haah. Haah.

The building was about sixty meters away from them.

The moment Kang Chan started running, everything he experienced in every battle he fought began replaying in his mind.

Jang Kwang-Taek, you son of a bitch.

You killed Choi Seong-Geon and tried to kill Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook. You've bullshitted your way out far too many times now. It's time you face the consequences of your actions.

Kang Chan glanced at the top of the watchtower.

One, two!

Whoosh!

Haah. Haah.

Damn it! This day just keeps making me run even when I don't want to!

Jang Kwang-Taek felt uncomfortable even though he was already sitting at his desk. It was as if uneasiness and anxiety were sitting on his shoulders and squeezing his head.

'Am I getting old? Am I really worried about one South Korean punk?' Jang Kwang-Taek frowned and sighed. The ominous feeling he had refused to disappear. 'Is the Party leadership coming here to arrest me?'

They didn't seem to have gone that far yet.

If the Party leadership did something so reckless, they would start a fight to the death.

He was told that the light infantry soldiers were slowly surrounding and sweeping their enemies.

Jang Kwang-Taek never thought that South Korea could have such spiteful people.

They used to be as weak as could be because of American capitalism and dirty entertainment!

Right now, he was up against the special forces team from Jeungpyeong. When he heard that they were acting out, he killed Choi Seong-Geon to make an example out of him. However, that just made twenty members of that special forces team attack North Korea. Right now, they had already killed sixty of his light infantry soldiers, thirty of whom were massacred before they could even fight back.

Jang Kwang-Taek gritted his teeth. He would take down the South Korean punk and his special forces team, dominate the Party, and support Huh Ha-Soo in becoming the next president of South Korea. If he could accomplish all those, China and Russia would certainly side with him again.

"Fuck!"

However, despite how hard Jang Kwang-Taek reassured himself, his instincts kept clinging to his shoulders and warning him. Nevertheless, he was willing to put his life on the line on this gamble.

If he issued an emergency draft to the executives sounding him out because of the South Korean special forces team—which was only twenty strong—then his reputation as the Minister of Defense would plummet to the ground.

Jang Kwang-Taek believed in the light infantry soldiers, the great warriors of the public. After all, he worked the hardest on them, and he didn't really have any other choice.

The light infantry soldiers whom he meticulously looked after were the reason the Party leadership could only observe Jang Kwang-Taek. With them around, even military authorities couldn't rashly turn away from him.

Jang Kwang-Taek believed in them. As great warriors of North Korea, they would cut the necks of that South Korean punk and his underlings and return alive.

Seemingly out of habit, Jang Kwang-Taek held up a cigarette. He then picked up a lighter and turned to the window.

Clank!

He opened the lid of the lighter but stopped himself from turning it on.

'Is that...?'

Someone was running straight toward the building.

Jang Kwang-Taek got a bad feeling about the person. He felt as if his blood was quickly freezing up.

It was only one guy.

'Is that South Korea's bastard...? This doesn't make sense.'

He would have had to push past the soldiers surrounding them first. Even if he managed to do that, reaching this place would have taken eight more hours of running as fast as he could.

'Is he planning on raiding North Korea's Ministry of Defense building by himself?'

Suddenly coming to his senses, Jang Kwang-Taek turned and violently pushed the button under his desk.

Bang!

Weeoo! Weeoo! Weeoo!

Kang Chan hung his rifle on his shoulder.

The enemy had rung the emergency alarm.

The front doors opened, and guards ran out from inside the building.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Weeeeeoooo!

The heavy machine gun that Seok Kang-Ho was manning rang out loudly. Although they were in broad daylight, the fire that came out of the barrel with each bullet could still be seen.

Crumble!

These motherfuckers chose to form a line to come out and meet me?!

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Kang Chan ran into the entrance.

He jumped over the scattered corpses and immediately threw himself toward the stairs in the middle of the lobby.

“Call the light infantry soldiers!” Jang Kwang-Taek yelled on the security phone.

As he did, the door swung open, and his deputy commander ran inside.

Weeeeeooooo! Crumble! Weeeeeooooo!

Outside the window, a frightening group of lights was flying toward the building next to them.

Crumble!

‘We don’t have that many troops in the main building!’

“Commander! Please come this way!” the deputy commander yelled.

Jang Kwang-Taek put the phone down, almost throwing it to the side, and followed his deputy commander out of his office.

Pew! Pew! Pew!

Blood sprayed in the air whenever the heads of Kang Chan’s enemies snapped back.

Clank! Click!

Kang Chan took out his magazine with his right hand and immediately loaded a new one into his gun with his left. Dayeru always pulled the trigger by accident whenever he imitated this move.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Did you sons of bitches have a good time killing our fellow men?!

Bang! Pew! Pew! Thud! Thud!

Two of the enemies ran out as the door opened. He quickly shot them in the forehead.

Kang Chan ran forward and went up the stairs. He didn’t care what happened after this and didn’t even bother to be quiet.

I’m going to kill him. I’m going to kill him no matter what.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

I am the god of death! Everything you fuckers do looks slow to me!

Click! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

He shot all of the enemies who ran out in the forehead.

Why did you kill Choi Seong-Geon?

Pew! Pew! Pew!

The international situation? The dynamics of the Korean Peninsula? None of those matter! You fucking dickheads shouldn’t have messed with someone I cared about!

Pew! Pew! Pew!

Weeeeeoooo! Crumble!

Ta-da-da-da-dang! Ta-da-da-da-dang! Ta-dang! Ta-ng!

There was a counterattack in earnest from outside the building. Enemies came here while watching for a chance to kill them.

Kang Chan went around the stairs on the fourth floor and checked either side of the hallway.

Fuck!

There was a room on one end of the hallway. Its door was wide open.

Swoosh!

Kang Chan ran toward it as fast as he could.

Thump. Thump.

Haah. Haah.

The world moved so slowly that it was as if someone was tightly pulling his surroundings back.

One of the doors that Kang Chan brushed past swung open, revealing a muzzle.

Kang Chan fell backward as he turned.

Ta-da-da-da-dang! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Thud!

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Many of these bastards are hiding.

He could feel immense pain in his back.

Kang Chan stood up. He reloaded his gun as he resumed running toward the open door.

When Kang Chan entered the room, a bright light struck his eyes. It was a parking lot filled with cars.

Kang Chan immediately raised his gun. There were about ten enemies.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Ta-da-da-da-dang! Pow-pow-pow-pow!

Kang Chan crouched down and ran to the cement railing in the hallway that led outside.

Ta-da-da-da-da-dang! Pow-pow-pow-pow-pow!

The upper part of the wall exploded.

Whoosh! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Kang Chan straightened his back and shot the enemy riflemen. He could still hear the KPV heavy machine gun unleashing hell.

As soon as Kang Chan reached the ground floor, he pulled out his pistol.

Ta-ng! Ta-ng! Tang! Tang!

One, two!

Swoosh! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

He shot one in the forehead, and a car hit another.

Did this fucker just do that?

That enemy instinctively avoided the bullet by sinking to his knees when he saw the guard next to him get shot in the forehead.

Pow-pow-pow-pow!

Kang Chan pounced on the enemy and aimed his gun.

“Jang Kwang-Taek?” Kang Chan asked.

The old man seemed speechless and angry. He found Kang Chan so absurd that it outraged him. In an instant, Kang Chan saw all of those emotions in the old man’s eyes.

“Are you the South Korean bastard?” the old man asked.

“Tell General Choi Seong-Geon that I said hello,” Kang Chan said.

Pew! Pew! Pew!

Kang Chan shot the old man in the forehead, neck, and chest.

It was over.

Weeeeeooooo! Crumble! Crumble!

Kang Chan could no longer hear the gunshots from the enemies who were still fighting back.

Why does the Ministry of Defense only have a few troops? Did I kill the wrong person? He looked like the guy I saw in a photo, though. Son of a bitch—Jang Kwang-Taek caused so much trouble even though he wasn’t even a big shot!

Pew!

Kang Chan shot Jang Kwang-Taek’s forehead once more, then went around to the back of the building.

What’s going on? How could the Ministry of Defense be this slack?

Kang Chan waved at the watchtower and the guard post.

The two remaining guard posts had been damaged beyond recognition, and the buildings had been riddled with the horrors of war. Mutilated corpses were all over the place, some of which were even piled up on top of each other. It didn’t make sense that the Ministry of Defense was this weak.

Seok Kang-Ho, Yoon Sang-Ki, and Hong Ki-Yoon swiftly ran over.

“Hong Ki-Yoon, double-check if that’s Jang Kwang-Taek,” Kang Chan ordered as he pointed behind him.

Hong Ki-Yoon did as instructed, and Seok Kang-Ho and Yoon Sang-Ki guarded the perimeter.

“It’s him—this is definitely Jang Kwang-Taek,” Hong Ki-Yoon reported.

Now that they had eliminated their target, all that was left to do was to return to South Korea. However, if they went back on foot, there was no chance they would make it in time.

As Kang Chan’s gaze alternated between Jang Kwang-Taek and the mountain, he came up with a plan. “Should we take Jang Kwang-Taek’s car? Would the guard posts also inspect that fucker’s car?”

Hong Ki-Yoon pondered for a moment before his expression brightened in approval. “Nobody will stop us if we drive with the emergency lights on.”

“Wear the shirt of that dead bastard next to you before we go.”

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

As soon as Kang Chan said that, Seok Kang-Ho and Yoon Sang-Ki opened fire.

“There are still some bastards left,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

As Kang Chan’s eyes glinted, Hong Ki-Yoon began changing into the blood-soaked clothes.

Chapter 185.2: I Am Happy (2)

Click.

When the door opened, a man went inside, cut across the extremely large room, and approached the desk. He then bowed to the man behind the desk as he began his report. “We have confirmed the deaths of Minister of Defense Jang Kwang-Taek and deputy commander Ha Deuk-Suh.”

The man behind the desk raised his head as his eyes widened in surprise. “Were the South Korean bastards behind it?”

“Yes.”

“Wow!” The supreme leader sighed softly as he shook his head. “I heard that they were surrounded! The military heads would’ve been keeping a wary eye on the situation while trusting the light infantry soldiers. It seems the South Koreans managed to get out of their encirclement and kill Jang Kwang-Taek even though he deployed his light infantry soldiers and a couple of helicopters. Jang Kwang-Taek is probably turning over in his grave right now. Alright—where are those bastards?”

“According to reports, they have taken the Minister of Defense’s car to make their way back to their surrounded colleagues.”

The supreme leader groaned, which sounded as if it was mixed with a sigh. “Contact the guard posts and tell them to pretend not to notice them. If our soldiers can kill them, then we’ll be hitting two birds with one stone. The chances of this happening are slim, but just in case they manage to wipe out our light infantry soldiers, we’ll punish those who followed and sided with Jang Kwang-Taek.” The supreme leader cocked his head. “Charge Jang Kwang-Taek and Ha Deuk-Suh with an appropriate crime, and make sure that the official reports state that they were shot to death.”

"How should we proceed with the covert operation in South Korea?" the man asked.

"Just announce that they were shot to death for now. We'll see how things go from there. After all, the answer to your question will change based on who will win this battle between the South Korean bastards and the light infantry soldiers. That aside, how did those useless dogs reach Shinpyeong so quickly?"

"We also find that quite strange."

"Look into it thoroughly later. Prioritize sending the eight hundred twentieth tank regiment to the Ministry of Defense. They should be on standby right now. Use them to dominate over the military heads and punish everyone who dared followed Jang Kwang-Taek."

"Understood."

When the man quickly left the room, the supreme leader looked up and stared blankly at the ceiling.

"I heard that China and Russia have been supporting South Korea lately. I now understand why," the supreme leader uttered to himself, his voice swiftly dispersing throughout the room.

Yoon Sang-Ki held onto Jang Kwang-Taek with eyes burning from tears.

They had successfully eliminated their target, but to anyone looking at them from outside the car, Jang Kwang-Taek would look as if he was just sitting comfortably in the backseat. They even put a fabric hat on him and lowered his head to hide the bullet holes that Kang Chan left on his forehead.

Did North Korea abandon Jang Kwang-Taek?

He found it suspicious that the Ministry of Defense's security was absurdly weak.

Kang Chan ran out to the building by himself, and now Yoon Sang-Ki was holding Jang Kwang-Taek's dead body.

Jang Kwang-Taek? Is this really him?

Yoon Sang-Ki couldn't believe it.

'You guys just need to survive for a little longer now—stay alive!' Yoon Sang-Ki shouted in his mind over and over again.

Rustle. Pew! Ta-da-da-dang! Ta-dang! Ta-da-dang!

Their enemies were blatantly closing in around them.

South Korea's special forces team wasn't going to put their heads against the muzzles of their enemies just because they were closing in on their position. However, the chances of the North Korean soldiers finding an opening to shoot down those crowded in the middle of their encirclement increased the smaller the distance between them.

To make matters worse, all of the South Korean soldiers' locations were compromised by now. After all, they had been firing back at their opponents nonstop.

Only nine of them were left now, and Kwak Cheol-Ho was one of them.

Of the twenty-four soldiers who joined this operation, four were killed when helicopters attacked them, and another four detached from the main force to kill Jang Kwang-Taek. Seven had been killed in this standoff so far.

Ta-da-dang! Pow-pow-pow! Pow-pow!

Not wanting to see bullets land on the bodies of their fallen comrades, they relentlessly dragged the dead soldiers and hid them inside their formation.

The sun set behind the mountain, causing a shadow to engulf the battlefield.

The battle had entered a lull.

Their enemies had stopped approaching them. Since they were surrounded, it seemed the North Koreans planned to just wait them out. After all, they were bound to grow tired eventually.

Even if their roles were reversed, the South Koreans would still find it difficult to overpower their enemies if they stubbornly resisted.

'They're hiding something.'

Kwak Cheol-Ho sharply examined his surroundings.

First, their opponents hadn't received any support from the regular army. They hadn't been bombarded by mortars or run over by tanks either. Their enemies also hadn't used explosive weapons like grenades yet.

Rustle.

Kwak Cheol-Ho watched a soldier take out his water and drink from it.

Their water pouch looked like an IV bag, so they could just put their mouth at the opening and suck out the water from there. It was best to drink this way during a standoff like this.

Rustle.

Kwak Cheol-Ho also took out and drank his water, making him feel much better.

Are they taking a bit of a break because they want to have dinner?

Silent moments like this were the scariest because they didn't know what could happen while they had their guards down.

Kwak Cheol-Ho rubbed his face with his left hand as if he was washing his face.

They would soon be unable to endure the battle. After all, they were starting to run out of ammo. With about fifty to sixty enemies surrounding them, their nine-man squad was bound to reach its limit soon.

We did good. We held them off long enough.

Kwak Cheol-Ho didn't know if they were going to last until eight this evening, but they deserved to be praised for their perseverance in this long battle.

Rustle! Rustle! Crunch!

At that moment, he heard their enemies moving simultaneously.

‘They’re coming!’

Their enemies seemed to have been planning on closing in on them from under the cover of darkness.

Kwak Cheol-Ho raised his rifle and scanned their surroundings.

Rustle. Rustle. Rustle.

It didn't take long for him to find one of the enemies' shadows, but he couldn't accurately track him with his sights because the enemy was moving.

How come I was still accurate even in the dark during the operation in France?

Ta-da-da-da-dang! Ta-da-da-da-dang! Ta-da-da-da-dang!

About three or four of their enemies shot the area next to Kwak Cheol-Ho all at the same time.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Right after they counter-fired...

Ta-da-da-da-dang! Pow-pow-pow-pow! Ta-da-da-dang! Pow-pow-pow-pow!

Chunks of the tree that Kwak Cheol-Ho was leaning on exploded. The North Korean soldiers seemed to have pinpointed his location using the sparks from his gun.

Rustle. Rustle.

Pew! Thud! Ta-da-da-da-dang! Pow-pow-pow-pow-pow! Ta-da-dang! Whoosh!

Kwak Cheol-Ho was sure that their opponents had closed the distance between them by more than just two steps. Right now, it would be best for them to assume that there was an enemy anywhere within fifteen meters of their location.

‘Too bad we can't listen to the radio.’

Before they all died, Kwak Cheol-Ho was at least hoping to know if Kang Chan managed to kill Jang Kwang-Taek. Unfortunately, everyone would hear any noise they made right now, even if they just took a step.

Rustle. Rustle.

Kwak Cheol-Ho knew that their enemies were approaching them. He couldn't see them, but he at least knew that they were close enough to make it difficult to use the radio. The mountain was quiet enough for the North Korean soldiers to hear them whisper from fifteen meters away.

Once the enemies were about ten meters away them, the entire South Korean special forces team would certainly die if the North Koreans volley-fired.

Rustle. Rustle. Pew! Pew! Pew!

Their enemies didn't even bother returning fire anymore.

Rustle. Rustle. Swoosh.

From the way the grass was moving, the North Korean soldiers seemed to be crawling toward them.

Pew! Thud Pew!

Kwak Cheol-Ho couldn't just recklessly open fire either since he had to conserve his ammo.

Their enemies had moved about twelve meters toward them.

These sons of bitches are using a textbook tactic.

Kwak Cheol-Ho looked back at his men.

'Thanks.'

'Thank you for leading us.'

Now surrounded on all sides, the nine remaining South Korean soldiers fought against over fifty North Koreans. No matter what anyone said, expecting them to win was unreasonable.

Everyone looked at each other for only a short moment, but that was enough.

Kwak Cheol-Ho thought of the training they did together and all the intense operations that they had gone through until now.

He didn't regret or feel disappointed that he became a special forces soldier. If anything, his only regret was that he couldn't pass all of his experiences to his juniors.

Click.

Kwak Cheol-Ho switched his gun's fire mode to full-auto.

Pew! Thud Pew! Pew! Thud! Pew-pew! Thud! Thud!

As he did, he heard rifle gunshots from the lower part of the mountain. An enemy fell with each bullet fired.

Ta-da-dang! Pew! Pew! Thud! Pew! Thud! Pew! Thud!

Those who fired back fell to the ground lifelessly. Those near them met the same fate not long after.

Kang Chan had arrived.

Pew! Thud! Pew! Thud! Pew! Thud!

How can he do that without hesitation? Why can't I move an inch?

Their enemies couldn't do anything but fall back.

Ta-da-da-da-dang!

Kwak Cheol-Ho brought himself back to his senses. With the North Koreans turning toward Kang Chan in surprise, he now had plenty of time to return fire.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Thud! Ta-da-dang! Pew! Thud!

The tide of the battle completely changed.

Gunshots echoed nonstop across the mountain.

Click. Clank!

Kang Chan changed magazines as he crouched down. He then fired at the enemy as he scaled the mountain. Seok Kang-Ho and Yoon Sang-Ki were beside him, bravely covering fire for him.

Pew! Pow! Thud!

The head of the enemy behind Kwak Cheol-Ho snapped back and smashed onto the ground.

If the god of death truly did exist, then they would probably look like Kang Chan.

Rustle!

Finally, Kang Chan reached Kwak Cheol-Ho and the others.

“You guys have gone through a lot,” Kang Chan said.

“Thank you for your hard work.”

Kang Chan glared at their front with spite-filled eyes.

Pew! Thud! Pew! Thud!

Before they knew it, their enemies had retreated.

Kwak Cheol-Ho looked at Kang Chan, then to the side. When their eyes met, Yoon Sang-Ki nodded.

‘He killed Jang Kwang-Taek?’

‘Yes!’

Yoon Sang-Ki gave Kwak Cheol-Ho a look that seemed to say, ‘Naturally!’

Chapter 186.1: Job Well Done (1)

A lion had pounced into a battle between dholes and wolves.

Pew! Thud! Pew pew! Thud! Thud!

Seok Kang-Ho, Kwak Cheol-Ho, and Yoon Sang-Ki followed Kang Chan.

Were those bastards always that weak?

The North Korean soldiers managed to get within twelve meters of the South Korean special forces team. However, by the time they lifted their heads or even spun around to escape, Kang Chan had already taken the shots that killed them.

Kwak Cheol-Ho suddenly realized the importance of having a commander.

Ha, motherfuckers! To think you were trying to surround us just moments ago! Why don't you come at us now? Come and get some!

He felt as if he was witnessing an otherwise indestructible wall being toppled down.

Hah. Hah.

Kang Chan sharply scanned his surroundings.

Do these motherfuckers not have any plans on giving up at all?

These North Koreans mobilized soldiers and conducted acts of terrorism, killed Choi Seong-Geon, and attempted to assassinate Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook. Now, they were trying to gain the upper hand and kill the South Korean soldiers using their superior numbers.

Rustle! Rustle!

Every now and then, one would come across situations where crawling was the best way to approach their enemies. However, this moment wasn't one of those. With everyone standing so sharply at attention, they could all sense whenever the enemy moved their guns or lifted their hands.

Click! Swoosh! Thwack!

How dare that son of a bitch aim that gun here?

Kang Chan turned his head and gestured at Seok Kang-Ho.

'Go around to the left!'

'Got it.'

Seok Kang-Ho trod lightly.

Clack! Pew! Pew! Pew! Thwack! Thwack!

After a short while, three bullets—one from Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, and Kwak Cheol-Ho each—flew through the forehead of the enemy soldier who lifted his head.

Kang Chan slowly moved the barrel of his gun from right to left. The tension inside him was easing up.

The sharp blade of his mind dulled down little by little, and the sound of the wind breezing through the branches and grass began to sound normal again.

He apprehensively drew in a breath and quietly let it out.

At the very least, it felt as if the fight was over for now.

Clank.

Kang Chan removed the gun from his shoulder and scanned his surroundings one last time.

"Kwak Cheol-Ho, have our men station here and there. Order one more to stand guard down there as well," Kang Chan ordered.

"Understood, sir," Kwak Cheol-Ho responded. With a wave of his hand, three soldiers quickly headed to their positions.

Of the twenty-four men who joined this mission, only thirteen were left. Five of them had their arms and legs tied up with their uniforms, which were stained with dark blood.

The soldier tasked to stand guard also got into position.

“Bring the dead soldiers over here,” Kang Chan commanded again.

It hadn't been too long since the battle ended. The soldiers, still nervous and alert, swiftly got to work.

Rustle. Rustle.

These fallen men were their fellow comrades, people who fought alongside and ran with them just this morning. That only made it harder to drag their stiff and limp bodies on the ground.

The soldiers had grave expressions on their faces, but they managed to gather the dead men in one place.

Chk.

Heavy silence enveloped the area as they took out their knives and cut their sleeves and pants to block their fallen brothers' ears and noses.

They had just about wrapped up everything now.

“Eat up for now,” Kang Chan ordered.

The soldiers' eyes widened in surprise, but they still obediently pulled out their C-rations.

Kang Chan knew that this was going to be tough for them. After all, their fellow soldiers just died right before their eyes. Even if they were hungry, eating now would still seem like a luxury that would make them feel guilty.

However, nothing could be done about it. In order to survive, they had to eat and sleep whenever they got the chance.

As Kang Chan ordered, the soldiers began to take out their C-rations from their bags.

Chk! Chk! Chk!

The sound of plastic being torn could be heard among the soldiers.

Munch. Munch. Munch. Munch.

On top of being hungry, they were all making an effort to finish their meal as quickly as they could.

These men, still wearing black camouflage cream on their faces, hurriedly shoved spoonfuls of food in their mouths. They ate in silence next to their fallen comrades and the dead enemy soldiers with holes through their foreheads.

If others saw them like this, some would probably ask why they chose this life. However, a philosophical mind wasn't needed for battles. They were only here as soldiers—as members of a special forces team—on an operation. Right now, all Kang Chan should do was focus on safely getting these surviving soldiers back home.

After drinking some water, three soldiers stood up and switched with the ones standing guard.

“I'll take your post. Go get some food in you,” Seok Kang-Ho said as he stood in Kang Chan's place. Kang Chan and the three soldiers who took the first watch began to eat C-rations.

By now, all the soldiers knew that Jang Kwang-Taek died. However, the way they looked at Kang Chan clearly showed that they had a hard time believing it.

These punks can't bring themselves to believe that we actually managed to kill Jang Kwang-Taek even though that's what we're here for.

Yoon Kang-Ki put his hand in his breast pocket.

"I want to put this next to the general," he said.

Kang Chan squinted to see what Yoon Sang-Ki had taken out.

"It's Jang Kwang-Taek's hat, sir," Yoon Sang-Ki informed him.

Yoon Sang-Ki seemed to have picked up Jang Kwang-Taek's hat before they abandoned the car on the way here.

"Here you go, sir," Yoon Sang-Ki offered.

"You have it," Kwak Cheol-Ho refused. However, Yoon Sang-Ki continued to hold out his hand with the hat.

When Kang Chan glanced at them, he saw Kwak Cheol-Ho extend his hand and take the hat. At the same time, Kang Chan also finished his meal.

All that was left now was to return alive.

Kang Chan looked at his watch. Around two hours later, he would receive a broadcast on the radio. It was awkward timing to start walking, but he also felt uncomfortable just waiting around for the broadcast.

Jang Kwang-Taek was dead now, but they were all cornered in one place. Fortunately, the enemy hadn't sent additional soldiers yet. No tank or mortar were deployed to their location, and the North Korean army wasn't coming.

Still, this was North Korean land.

"Let's head deeper inside first," Kang Chan directed.

The soldiers quickly finished getting ready.

"Daye, you and Kwak Cheol-Ho take the rear. Yoon Sang-Ki, guard our right flank," Kang Chan ordered again.

"Got it, Cap," Seok Kang-Ho replied.

"Yes, sir," Yoon Sang-Ki responded.

After ordering the injured soldiers to stand in the middle of the formation, Kang Chan slowly led his men forward. It was a dark forest, and the paths were difficult to walk on. However, they had to take this road back.

Thirty minutes into the march, Kang Chan stopped to carefully observe their surroundings. He could see everything in the area with just a glance.

Although quite some time had passed since the last round of bullets were fired, nothing had happened yet. Taking that into consideration, he grew certain that the North Korean leadership somehow influenced this current situation.

“Kwak Cheol-Ho, we’ll be resting here. Divide the men into two groups. We’ll take turns sleeping for an hour,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Yes, sir,” Kwak Cheol-Ho replied.

“Daye, you sleep first,” Kang Chan told Seok Kang-Ho.

“Will do,” Seok Kang-Ho responded.

Half of the soldiers lay down behind the men who were awake.

They would sleep when they were ordered to. Once they were back up, they would fight if that was required of them.

A moment later, Kang Chan heard someone snoring.

How can that bastard still snore even in the middle of enemy territory?

Darkness had settled upon the night.

Kang Chan sat back against a tree with his rifle slung from his shoulder. He rested his arm on his raised left leg, then stretched out his right leg. It was the easiest position to immediately open fire if he had to.

Kang Chan wondered how Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook were doing. They were probably fine since they had the National Intelligence Service agents and Kim Hyung-Jung guarding them.

It was the same for everyone else, too. If anyone dared touch his people, he would follow them to the ends of hell to exact vengeance.

This was the reason tribal wars in Africa became so brutal. They clearly showed each other what would happen if someone messed with their people.

Pft.

However, even in Africa, no one attempted to take revenge against Kang Chan. That was how he gained the code name God of Blackfield.

Are Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook really doing well, though?

His father and mother. Fuck, that was really good to hear. A father who tried to understand everything—even if it meant putting his worries and concerns behind him—instead of one who beat people up after getting drunk. A mother who embraced and was ready to die together with him.

And these people weren’t his real parents? Bullshit. They were his true parents. No calculations were needed before such a genuine love.

They’re my real parents. The love they have given me for the last six months is enough for me to happily make sacrifices for them for the rest of my life.

Rustle. Click!

The awake soldiers nervously exchanged glances.

Kang Chan smirked and put down his gun, which he had aimed at Yoon Sang-Ki.

It wasn't sleeping that the men were doing. They had essentially fainted.

To be honest, Kang Chan didn't expect them to be able to catch up with him. However, Hong Ki-Yoon and the others were stubborn enough to force themselves past their limits so they could follow him.

Chapter 186.2: Job Well Done (1)

As stars popped up in the sky, the smaller-sized moon came into view.

“General Choi...!” Kwak Cheol-Ho cried out in his sleep.

Geez, those punks!

How could men who were supposed to be on the special forces team fall asleep more easily than Seok Kang-Ho did? How could they trust Kang Chan so much to fall asleep like a baby?

Kang Chan missed Choi Seong-Geon. He met good people like him far too late. Having to live again was more cruel than his life in Africa, but what kept him going was the fact that he had good people in this life.

‘I guess I'll have to go on that damn tour of the other agencies, huh?’

He would become as respected as Lanok and make it so nobody could touch his people.

Kang Chan looked up to where the stars were.

“It's time, sir,” one soldier informed him.

“Wake them up,” Kang Chan ordered.

The soldier proceeded to go around and wake up all the sleeping men.

“Ugh.”

Crack. Crack.

“Let me drink some water before we switch,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

“Take your time,” Kang Chan responded.

His throat was so scratchy that Kang Chan wanted to have him drink oil, not water.

“Whew! I feel alive again. Go get some sleep, Cap,” Seok Kang-Ho suggested.

“Yeah, I will,” Kang Chan replied after taking a look around their surroundings and then getting on the ground.

He fell asleep listening to the soldiers who finished their shifts lying down on the floor.

Kang Chan woke up when someone touched him. When he got up, Seok Kang-Ho held out his hand and offered him some water.

“The situation seems about done now,” Seok Kang-Ho told him.

Kang Chan filled his mouth with water and slowly swallowed it.

“They left us untouched all this time,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

“What time is it?” Kang Chan asked.

“It’s eight,” Seok Kang-Ho replied.

Kang Chan stretched his neck from side to side and leaned on the tree, getting in position. The blackness of the night had grown darker before he knew it.

The enemies weren’t giving them much of a fight, but it was night. They couldn’t talk loudly right now.

Chk.

“I’m sure everyone is already thinking about it, but the fact that they left us here means that some kind of negotiation probably went down. Even so, don’t let your guards down. I’ll wait for the news to come in through the radio before making a decision. The path back could be dangerous, so be on the alert at all times,” Kang Chan instructed them.

Once Kang Chan was finished speaking through the radio, the soldiers who just woke up from their sleep switched with the ones on guard duty.

Swish. Swish. Rustle. Rustle.

The insects and beasts continued to throw tantrums.

Kang Chan missed cigarettes and instant coffee.

After the soldiers spent some time waiting, one of them stuck a receiver in his ear and raised the radio high in the air. Nobody was talking, but everyone knew that their gazes were focused on that soldier.

After two minutes, which felt like two hours, the soldier’s expression passed through multiple phases of emotions until he finally put the radio down and took the receiver out of his ear.

“They’re sending a helicopter to us at nine,” the soldier said.

“What?” Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed in surprise.

“I’m sure of it. The information was repeated to me three times. They will send a helicopter at nine, and we must be near the location where the first conflict was. We must not shoot either. We were asked to uphold these two conditions,” the soldier explained further.

Seok Kang-Ho glanced at Kang Chan.

Commands like these likely weren’t a trap.

“Let’s get a move on,” Kang Chan said.

If Kang Chan knew they were going to get these orders, he should’ve just had them stay. However, even if he was put in the same situation a hundred times, he would’ve moved first and asked

questions later. Still, he found relief in the fact that they would be able to give their dead brothers a proper burial.

This time, it took twenty minutes to get back to where they had their first conflict. It was a strange, ominous feeling.

“Seok Kang-Ho, go up with Kwak Cheol-Ho over there and secure our location,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Let’s go,” Seok Kang-Ho told Kwak Cheol-Ho. They then swiftly carried out Kang Chan’s orders.

Kang Chan hung his rifle on his shoulder and stood up from his position.

“Move the soldiers,” Kang Chan ordered.

At his command, the soldiers sprung into action. The more muscles someone had, the stiffer they became after dying.

One man grabbed a fallen soldier by the shoulders, and another lifted him by the ankles. The special forces moved quickly in the dark.

After about ten minutes, Kang Chan and his men stood where helicopters attacked them.

Swish!

The damned wind swept through Kang Chan and the other soldiers. After waiting for a bit longer, they began to hear sounds from afar, which were followed by flashing red lights.

Click!

Kang Chan put his finger on his trigger and waved his hand to assign the soldiers their positions. He didn’t have a bad feeling in his gut this time.

Du du du du du du du.

Kang Chan looked sharply at the helicopter.

Chk.

“This is Stork. Delivery Team, state your location.”

The soldiers had adjusted their radio frequencies before arriving.

Chk.

“We’re in the front. Delivery Team, over.”

Click! Pew! Pew!

Chk.

“Roger, Delivery Team. Your location has been confirmed.”

Du du du du du du du.

A Chinook helicopter rushed toward Kang Chan with its light flashing brightly.

Whoosh.

An intense gust swept over Kang Chan and his surroundings.

Chk.

“Delivery Team, hurry it up.”

The chopper precariously balanced over a rock with its rear sticking out. The soldiers began to move following Kang Chan’s hand signals.

In teams of two, they carried the fallen soldiers and ran toward the chopper. Two of the soldiers who were already aboard the helicopter grabbed the shoulders of the fallen and pulled them inside.

The whole process took about a total of three minutes. Kang Chan only jumped into the helicopter upon confirming that everyone else had gotten in.

Du du du du du du du.

The helicopter seemed to hang in the air for a moment before tilting away from the mountain. Kang Chan turned to a soldier who came with the helicopter.

“What’s our destination?” Kang Chan asked him.

“Out to sea and then to Mount Hwangbyongsan in Gangwon Province!” the soldier replied over the noise.

Mount Hwangbyongsan? Kang Chan didn’t know where that was.

“It’s the special warfare winter training center of the ROK Army!” Kwak Cheol-Ho explained from next to him.

South Korean soldiers had essentially come into North Korea with a helicopter to carry out their own special forces team.

“Does anyone have any cigarettes?” Kang Chan asked.

The soldier who came with the helicopter looked surprised, but no one appeared apologetic or scared.

Two soldiers dug through their military gear and pulled out cigarettes and lighters. They then tore open the cigarettes and lit them.

Csh. Chk.

Four people used a Zippo lighter to light up their own cigarettes.

“Hoo!”

The ear-splitting noises and the rough winds couldn’t stop them from smoking.

They should make cigarettes longer.

They reached the ocean after some time but re-entered the mainland before long. The soldiers' eyes were filled with a complicated mix of being successful with the operation, gratitude for being alive, and regret for their fallen comrades.

"Kwak Cheol-Ho!" Kang Chan shouted with a wave of his hand.

Kwak Cheol-Ho moved his ear closer to Kang Chan.

"When we get back, don't be discouraged like last time! Overcome it! Make the others proud of being veterans!" Kang Chan said.

"Yes, sir!" Kwak Cheol-Ho shouted in response with a nod.

Du du du du du du du du.

The helicopter descended toward the center of the mountain. The lights around the barracks were brightly lit, illuminating sedans, vans, buses, and trucks. The soldiers descended from the helicopter, feeling the wind from the propellers against their bodies.

Jeon Dae-Geuk and Kim Hyung-Jung approached Kang Chan, extending their hands to embrace him. Jeon Dae-Geuk seemed to want to say something but couldn't find the words. He just patted Kang Chan on the back.

"Job well done, Mr. Kang Chan," Kim Hyung-Jung barely managed to utter with his eyes red.

"Mr. Seok!" Jeon Dae-Geuk said as he greeted Seok Kang-Ho, gripping both his hands.

In the meantime, the other soldiers stepped out, with their fallen descending last. When the helicopter's engine turned off, the silence that was threatening to take over instantly rushed over them.

"Attention!"

Kwak Cheol-Ho's loud shout chased away the deafening silence.

Kang Chan shook his head. Before Kwak Cheol-Ho could salute Kang Chan, Kang Chan approached him and patted his helmet.

"Good work," Kang Chan told him.

"Good work, sir," Kwak Cheol-Ho responded.

In situations like this, what use was there for etiquette and formality?

Tap, tap, tap.

Kwak Cheol-Ho extended his hand and gave Kang Chan's helmet a pat.

"Good work," Kang Chan said.

"You as well," Yoon Sang-Ki said as he patted Kang Chan's helmet with red eyes.

Seok Kang-Ho followed Kang Chan, and they went around patting each other's helmets.

“You’re not going to be all down in the dumps again, are you?” Kang Chan joked.

The soldiers smiled wryly at Kang Chan’s words.

“Let’s let General Choi Seong-Geon and the others leave with light hearts.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho saluted one last time, and the other soldiers followed suit.

Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho saluted back at them.

Staying here any longer was counterproductive, especially since some of their fellow soldiers were injured. As the bus and the van drove away, Kang Chan took off his helmet. His hair was flattened and tangled, making him look somewhat stupid.

“Let’s go,” Jeon Dae-Geuk said, gesturing at a van.

The four of them sat in the back, facing each other.

Vroooooom.

Perhaps it was because they had just been on a helicopter, but even though they were in a van, it seemed to slide on the road as easily as a sedan.

“How are my parents?” Kang Chan asked.

“They’ll likely be at the hotel at this time,” Kim Hyung-Jung responded.

Kang Chan let out a low sigh of relief.

“We still have to capture Wui Min-Gook, right?” he asked.

“We have all the information now. Chairperson Huh Ha-Soo was arrested on charges of espionage, and all the North Korean agents who infiltrated the country have been killed. Unfortunately, we failed to catch Wui Min-Gook,” Kim Hyung-Jung replied.

Seeing Kang Chan’s questioning look, Kim Hyung-Jung continued his explanation.

“He wasn’t at the scene. We split our agents between Namjangju and Chairperson Huh Ha-Soo’s villa in Gapyeong, but Wui Min-Gook wasn’t at either location.”

“Then that means there could still be others out there,” Kang Chan remarked.

“It seems only Wui Min-Gook left to take care of other business. Based on the information we received from the North, we suspect Wui Min-Gook and one more person are still out there.”

That was good enough. What else could be done when the guy wasn’t there when the agents surrounded the area?

“Get some sleep. You should rest too, Mr. Seok,” Jeon Dae-Geuk urged.

“Yes. I think I’ll actually get some sleep” Kang Chan said as he reclined his chair back and closed his eyes.

His tension was slowly easing.

General Choi, I hope you feel less wronged after this.

Kang Chan fell asleep again.

Chapter 187.1: Job Well Done (2)

The men arrived at the safe house in Hannam-Dong a little over one in the morning.

Having a good wink of sleep, Kang Chan felt a little less tired, but his arms and legs felt sore because of his position in the car when he fell asleep.

“Ahaaam!”

Seok Kang-Ho seemed to be feeling the same because he kept yawning.

Kang Chan took a shower first.

He stood under the warm water and erased the camouflage cream, shampooed his hair, and washed his body. Kang Chan then wiped the steamy mirror with his hand.

Although he was given Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook, his life turned into a series of relentless and neverending challenges in return. He couldn’t stop thinking about their fallen comrade who broke his finger during the operation.

“Whew,” Kang Chan sighed loudly under the flowing water.

Click.

He covered himself with a towel and stepped out of the bathroom.

“Your turn to wash up,” Kang Chan told Seok Kang-Ho.

“Ahaaaan!” Seok Kang-Ho stretched, then replied, “Got it.”

“I’ve prepared a set of clothes for you in that room,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

“Thank you. I’ll go get changed,” Kang Chan responded.

Entering the room, Kang Chan found a neatly arranged shirt, suit, radio, and phone waiting for him. After changing into the clothes, Kang Chan returned to the living room and sat down in front of Jeon Dae-Geuk and Kim Hyung-Jung.

“Feeling a bit better now?” Jeon Dae-Geuk asked.

“Yes, sir,” Kang Chan replied.

“Let’s all eat together when Mr. Seok is done showering,” Jeon Dae-Geuk suggested.

“If you’re staying here because of us, we can just go and eat at the hotel,” Kang Chan replied.

“Manager Kim and I haven’t had dinner yet either,” Jeon Dae-Geuk responded.

Kang Chan couldn’t help but smile at Jeon Dae-Geuk’s mock-rebuking comment.

One good thing about being reincarnated was that he could meet people who genuinely conveyed good sincerity in their hearts.

“Whew, that’s a lot better,” Seok Kang-Ho loudly remarked as he walked out of the shower. He then changed into a new set of clothes as well.

They had quite a late dinner at two in the morning.

Kang Chan went to the dining table and sat down, gazing at the food that had been prepared for them.

“You’re thinking about the soldiers, aren’t you?” Jeon Dae-Geuk asked.

Kang Chan just smiled dryly.

“I heard he was good at welcoming them back. General Choi... He would always wait late into the night until the soldiers returned from an operation or training and eat with them. His deputy would prepare a fine banquet. Let’s dig in too,” Jeon Dae-Geuk said as he lifted his own spoon.

Kang Chan followed suit and started to eat. He once again felt that a meal wasn’t truly a meal unless it included steaming rice, spicy side dishes, and meat.

Naturally, Seok Kang-Ho had two servings and drank coffee.

Jeon Dae-Geuk looked proud and apologetic at the same time.

“The North Korean leadership contacted us first. When we demanded your return from their country, they suggested we send a helicopter for your evac,” Kim Hyung-Jung explained.

“I thought something like that might have been the case. When we barged into the Ministry of Defense, their security seemed extremely lax,” Kang Chan said.

“It appears that Jang Kwang-Taek got politically secluded. Even so, that doesn’t mean that it should’ve been any easier,” Kim Hyung-Jung mused.

Jeon Dae-Geuk, who was just silently listening to their conversation, looked curious about the situation. However, he couldn’t pull rank on Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho to pressure them into telling him what happened, so he instead stopped himself from getting involved in the conversation at all.

“What are you thinking about doing for General Choi’s funeral, Manager Kim?” Kang Chan asked.

“We naturally plan to hold a proper one for him,” Kim Hyung-Jung replied reassuringly.

“What about the soldiers who died on this mission?”

“We are fortunate enough to have brought them back home. We will honor them with everything they deserve,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

“Please tell me when you’ve decided on a date,” Kang Chan requested.

“I’ll make sure to keep you updated,” Kim Hyung-Jung agreed.

Kang Chan turned toward Jeon Dae-Geuk this time.

“I’ll come back after having a smoke outside,” Kang Chan said.

“Yeah? Sure, go ahead,” Jeon Dae-Geuk said with a somewhat upset face.

He traveled hours to get here and saw Kang Chan sleeping. They had also eaten and had tea together. Nevertheless, he still seemed sad that he would have to be away from Kang Chan in the short moment that he would be gone to smoke.

People like him never seemed to fail to get inside Kang Chan’s walls.

Kim Tae-Jin and Kim Hyung-Jung were no different from this grumpy Jeon Dae-Geuk. Even if these kinds of people weren’t the most refined of men, Kang Chan always liked them since they were always honest about how they felt.

Kang Chan walked out to the yard with Seok Kang-Ho and Kim Hyung-Jung. They then pulled out their cigarettes and started smoking together.

Click.

“Whew.”

The white smoke disappeared from the light of the yard into the darkness.

“You can return home in the morning,” Kim Hyung-Jung said as he shook off the ash from the tip of his cigarette.

“We’ve assigned agents across from your apartment complex and on the rooftop opposite of where your parents currently are. At the very least, nothing dangerous will happen to them while they’re at the hotel,” Kim Hyung-Jung reassured him.

Whew! That’s one hell of a relief.

Kang Chan felt as if he could now breathe a little easier.

“Mr. Seok, your wife and daughter informed us they would like to return to the country tomorrow,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

“Why?” Seok Kang-Ho asked, which led to Kim Hyung-Jung and Kang Chan bursting out in laughter together.

“Would you like another one?” Kim Hyung-Jung offered.

Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho accepted and lit up another cigarette from Kim Hyung-Jung.

“I mean, they’re in a foreign country. They should be enjoying themselves out there, not insisting on heading back so early,” Seok Kang-Ho argued.

“They’d be sad if they learned you said that. Your wife was so worried because she couldn’t reach you since yesterday. I heard the agents on site had some difficulties coming up with stories to convince her that you were fine,” Kim Hyung-Jung remarked.

“Sheesh, she shouldn’t be so worried. That wasn’t necessary,” Seok Kang-Ho grumbled.

Kim Hyung-Jung smiled in amusement.

“She says you regularly called her in the mornings and the evenings. She was worried that something might have happened because there was no reason a person as considerate as you wouldn’t contact her for two days,” he said.

“Hmph!” Seok Kang-Ho coughed and then observed Kang Chan’s expression.

“What?” Kang Chan asked.

“Well, I am a bit of a family man,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

“I never said otherwise,” Kang Chan replied.

The three laughed. After some time, they returned to the living room.

“What’s so funny that made you three so happy without me?” Jeon Dae-Geuk crabbily asked.

“We were laughing because Mr. Seok is surprisingly a family man,” Kim Hyung-Jung replied with a smile.

“Why is that a surprise?” Jeon Dae-Geuk abruptly defended Seok Kang-Ho. “It’s only right that people who live the way we do are always apologetic to our families. We should call whenever we have time and always put in an effort to be kinder.”

“Completely correct. I’m doing good, aren’t I, sir?” Seok Kang-Ho jumped in.

“Of course, Mr. Seok. You’re really doing a good job,” Jeon Dae-Geuk complimented him.

Seok Kang-Ho looked back at Kang Chan and Kim Hyung-Jung with a renewed face of confidence.

They all sat down and just chatted for the next twenty or so minutes.

“Don’t forget to invite me to General Choi’s funeral ceremony,” Kang Chan said.

“Of course, we won’t. Even if no one else comes, you and Mr. Seok definitely have to be there. Otherwise, he’ll probably be upset,” Jeon Dae-Geuk said with a nod.

“Section Chief Jeon,” Kang Chan began.

Jeon Dae-Geuk, Kim Hyung-Jung, and Seok Kang-Ho’s gazes all turned to him at once.

“You don’t have to feel sorry for me, sir. I went on this operation of my own volition. I feel bad for our fallen soldiers for saying this, but I’m actually grateful that you helped us go on this operation. In a way, it also feels like I repaid my debt to General Choi,” Kang Chan reassured him.

Jeon Dae-Geuk took in a shallow breath and then nodded.

“Would you like to get some rest now?” Kim Hyung-Jung suggested.

“Can I stay here a while longer?” Kang Chan questioned.

“Of course,” Kim Hyung-Jung replied.

Jeon Dae-Geuk seemed pleased too, so Kang Chan decided to stay seated.

In the meantime, Seok Kang-Ho retold what happened during the mission. Jeon Dae-Geuk’s facial expressions were a sight to see.

“So you’re saying only the four of you went to the Ministry of Defense? And in just four hours of running at that?” Jeon Dae-Geuk asked in disbelief.

“Yes, sir. Only the captain went inside the building, though,” Seok Kang-Ho added.

Jeon Dae-Geuk and Kim Hyung-Jung looked at Kang Chan with astounded expressions.

“It wasn’t that big of a deal,” Kang Chan attempted to joke, but he failed to get any laughter.

At around four in the morning, they all got up.

“Get some good rest. Contact Manager Kim immediately if there’s anything you need,” Jeon Dae-Geuk instructed Kang Chan.

“Yes, sir,” Kang Chan replied.

“I’ll head back after escorting them back to the hotel,” Kim Hyung-Jung told Jeon Dae-Geuk.

“Alright. See you,” Jeon Dae-Geuk replied.

After Jeon Dae-Geuk left, the three took a car back to the hotel. It wasn’t that far, so they reached their destination in less than ten minutes.

“You don’t have to see us off, sir,” Kang Chan insisted.

Even so, Kim Hyung-Jung still got out of the sedan and extended his hand for a handshake.

“That was a remarkable job you all did,” Kim Hyung-Jung said gratefully.

The tight grip was more than enough to convey how Kim Hyung-Jung was feeling. After shaking hands with Seok Kang-Ho as well, he stayed a bit longer to watch Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho get in the elevator.

They had probably contacted the agents in advance because two of them stepped into the elevator with Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho. They pressed a button and climbed up to the higher floors.

Just at dawn yesterday, they were crawling up the mountains. Today, they were taking the elevator. There was really no way to predict where life would take them. Kang Chan never even expected something like yesterday to happen.

Chapter 187.2: Job Well Done (2)

When Kang Chan got off the elevator, he was greeted by bulky agents wearing dark suits with receivers in their ears standing from hall to hall.

Click.

Now that Kang Chan was finally in his room, he felt as if he could relax. He took off his jacket and sat down on the couch.

A cup of coffee would be nice.

Kang Chan came up with an idea.

Chk.

“Is there any coffee that’s left?” Kang Chan asked.

The agents took about ten seconds to respond, making Kang Chan think that they weren’t expecting him to talk to them right now.

Chk.

“Yes. Would you like some? You’ll have to warm it up a bit, though,” one agent replied.

Seok Kang-Ho grinned as he headed toward the door.

Click.

“I hear there’s coffee?” Seok Kang-Ho asked in a mischievous tone.

Does this bastard think the hallway is some cafe?

After a while, Seok Kang-Ho returned with a coffee pitcher in his hand.

“Why did they give you so much?” Kang Chan asked.

Seok Kang-Ho poured the coffee into an electronic pot.

Kang Chan knew ordering in would probably have been easier, and the agents could have felt uncomfortable. However, he wanted to share at least one cup of coffee with them before parting ways with them.

They wouldn't be able to drink it together, but the fact that they had the same coffee was more important. After all, rank didn't matter here.

If he didn't have the agents standing outside to protect those he loved, how could he have left for the operation with peace of mind?

Chk.

"We heated up some coffee. Who wants to drink some?" Kang Chan asked over the radio.

This time, it took them twenty seconds to respond.

"We're working right now, sir. Please enjoy your coffee," an agent said. He sounded as if he was holding back a smile.

Seok Kang-Ho brought the coffee over and sat down at the table. Just then, someone spoke over the radio.

Chk.

"This is senior agent Shin Geun-Ho. We were all trained under General Choi, sir. I'm sure there isn't a single agent in South Korea who hasn't crossed paths with the general at least once."

Chk.

The agent continued, "Thank you for your service, sir."

Kang Chan thought the agent would speak more, but that was the end of the conversation. The agent was probably worried about talking about the operation.

As Seok Kang-Ho put back the cigarettes and ashtray, Kang Chan turned his phone on.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

He received so many missed calls and texts in just a single day.

"Should we get some sleep now?" Kang Chan asked Seok Kang-Ho.

"I don't see why not. Let's have some coffee first, though. You're having breakfast with your parents, right?" Seok Kang-Ho confirmed.

"Well, I don't want you to eat by yourself. I'm going home after having breakfast, so let's eat together."

"All right. Let's see. It looks like we'll have about three hours of sleep if we sleep now," Seok Kang-Ho noted.

The two drank coffee together and then returned to their individual rooms to lie down in their comfortable beds.

Sleeping for short amounts of time was a piece of cake to them. After all, they spent nearly ten years in a place where that was the norm. Neither of them were displeased about the lack of normal sleep. They were just grateful for getting any at all.

Kang Chan woke up in the morning when the sunlight coming in through the window hit him. He had slept about an hour past the time he would usually wake up, but the scenery outside wasn't much different from what he saw any other day.

Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho washed up lightly and ate a filling breakfast.

It was around eight-thirty in the morning. Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook were probably already up.

A smile stretched on Kang Chan's face just at the thought of seeing them. He changed into new clothes and attached a radio. Just to be safe, he holstered a pistol on his ankle too.

"My family's coming home today, so I'll try to call in the evening if I can," Seok Kang-Ho told him.

"Just focus on spending time with your family today if you can," Kang Chan said.

"Right, I plan to do that. You should hurry and get going too."

What would I do without this punk?

Kang Chan nodded, stepped out the door, and headed to the room that was right next to his. He was walking an extremely short distance, but his heart was beating faster due to his excitement of getting to see them again.

Ding dong.

Kang Chan pressed the bell and took a deep breath.

- Who is it?

"It's me," Kang Chan replied.

Click.

Kang Dae-Kyung opened the door.

"I'm back, Father," Kang Chan greeted.

"What happened? Have you taken care of everything already?" Kang Dae-Kyung asked in surprise.

"Yes. I got back early," Kang Chan answered.

Kang Chan began to walk into the room with Kang Dae-Kyung when Yoo Hye-Sook, who forced down the rest of the food she was chewing, came dashing at Kang Chan.

"Channy!" Yoo Hye-Sook exclaimed, embracing her son tightly.

"What is it, Mother? Did something happen?" Kang Chan asked with concern.

"She had a nightmare. She didn't get any sleep and was worried sick about you."

Yoo Hye-Sook looked as if she finally got a sense of relief.

I have this kind of mom now.

A mom who could sense in her dreams when Kang Chan left on dangerous operations—a mom who was always worried about her son.

“I’m sorry,” Kang Chan apologized.

“Are you okay? You’re not hurt anywhere, are you?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked, carefully examining Kang Chan’s face and body. She looked full of concern.

“I’m not hurt at all. I’m completely fine,” Kang Chan assured her.

“You’ve become so gaunt in the face,” Yoo Hye-Sook protested.

“It must be because I overworked myself a little to get back quickly. Well, you two were having breakfast, weren’t you? You should hurry and eat the rest of your meal,” Kang Chan said.

“What about you, Channy?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked.

“I already had breakfast. You two can eat,” Kang Chan responded.

“I feel full just seeing my son,” Yoo Hye-Sook said.

“My goodness,” Kang Dae-Kyung said with a fake sigh that made Yoo Hye-Sook make an abashed expression.

“Hurry and eat, Mother. Otherwise, Father can’t eat either,” Kang Chan urged her.

Even as they walked over to the dining table, Yoo Hye-Sook continued to examine Kang Chan.

Kang Chan’s parents were having toast and eggs for breakfast.

“Why are you only eating these?” Kang Chan asked in surprise.

“Your mom chose this meal,” Kang Dae-Kyung replied.

Yoo Hye-Sook just smiled awkwardly.

It wasn’t as if Kang Chan asked the question because he was dying to know the reason why, so he didn’t push any further. Instead, he picked up a piece of the toast and spread some butter on it. He then smeared a little strawberry jam on top.

“Mother, please have this,” Kang Chan offered.

It was just a piece of bread, but Yoo Hye-Sook looked like the happiest person in the world.

“It’s so good! You should have some too, Channy,” she urged him.

“I ate with the employees that I work with before going here,” Kang Chan informed her.

“Remind me, who’s the mom, and who’s the son again?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked jokingly.

“Honey! You’re always like this when you’re jealous,” Yoo Hye-Sook pretended to scoff.

“Should I spread some jam on bread for you too, Father?” Kang Chan asked with a grin.

“No need. I feel like I’ll make the same expression your mom is making if you,” Kang Dae-Kyung refused.

The three burst out laughing at the same time.

“Right! They said we can go back home after breakfast,” Kang Chan said.

Nervousness flashed across Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook’s faces.

“Apparently, they have already caught almost all the culprits from the incident last time. They’ve also tightened security around the apartment, so I think our home should be safe.”

They still looked quite concerned, but they seemed relieved to know they could leave finally the hotel.

“Can I go back to work?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

“I wasn’t able to ask about that,” Kang Chan answered with regret.

Kang Dae-Kyung nodded. Kang Chan understood his frustration.

“For now, how about we go home and go on a vacation?”

“A vacation?” Kang Dae-Kyung echoed.

“Yes. You probably can’t go to work for the week, but I know it’s uncomfortable to have to stay at home all day after being cooped up in the hotel. Since I couldn’t go on the trip to Jeju with you last time, I thought it might be nice.”

“Will you be alright?”

“Yes, I think I’ll be fine,” Kang Chan replied.

Yoo Hye-Sook’s eyes moved between them expectantly as she listened to their conversation.

“Well, I guess we’ll have to go,” Kang Dae-Kyung replied with a laugh after seeing Yoo Hye-Sook’s expression. “Where should we go?”

“Well, do you have any place you’d like to visit, Mother?”

“Since we went to the beach last time, how about a quiet mountain or valley this time? What do you think, dear?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked Kang Dae-Kyung.

“That sounds good. Isn’t it around time to pick chestnuts now?”

“Chestnuts?” Kang Chan asked.

“Yes, there are vacation rentals in places where lots of chestnut trees grow. We can pick and steam them. It might still be a bit early, though.”

“I’ll look into it.”

They talked some more until Kang Chan’s parents finished their meal. Now, all that was left to do was pack up and go back home.

Kang Dae-Kyung was still worried, while Yoo Hye-Sook seemed relieved.

After Yoo Hye-Sook went in to shower, Kang Chan spoke up.

“Did Mother worry about me a lot?”

“Your mom has been worrying about you a lot recently maybe because of the incident, but she said she also had a bad nightmare last night,” Kang Dae-Kyung replied as he glanced in Yoo Hye-Sook’s direction.

Kang Chan felt so sorry that he couldn’t even say anything.

“She said a red monster kept trying to take you away. She was so worried. She got close to no sleep,” Kang Dae-Kyung added.

“I’m sorry.”

If I knew, I would’ve called even if it was still early.

Parents were truly incredible.

“Goodness. My son’s becoming more mature while you’re mom is becoming more childish.”

Kang Dae-Kyung chuckled and patted Kang Chan’s head. It was the same feeling as when Kang Chan patted the soldiers’ helmets.

“You can’t suddenly cancel at the last minute this time too, okay?”

“Yes, sir,” Kang Chan replied.

“And everything’s okay?” Kang Dae-Kyung confirmed.

“Yep.”

“Channy,” Kang Dae-Kyung suddenly called.

“Yes, Father,” Kang Chan replied as he lifted his gaze.

“All mothers do it with their children, but your mother really risked her life to give birth to you. She wasn’t getting any better even when we practically poured blood into her. I gave you to her thinking that I should let her hold you one last time, but that made her recover instead.”

Kang Chan's heart clenched at the story. Kang Dae-Kyung smiled bittersweetly as he continued, "You mean everything to your mom. Nobody else in this world can replace that. Take care of your her, okay?"

"Yes, sir," Kang Chan replied. Something seemed caught in his throat.

"Ha, punk! I hope you have a son that's just like you," Kang Dae-Kyung said as he stretched out his hand to wrap around Kang Chan's shoulders.

It felt as if the whole world was embracing Kang Chan.

Chapter 188.1: They Said It's Okay (1)

Beep, beep, beep, beep. Click.

Home! I'm finally back home!

The house felt a tad stuffy when they opened the door and entered. However, the coziness that welcomed them inside was incomparable to the hotel.

"Goodness! The smell!" Yoo Hye-Sook exclaimed as she headed to the veranda. However, before she could reach it, she flinched and turned back to Kang Chan.

"They said it's okay," Kang Chan assured her.

Swish.

Kang Chan opened the curtains and the balcony window. He knew there were agents on this apartment's rooftop and the rooftop of the opposite building.

"Oh, this is still here," Kang Dae-Kyung remarked in surprise as he looked at the chicken on the table. It was the very same chicken that they had ordered to eat for their movie night but abandoned because they had to rush out of their home.

"Can we still eat that?" Yoo Hye-Sook wondered aloud.

"Of course not. Do you want to get sick?" Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

"Not really," Yoo Hye-Sook furrowed her brows at her husband. She didn't actually seem mad, though. "Can you get the vacuum cleaner, dear?" she asked.

"What about Channy?" Kang Dae-Kyung objected.

"Our son just got back this morning," Yoo Hye-Sook asserted.

Kang Dae-Kyung burst out into laughter.

"Let me change into something more comfortable, then I'll get the vacuum cleaner," Kang Chan chimed in.

"Oh, right! Honey, we should change clothes first too," Yoo Hye-Sook said.

They cleaned their house as intensely and fiercely as the operation Kang Chan went to.

With determination, Yoo Hye-Sook washed the bedding and clothes they brought from the hotel, and Kang Dae-Kyung and Kang Chan were tasked with vacuuming and mopping. The whole cleaning process took about two hours.

“Done. Is this good enough?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked. He sounded tired.

“Yep. Thank you, Honey. You and Channy should go wash up now. Give me the clothes you were wearing while cleaning,” Yoo Hye-Sook answered as she dashed back into the kitchen again.

How could they go take a shower while she was still so busy taking care of their home?

Yoo Hye-Sook scolded and asked Kang Dae-Kyung and Kang Chan why they followed her in, but the two just focused on helping her by washing the dishes and tidying up the kitchen.

“Whew! I finally feel like I’m back home,” Yoo Hye-Sook exclaimed as she wiped her forehead with the back of her hand.

Kang Chan couldn’t help but smile.

“Father really is a lucky man,” Kang Chan said with a grin.

“Right?” Yoo Hye-Sook agreed pleasantly.

“Hey! Are you really trying to score brownie points for yourself right now?” Kang Dae-Kyung shot at Kang Chan.

“I was just being honest,” Kang Chan replied innocently. He was glad that they could all smile.

The three had a cold glass of juice and then showered, changing into lounge clothes.

While Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook looked into vacation homes that they could go to, Kang Chan returned to his room. The soldier who broke his finger and the others who died in the recent operation randomly popped into his mind.

Just like Kang Chan, those soldiers likely had their own families as well—people who were waiting for them to return so they could laugh and chat together again.

Kang Chan let out a low sigh.

He would actually prefer it if someone sarcastically snarked at him right now like back in Africa. Although he talked all big to the soldiers about not feeling guilty, it wasn’t easy to shake off feelings like this. Perhaps this was why he acted so impudently to those people when he first met them.

Letting someone inside one’s heart was always scary. Men who had faced life and death together could relate to his thoughts right now.

Kang Chan let out a deep sigh and picked up his phone. The time had come to contact the people who had been waiting for his call.

The call was answered as soon as he pressed the call button.

- Monsieur Kang!

“Mr. Ambassador, I’ve returned back home,” Kang Chan greeted him. He felt as if this sly snake probably already knew that, though.

- This has got to be one of the most difficult operations I’ve ever witnessed or learned of. You just made something impossible possible in the most wonderful way.

Kang Chan just laughed.

- If you have time, would you like to have some tea with me?

“That goes without saying. I would be happy to see you again, Mr. Ambassador,” Kang Chan replied.

- You have no idea how much it pleases me to hear you say that, Mr. Kang Chan. I have too many appointments today, but how does tomorrow sound?

“Should I call you morning tomorrow then?”

- Around then would be great, but if it’s all right with you, let me be the one to initiate the call.

“Not a problem, Mr. Ambassador,” Kang Chan agreed.

Next up was Michelle. However, the call just kept ringing until it dropped on its own, connecting Kang Chan to the voicemail greeting in the end instead.

Is she busy?

Come to think of it, he hadn’t given the drama any attention in quite a while now.

Kang Chan also had two missed calls from phone numbers he didn’t recognize and one from Director Yoo Hun-Woo. He could probably get to these later.

Kim Mi-Young hadn’t contacted her yet since she was probably busy preparing for her exams.

“Channy! What are you up to?” Yoo Hye-Sook called for Kang Chan. She sounded brighter than usual, most likely because they were finally back home again. As he opened the door and stepped out, the scent of sesame oil greeted him.

“What are you cooking? It smells so good in here,” Kang Chan asked with amazement.

“The kimchi I left out got perfectly fermented, so I made some noodles with them. Come have some, Channy,” Yoo Hye-Sook said.

She set down a bowl for Kang Dae-Kyung, then stretched more noodles high over her head and plated them in another bowl for Kang Chan.

“That looks really good,” Kang Chan remarked.

“Your mother’s bibim-guksu is famous,” Kang Dae-Kyung joked.

“You should eat with us, Mother,” Kang Chan urged her.

Kang Chan only started eating his bibim-guksu when Yoo Hye-Sook sat down and picked up her chopsticks. The well-fermented kimchi, combined with spicy and slightly sweet seasoning, was so delicious that he couldn't hold back his smile.

“Slow down, no one's going to eat your food!” Yoo Hye-Sook rebuked him with a happy smile. Kang Chan could only imagine how uncomfortable someone as exuberant as her must have felt pent up in the hotel.

“Right, were you able to find a vacation home?” Kang Chan asked.

“Yup. There was a vacation home that seemed nice near the streams of Gapyeong. How does the day after tomorrow sound?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

“That's all right with me,” Kang Chan responded.

Aside from his meeting with Lanok tomorrow, he had nothing in particular on his schedule.

“Honey, can you roast chicken for us during our vacation?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked Kang Dae-Kyung.

Kang Chan turned to Kang Dae-Kyung with a curious expression.

“Your dad makes the best chicken to pair with beer,” Yoo Hye-Sook explained.

“Your wish is my command,” Kang Dae-Kyung replied. He then ate a large mouthful of noodles. The food at the hotel didn't suit his tastes that well.

“Honey! Slow down,” Yoo Hye-Sook said. She put more noodles in his bowl while stopping him from eating so fast.

While they were talking, they decided that Kang Dae-Kyung would make the reservation. After finishing his meal, Kang Chan went to his room and flopped down on his bed.

After meeting Lanok, I'll talk about visiting the other agencies, and...

However, his eyes were heavy with sleep. The horrible sprinting, frequent catnaps, and intense fights—all of that was over now.

Kang Chan drifted off to sleep.

Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz.

Kang Chan's eyes shot open. He glanced around at his surroundings.

It was still midday.

He picked up his phone from the desk and saw Michelle's name on the screen when he turned it on.

“Hello?” Kang Chan answered.

- Channy? Did I catch you when you were sleeping? Sorry.

“It’s fine. It was about time for me to get up anyway,” Kang Chan said.

- I couldn’t pick up earlier because we were in the middle of filming. Are you okay?

Michelle could be considerate sometimes.

“I saw you called?” Kang Chan asked.

- Yeah. I was hoping to give you the documents for the building registration and talk about giving the employees a reward since the drama will be done next week.

Kang Chan pulled himself up. He could have Michelle take care of a bonus for the employees, but he should probably take the documents from her.

“Do you have time later in the evening?” Kang Chan asked.

- I had dinner plans, but I can cancel them.

Kang Chan laughed.

“Let’s just have a drink together after your dinner appointment. Where’s a good place for us to meet?” Kang Chan asked.

- Hmm. Once I’m free, I’ll head over to your house and call you when I get there. I’ll probably be there at around nine.

“Sure. Sounds good.” After making plans with Michelle, Kang Chan hung up and looked at his phone screen. It was a little over three in the afternoon.

After what happened over the last few days, his stamina still didn’t seem to have recovered. That was only natural, though, considering he would have to rest for an entire day to recuperate from the amount of running he did.

Anyway, I wonder what they’re doing out there.

Click.

When Kang Chan stepped out of his room, he smiled at what he discovered.

Kang Dae-Kyung had fallen asleep with the TV still on, leaning his head on the backrest of the couch. Yoo Hye-Sook had dozed off with her hand gently resting on his leg in a fetal position.

They were probably tired from not being able to get proper sleep last night. The hotel life was no doubt uncomfortable for them too. Considering even Kang Chan felt so comfortable and cozy in their home, his parents probably felt that way even more.

I’m so lucky to get to meet people like them.

Kang Chan quietly returned to his room and brought out a thin blanket.

Creak. Creak.

Kang Chan put a lot more care into it than it looked. Nevertheless, just as he tried to cover Yoo Hye-Sook with the blanket...

“Channy? Oh dear, I must have fallen asleep,” she said, suddenly waking up. Although her lips were moving, her eyes were still extremely glazed with sleep.

“You should sleep a little more, Mother. It’s just a bit past three now,” Kang Chan told her.

Yoo Hye-Sook smiled drowsily.

Kang Dae-Kyung did look a bit uncomfortable, but waking him up right now would probably only be a loss for him. He would likely want to be in that position longer.

Chapter 188.2: They Said It’s Okay (1)

The sunlight stretched across the room, reaching all the way into the living room.

If he could live like this for the rest of his life, he would definitely consider getting married. It wasn’t all that bad, after all.

Kang Chan quietly came back to his room, shut his door, then turned his computer on. There were a lot of things on the news that he wanted to check.

Well, it’s been a while since I’ve gotten on my computer.

So many reports were about Huh Ha-Soo that he could probably build a mountain with them. However, they all revolved around three main points: his espionage charges, the political manipulation, and his past accomplishments. Kang Chan supposed it all depended on how one looked at it.

Next up was the evaluation of the drama produced by DI. This could be summarized into one sentence: the drama could have gone down in film history if it wasn’t for all the incidents that took place during its airing period.

Eun So-Yeon and most of the other actors were all receiving favorable reviews. A few of the trainees were even having more than just fifteen minutes of fame. They were just eating tteokbokki and snacks inside the office not too long ago, but now they were on the screen, dressed up and smiling from ear to ear.

Kang Chan couldn’t help but grin.

DI was a company that Kang Chan hastily set up to gather intelligence for information warfare at Lanok’s request. It no longer served its initial purpose, so he felt relieved that it still managed to become successful.

Kang Chan also found news about North Korea executing Jang Kwang-Taek with a firing squad and reports about Russian and French aircraft carriers returning to their respective countries.

The world was certainly a complex place.

Once people died and were killed in the shadows, the governments and agencies—the only ones that the public could actually see—would take care of the aftermath based on what each would gain or lose.

Perhaps it was a necessary evil. If there wasn’t any information warfare or covert operations, every minor conflict would carry the risk of turning into a full-scale war.

Kang Chan turned off the computer after finishing his perusal of the reports. Not long after, he heard someone knock on the door three times.

“Yes?” Kang Chan answered.

Yoo Hye-Sook entered with a blanket in her hands.

“How was your nap?” Kang Chan asked.

“Refreshing. Are you hungry?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked, seemingly intent on preparing him some food.

Kang Chan smiled.

“How do you feel? Less tired? I heard you didn’t get any sleep last night,” Kang Chan said.

“Ever since we got back home, I’ve been feeling sleepy nonstop. I don’t think I’ll be getting any sleep later tonight if I nap some more, though, so I’m up now. What do you want for dinner?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked.

“I don’t have any plans other than to meet Michelle at nine, so I’m thinking of eating at home today. Do you want to eat outside?” Kang Chan asked.

“Let’s eat at home,” Yoo Hye-Sook replied.

The meals they had at the hotel were probably the reason Yoo Hye-Sook looked so earnest about finally having dinner at home.

But is there anything to eat?

“What is it, Mother?” Kang Chan asked, seeing the look on her face.

“There’s nothing to make side dishes with. And we have to pack food for the vacation home too, so can I go to the market out front real quick?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked hesitantly.

“Why don’t we go together?” Kang Chan responded with a smile.

“Really?” Yoo Hye-Sook replied brightly.

Kang Chan would be too anxious about letting her go alone anyway. They both walked out into the living room together. Yoo Hye-Sook had a beam on her face like a young student about to go on a field trip.

“What’s going on? Why do you look so happy, dear?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked curiously.

“We made plans to go to the market together,” Yoo Hye-Sook replied joyfully.

“What about me?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked with a mock-upset face.

The mother and son naturally wouldn’t leave without the man of the house.

The three changed into clean clothes first.

Chk.

“We’re going to go to the market. We’ll be taking the car in the underground parking lot. I know it’ll be extra work for you, but I hope you understand,” Kang Chan told the agents.

Chk.

“Agents are waiting on standby in the underground parking lot, the roads, and the rooftop. Nothing seems out of the ordinary. We also have control of the management room’s cameras.”

Chk.

“Thank you.”

Kang Chan had heard that Wui Min-Gook and one other enemy were still out there.

Motherfucker.

Kang Chan hoped they would be taken care of before his family went to the vacation home, but at worst, it wouldn’t take too long since Wui Min-Gook was now no more than a tiger without claws—no, he didn’t even have his paws anymore.

After changing, Kang Chan opened the front door and examined the stairs. Just in case, he holstered a gun to his ankle and hung the radio behind his back with the receiver hanging out.

“Can we leave now?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked cautiously.

“Of course,” Kang Chan answered.

Yoo Hye-Sook walked out with an anxious expression, and Kang Dae-Kyung and Kang Chan stood on both her sides as if they were protecting her, heading toward the underground parking lot.

It didn’t seem like Yoo Hye-Sook had completely shaken off the memories of the past yet, but even so, she was managing well.

Their trip to the market wasn’t as complicated as they thought.

The three pulled a cart around and picked up various fruits, tried out foods, and brought bulgogi, dried squid snacks, milk, and more.

It was fun, but it was also tiring. There were also so many people that it made it quite difficult to check everyone who approached them. They had only taken a rough walk around the market, but that alone already took two hours.

Yoo Hye-Sook seemingly became increasingly lively while Kang Dae-Kyung and Kang Chan just looked fatigued.

“Channy, what do you think about pork belly for a meal?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked.

“Sounds good,” Kang Chan responded.

Yoo Hye-Sook wanted pork belly, so she would get pork belly. They finished the shopping trip after buying more meat and side dishes.

In the car on the way back, Yoo Hye-Sook looked even more energized.

“I made a reservation for a vacation home in Gapyeong,” Kang Dae-Kyung informed Kang Chan.

“Got it,” Kang Chan replied.

They returned home and organized the items that they purchased. They then had pork belly for dinner and drank tea together.

There wasn't much to happiness. Being grateful to be able to sit and eat together—that was all it took.

However, to keep this happiness, someone had to endure terrible training, go out and fight, and a few might not come back. It wasn't like anyone recognized their efforts either.

The pain of the families whom the fallen left behind was the price to pay for the happiness of the families who had no idea what was sacrificed.

As Kang Chan ate the pork belly and watched Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook, he found solace in the thought that what he had been doing all this time hadn't been in vain.

He wanted to become stronger and had the determination to create a more powerful country probably because he wanted others to feel this kind of happiness.

“I'm so happy,” Yoo Hye-Sook said as they sat down on the sofa. They had just finished doing the dishes together.

As they watched the news, Kang Chan's phone began to ring.

It's only eight, though.

Kang Chan returned to his room to answer the phone.

“Hello?” he greeted.

-Channy. I got off earlier than I thought. Can I go over right now? It'll only take me about fifteen minutes.

“Okay, I'll be waiting in front of the apartment by then,” Kang Chan agreed.

He could go out to see her in the clothes he was currently wearing right now anyway.

“Michelle said she's coming a little earlier. I'll just have some tea with her and come back home,” Kang Chan told his parents.

“Would you tell her I said hello, Channy?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked.

“Of course. See you later,” Kang Chan replied.

“Be careful,” Kang Dae-Kyung said with concern.

“I will, Father. If you ever need to go out, please give me a call.”

“I won’t have to go outside. Don’t worry about us and go,” Kang Dae-Kyung assured him.

Kang Chan soon left the apartment. When he reached the ground floor, he explained the situation to the agents over the radio and walked toward the entrance.

Beep, beep, beep. Beep, beep, beep.

He picked up his phone and saw a notification from an application on his screen.

“Hello?” Kang Chan answered.

- It’s me, Woo Hee-Seung, sir. Lee Doo-Hee and I have just returned from our paid leave yesterday.

Hearing Woo Hee-Seung’s voice made Kang Chan suddenly miss Choi Jong-Il.

“I’m going out to drink some tea now. Let’s meet once I’m done,” Kang Chan said.

- Copy. Team Leader Choi Jong-Il told me to deliver his regards.

Kang Chan and Woo Hee-Seung said their goodbyes to each other with light tones.

Wui Min-Gook was still out there somewhere.

Before leaving the apartment, Kang Chan scanned the areas where he could be shot from.

When he got out, the world seemed at peace.

Honk.

A car stopped in front of him, and Michelle waved her hand through the open window of the passenger seat. Caucasian people were really pretty.

Kang Chan got into the passenger seat.

“I know you’re still tired. I hope I’m not bothering you,” Michelle said worriedly.

“It’s fine. I wanted to have another cup of tea anyway,” Kang Chan replied.

“Okay, Channy, if you say so.”

Michelle started the car and drove to Apgujeong-Dong. The large cafe was bustling with expensive foreign cars. When she parked, staff members came rushing over.

Each table had candles lit, and the interior decorations were exquisite.

In every corner, no matter who it was or where, all eyes were on Michelle. Flowing blonde hair, a sharp nose, big blue eyes, and a body that emphasized her chest and waist.

Kang Chan and Michelle sat on the terrace and ordered coffee. The candles flickered, elegantly creating quite a decent atmosphere.

“Here.”

When Michelle handed him a cigarette, envious glances from all around the room shot at Kang Chan.

Chapter 189.1: They Said It's Okay (2)

"You don't look good, Channy," Michelle commented.

"I had a lot of things to do."

For some reason, Michelle didn't ask him what he had been up to but instead immediately changed the subject. "The school's anniversary is next Friday. They'll be holding the school festival then."

Kang Chan smirked.

He had just returned yesterday from a battle so brutal that a lot of his men died. However, the school festival was an important event as well.

"The kids worked hard to prepare for it," Michelle continued. She talked carefully as if she was pacifying a younger brother who had a bad temper. Now that he thought about it, he did ask her to work on the school festival.

"Oh, and the building registration paperwork is in the car. Don't forget to take it with you. We'll be cleared to move into the building in two weeks. I know the first floor will be a shopping mall, but how should we divide the rest of the buildings?" Michelle asked as their tea was served.

"I was planning to move my father's automobile company's office first floor of offices, but convincing him to do that would be tricky. It doesn't matter what you do with the rest of the building for as long as it doesn't overlap with the floors that I'll be using. Right, what about DI?" Kang Chan asked.

"I'm thinking of giving the company the seventh and eighth floors. Can we do that?"

Kang Chan raised his coffee cup as he laughed lightheartedly. "I just told you that I'm leaving the building management to you, didn't I? Stop worrying and use the floors as you see fit. I do hope that my mother's Foundation office will be on the first floor as well, but we can figure that out later."

"Actually, a finance company contacted us about using the first, second, and third floors for a bank and a brokerage firm."

Will it be okay for those to be in the same building as Kang Dae-Kyung's company and Yoo Hye-Sook's foundation? Wouldn't various factors overlap?

Kang Chan couldn't immediately answer Michelle.

"Michelle, I'll be going to a vacation home with my parents in two days. Can I give you my decision when I get back? For as long as we decide where to put the exhibition hall in the first floor, the rest will be easy anyway, won't it?" Kang Chan asked.

“A vacation home?”

“Yes.”

They could hear people laughing out loud around them. Perhaps it was because the establishment they were in sold alcoholic drinks like beers and cocktails.

“Our drama ends next week. Since it received quite high TV ratings, I’m thinking of going abroad with the DI employees and the other actors who starred in it,” Michelle said.

“I’ll leave that up to you.”

“Will you be able to join us?”

“This might not be the case for our employees and in-house actors, but the outsourced actors will probably find it hard to accept that I’m a high schooler,” Kang Chan said.

Michelle obediently nodded as her round eyes remained closely locked on Kang Chan.

Something’s wrong—she’s acting somewhat submissive today. There’s no way she’s acting like this because of money.

“Why are you looking at me?” Michelle asked.

“You’re hiding something, aren’t you?”

Michelle smiled mischievously. “Our drama is a success, and I’ve done a good job taking over the building and overseeing its construction. So once I’m back from my trip abroad with DI, let’s go to Bali. Just the two of us.”

No wonder she’s being so obedient.

“What do you think?” Michelle asked.

“You already know my answer, right?”

“Let’s go!” Michelle extended her arms as if she were falling onto the table, then grabbed onto Kang Chan’s forearm and grumbled. From how the men around them reacted, it seemed even the server would raise his hand if Michelle asked if there was another guy who wanted to go with her instead.

“Get your act together,” Kang Chan said.

“Let’s go!” Determined to go with him, Michelle clung to Kang Chan. She didn’t let go even though she was fully aware that the people around them were staring.

“Let’s just hang out for a day instead. I still have to take Cindy and Cecile to dinner,” Kang Chan said.

Michelle sat up and pouted. After staring at Kang Chan for a while, she blinked. "Fine, but I get to decide where we're going on that day."

"Sure."

Michelle was a cut above Kang Chan when it came to choosing restaurants anyway. In fact, he was already planning to ask her to choose where to go for him if she accepted his offer.

"Embrasse moi[1]," Michelle said.

She's asking me to kiss her here?

The ears of the men around them pricked up when Michelle spoke in French.

"I'll do that next time. Now! Let's have a smoke and go home," Kang Chan said.

"You really make people anxious during moments like this," Michelle replied but took the cigarette that Kang Chan offered her anyway.

Chk chk.

The two lit up cigarettes.

"We can probably pay our drama's financial investors by selling the publication rights in other countries," Michelle said.

Smoking seemed to have returned her to her senses.

How will she react if I tell her that I'm going to France to receive training for about six months?

The two talked for about an hour more before leaving. Michelle dropped Kang Chan in front of his apartment building. Other than deciding that he was going to eat with the DI employees before they went on their trip abroad, they didn't talk about anything special.

Kang Chan told Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee to meet him tomorrow before heading back home.

The next morning, Kang Chan went for a leisurely jog. He still felt as if he hadn't completely recovered from the fatigue he accumulated during the operation, so he couldn't overwork himself yet.

After doing push-ups and a few other exercises, he headed back home.

"You should rest!" Yoo Hye-Sook told Kang Chan.

"I'll feel better quicker if I exercise."

This conversation would've annoyed him in the past, but Kang Chan now felt thankful for getting to have it this morning.

After showering and changing, Kang Chan sat at the table with his parents. Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook looked ten thousand times more comfortable at home than at the hotel.

"Did you two get enough rest?" Kang Chan asked.

“Yes. I slept soundly. Something about sleeping at the hotel made me feel uneasy. Fortunately, that feeling disappeared when we got back home,” Kang Dae-Kyung said.

Yoo Hye-Sook nodded in agreement.

Kang Chan enjoyed breakfast and returned to his room. After a while, his phone rang.

Did Lanok put a camera in my house after all?

Kang Chan held up his phone after looking around his room.

“Mr. Ambassador, it’s Kang Chan.”

- Mr. Kang Chan, Are you free at around ten-thirty today? I’d like to see you at the embassy.

“Yes, I’ll be there.”

The call ended there.

When Kang Chan went out of his room, he found Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook doing the dishes together.

“Do you need my help?” Kang Chan asked.

“Not at all—it’ll be disrespectful to disturb this moment of ours,” Kang Dae-Kyung joked.

Due to Kang Dae-Kyung’s rejection, Kang Chan made tea instead.

“I’m going to the French embassy,” Kang Chan said.

“Okay. Are you sure you’re free to go to the vacation home tomorrow?”

“Of course.”

After having tea, Kang Chan changed and leisurely got out of the house. He took out his phone before he left the building and called Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee.

“I’ll be heading to the embassy, but let’s have tea first. Are you two up for it?”

- We’re right in front of the apartment.

As soon as Woo Hee-Seung replied, a car came out of the alley and stopped in front of Kang Chan.

They drove off as soon as Kang Chan got in.

“Thank you for your hard work,” Woo Hee-Seung told Kang Chan.

“We all did our part to accomplish the mission. Some of our men even sacrificed their lives for it.”

Kang Chan felt many emotions when he saw Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee.

“We will be guarding you for the time being,” Woo Hee-Seung changed the subject.

“Got it. My only appointment today is a meeting at the embassy at ten-thirty. Let’s go somewhere and have tea before then.”

“I know a good place in front of the embassy.”

Taking only a little while to reach their destination, Lee Doo-Hee parked the car in front of a cafe with a nicely decorated terrace.

“I’ve never been to this cafe before,” Kang Chan commented.

“Their coffee here is quite good as well,” Woo Hee-Seung said.

The three at the terrace and ordered coffee. They then had a smoke.

“How’s Jong-Il doing?” Kang Chan asked.

“I heard that he’s recovering quite well. He can’t come back right now because it’s still dangerous for him to go on a plane, but he’ll probably be able to fly home in about a month.”

“How’s his family doing? I heard he has a wife and a child.”

“They’re okay. Hyungsoo-nim[2] is very strong.”

Woo Hee-Seung’s expression made Kang Chan smirk. They also told him about how Cha Dong-Gyun was doing.

Feeling as if he reunited with his comrades after a long time, Kang Chan spent thirty minutes just talking to them. Afterward, he headed to the embassy.

The agents who were now familiar with Kang Chan guided him in. Lanok then greeted him.

After giving each other a French greeting and sitting down at their seats, Raphael brought over tea and cigars.

“Getting to see you again makes me happy. It was an excellent operation,” Lanok said.

“It was only possible because you supported us. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.”

Lanok lightly nodded. “Something happened behind the scenes.”

That was yet another thing that Kang Chan was oblivious to. Lanok’s expression seemed different from the time he recommended training, too.

“The UK contacted me. I don’t know why yet, but they want to meet you as soon as possible. I’m hoping to meet them with you if you’re okay with that. What do you think?” Lanok asked.

Kang Chan couldn’t make sense of the situation. “Well, what do you suggest?”

“Meeting them doesn’t seem like a bad idea.”

“I’ll leave the decision to you if you want. However, I’m planning on spending the whole day tomorrow in a vacation home with my parents, so I request that our meeting with them be scheduled after that.” Kang Chan decided to inform Lanok of his schedule before the ambassador could respond since people like him tended to set appointments as early as possible once given the green light. They disappeared just as quickly, too.

“We have plenty of time anyway. I’ll block off tomorrow.” Lanok readily accepted Kang Chan’s request.

Chapter 189.2: They Said It’s Okay (2)

Lanok picked up a cigar. Kang Chan knew from that behavior alone that Lanok was about to open a slightly burdensome topic next, so he took a sip of his tea.

“Have you thought about the training that I recommended?” Lanok asked.

“Yes. I was just about to ask you to send me there if I’m still qualified for it.”

“Brilliant judgment, Mr. Kang Chan.” Lanok smiled brightly, seemingly satisfied.

“I’ll schedule it after our meeting with Ethan. That way, I can act accordingly.”

“Mr. Ambassador, if I were to receive training, when are we going to leave?” Kang Chan asked.

“In ten days, most likely.”

We’re going to leave so soon? He’s telling me to leave in ten days for something that will take six months to finish?

Kang Chan had to persuade and say goodbye to quite a lot of people before he could go.

Nevertheless, Lanok looked at Kang Chan with eyes that asked, ‘What’s wrong?’

Fortunately, I’ll still get to go to the festival next week before I go.

“Will the training really take six months?”

“More or less, yes.”

If he was going to go there anyway, it was best to go there as soon as possible—even if that meant just a day earlier. Scheduling it now was a lot better than just waiting around, too.

“Can I still contact people in South Korea while I’m training?” Kang Chan asked.

“Of course. Except when you’re in certain facilities, there shouldn’t be a problem contacting them during your break and dinner.”

That was great—his schedule was a lot more relaxed than he expected. It made him feel as if telling Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook about it tomorrow wouldn’t be difficult.

Kang Chan spent a while longer just talking to Lanok about various topics. At noon, he stood up and left so Lanok could go to his lunch appointment.

Kang Chan took out his phone and called Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee.

“Are you two free? Let’s have lunch,” Kang Chan asked. After getting their confirmation, he gave Seok Kang-Ho a quick call.

- It’s me. Where are you?

Seok Kang-Ho sounded as if he was going to run out at any moment.

“I’m going to have lunch with Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee since I’m already with them. Want to come?”

- Phuhu, where are you guys going?

“One second,” Kang Chan replied, held up his phone, and asked the two what and where they wanted to eat. Since Wui Min-Gook was still in Korea, he wanted to avoid open or crowded areas.

Eventually, they decided to go to the restaurant that Kang Chan went to with Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook.

By the time the three arrived at the restaurant, Seok Kang-Ho was already inside. That was to be expected, though, since it was close to his house.

“Did you get some rest?” Kang Chan asked Seok Kang-Ho.

“I slept all day. What about you?”

“It’s all I’ve been doing lately too.”

Only a day had passed. Seeing Seok Kang-Ho allowed Kang Chan to roughly figure out how he was doing.

They ordered sirloin for the table. Lee Doo-Hee grilled the meat.

Since there were other people at the restaurant, they only caught up with each other and talked about how the meat tasted as they ate.

Still, moments like this were precious to Kang Chan. He was grateful for it.

Although he and these men overcame great danger together and survived in France and China, they never knew when they were going to die in this line of work, so times like this were irreplaceable to them.

In Kang Chan’s previous life, he only had Dayeru and Gerard to share these kinds of moments with. Fortunately, he had more people like them around him now.

“I’m going to a vacation home in Gapyeong with my parents tomorrow,” Kang Chan said.

“Tomorrow?” Seok Kang-Ho replied as he had trouble chewing the hot meat.

“Yeah. Telling him to just stay at home didn’t sit right with me, considering they stayed at the hotel for quite a few days and I only spent half of the day with them during our trip to Jeju Island.”

“That’s a good idea.”

After talking about various other topics and finishing their meal, they headed to the cafe at the intersection.

Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee sat with them for a moment, then left after telling Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho that they were fine just staying in the car.

“Considering how they’re behaving, there are probably more agents in our vicinity,” Seok Kang-Ho commented.

“I think so as well. They seem to have been tasked to guard us from a close distance, so other agents have probably formed another line of defense. Some are likely guarding you as well, which makes it difficult for them to use the radio in front of us.”

“They’re having quite a hard time.”

Kang Chan nodded. They had to twist that bitch Wui Min-Gook’s neck quickly to make everyone’s lives easier.

When Kang Chan found the chance, he decided to bring up his training.

“Have I told you that Lanok told me to go to France to receive training?” Kang Chan asked. He then told Seok Kang-Ho about his conversation with Lanok earlier.

“That doesn’t seem like a bad idea,” Seok Kang-Ho said afterward, which Kang Chan found unexpected.

Kang Chan thought that Seok Kang-Ho would become very angry and say things like, ‘I’m going to be bored all alone,’ and ‘How can you agree to that and leave me behind?’ Unexpectedly, however, Seok Kang-Ho just calmly agreed to it.

“I also met Michelle yesterday. She said that we’ll be able to move into the building in about two weeks. I want you to stay there while I’m in France,” Kang Chan continued. “She also told me that the school’s anniversary is next Friday, which is when they’ll hold the festival as well.”

“The school holds the festival every year on that date because that’s when the senior students can’t go to school due to their upcoming exams.”

“I see.” Kang Chan drank coffee while nodding.

“Shouldn’t you tell Section Chief Jeon and Manager Kim about your training in France as well?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

“I will. I just thought I’d tell you first. I’ll tell my parents next, then let the others know when I have time.”

“I hope nothing happens while you’re in France.”

“I was told that I won’t have trouble calling people, so there shouldn’t be any problems since you all can just contact me immediately if something comes up,” Kang Chan said as he picked up a cigarette. “I doubt something as intense as what just happened would come up again anyway while I’m away. Honestly, I’m sure the agents can find Wui Min-Gook and the other man who escaped with him without our help.”

“That’s true.” Seok Kang-Ho nodded as he picked up a cigarette as well.

Kang Chan returned home at about four in the afternoon.

Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook cleaned the house and rested their fatigued minds and bodies yesterday. Today, they seemed to be leisurely enjoying their spare time.

Is this the right moment to tell them that I’m going to be away in France for six months? If I don’t, will I find the opportunity to tell them at the vacation home? Wouldn’t it be too quiet there?

Kang Chan couldn’t make up his mind.

“Have you had lunch yet? Do you want to have some fruit?” Yoo Hye-Sook warmly asked Kang Chan, who had lightly washed up and changed.

“Do you guys want to have some?” Kang Chan asked back.

“Sure,” Kang Dae-Kyung replied.

Yoo Hye-Sook took two apples and brought them to the living room.

When would I want Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook to tell me about a decision that they have made without informing me about it first?

If Kang Chan had to hear the news anyway, he would want them to tell him as early as possible, even if that meant only an hour earlier.

Yoo Hye-Sook peeled and cut up the apples. She handed one slice to Kang Dae-Kyung first, then gave a slice to Kang Chan as well.

“I have something to tell you two,” Kang Chan started. He couldn’t help but feel bad when he noticed the two immediately becoming nervous. “Ambassador Lanok recommended that I study abroad for a short period in France. He said that it’s going to last about six months. I think it’s going to be very helpful to me in the future, so I’d like to accept the opportunity if the two of you are okay with it.”

Yoo Hye-Sook quickly looked at Kang Dae-Kyung.

“Hmm, are you going to be attending a university there?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

“No—the French government has apparently prepared a scholastic course just for me.” While making up excuses, Kang Chan kept in mind not to tell them about intelligence bureaus, France’s DGSE, or that their work could even include the assassination of global key figures.

“Are you thinking of learning about politics and government work, by any chance?” Kang Dae-Kyung vaguely asked.

Kang Chan decided to take this opportunity to tell them what was on his mind. “I recently realized that it would be difficult for me to pull out of work related to the Eurasian Rail. Not only Ambassador Lanok but the people that he introduced me to are all key members of the project. I keep getting connected to them. I even received an offer to become the South Korean representative for the Eurasian Rail. However, if I’m going to continue to work in this field, I want to properly study for it and meet more people.”

Kang Dae-Kyung just held the half-bitten apple slice in silence. Yoo Hye-Sook hadn’t even taken a bite yet.

“What about college?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked.

“I’m thinking of enrolling two years after finishing the scholastic course.”

Yoo Hye-Sook seemed to have figured out from the sudden rise in Kang Chan’s status that there was something suspicious about the situation. She looked as if she just wanted her son to have a normal life.

“When are you leaving?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

Kang Chan looked up toward Kang Dae-Kyung. “I’ll be leaving in ten days if you give me permission to go.”

Kang Chan didn’t even say a word to his parents when he went to France to become a mercenary in his previous life, yet he just asked for Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook’s permission.

Kang Dae-Kyung inhaled loudly. Yoo Hye-Sook still looked puzzled.

Chapter 190.1: You Want To Go, Don’t You? (1)

Crunch.

Yoo Hye-Sook turned her gaze away upon hearing Kang Dae-Kyung bite into the apple he was holding.

“You want to go, don’t you?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

“Yes, Father,” Kang Chan replied.

Kang Dae-Kyung sounded as if he was asking to try to have Yoo Hye-Sook accept the reality rather than asking out of curiosity. Hence, Kang Chan answered resolutely.

“And your departure doesn’t mean you’re not going to be able to go to college, does it?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked again.

“I haven’t gotten a definite response yet, but I’m planning on looking deeper into it after getting permission from both of you,” Kang Chan replied.

Kang Dae-Kyung nodded, then prodded on, “Are you allowed to stay in touch with us?”

“Yes. They said that except for certain occasions, there won’t be any issue with me contacting you,” Kang Chan responded.

This was the first time Kang Chan ever asked for permission from his parents. In the past, he just obediently went to school when he was told to, and he could never ask his parents for things that required money. Why else would he have left for Africa and never looked back the moment he graduated from school?

But this didn’t feel restrictive at all. Rather, his heart felt warm with emotion.

“Is his college attendance the biggest issue for you, Honey?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked Yoo Hye-Sook.

Yoo Hye-Sook’s response was to just look between Kang Dae-Kyung and Kang Chan with a sad expression.

“Channy, can I ask one thing of you?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked.

Kang Chan patiently waited for his next words.

“Before you go, you have to get confirmation on your status with college, and you’ll call your mother two times a week no matter what. Got it? Now that I said it, I guess those are more like two things,” Kang Dae-Kyung said with a forced smile.

“Mother?”

Kang Chan turned around and noticed Yoo Hye-Sook’s eyes were redshot. He had grown accustomed to it due to how frequently it happened, but her tears never once failed to reach his heart.

If he hadn’t been able to lean against Yoo Hye-Sook’s shoulder and cry into her embrace at one point in time, Kang Chan would probably have been wandering around in Africa again, never to learn what familial or parental love felt like.

“Well, your dad gave his permission, so why not?” Yoo Hye-Sook finally replied.

Kang Chan subconsciously took a step toward Yoo Hye-Sook.

“I’ll be going to France, then,” Kang Chan affirmed.

“Of course. You should follow what your heart tells you to do,” Yoo Hye-Sook said as she stroked Kang Chan’s back. He felt as if he just received the greatest, kindest, and strongest love in the world.

“When did this boy grow up so much?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked after tousling Kang Chan’s hair and patting his back.

“Finish your apple, Channy,” Yoo Hye-Sook insisted when she noticed the apple that Kang Chan was holding. She barely managed to reign back her emotions.

How could Kang Chan refuse? He took a big bite of the fruit.

“If you’re leaving in ten days, you’ll be busy, won’t you? Where will you be staying? You’ll have to take some side dishes with you. Some gochujang, dried seaweed, and—oh! Take some salted seafood too,” Yoo Hye-Sook brainstormed.

“Mother, I don’t have to take anything. It will all be prepared for me. I probably can’t take any food like that either way because I’ll be staying in a dorm-style residence,” Kang Chan quickly butted in. Yoo Hye-Sook seemed about to start packing for him immediately.

“Still! What if you lose your appetite there?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked worriedly.

How could Kang Chan not love his mother? He was most grateful for being born again as her son.

“I’ll be fine. Once I’m there, I’ll check if you can send me some food. It wouldn’t be too late to send some to me then,” Kang Chan convinced her.

“Really? Are you sure you’ll be okay? Should we go shopping for some clothes?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked, still concerned.

Kang Chan smiled. Kang Dae-Kyung did as well.

“After your training is done, it would be nice if your mother and I could follow you to France and do some sightseeing,” Kang Dae-Kyung mused.

“Sounds like a plan!” Kang Chan exclaimed.

“Goodness! I’ll be able to visit France thanks to my son!” Yoo Hye-Sook said with joy.

“Honey! You’re going with me, not Channy!” Kang Dae-Kyung protested.

“If you can’t go, I’m going to have my son get me tickets and go by myself!” Yoo Hye-Sook jokingly shot back.

“Hey! That’s not fair!”

Yoo Hye-Sook softened a bit thanks to the humorous atmosphere that Kang Dae-Kyung created.

“Channy, hurry and have more apples,” Yoo Hye-Sook said.

Kang Chan glanced at Kang Dae-Kyung.

‘Thank you, Father.’

Kang Dae-Kyung looked as if he had a torrent of emotions inside him. A father’s love was definitely different from a mother’s. A single look from him was worth more than a thousand words and made Kang Chan’s heart throb with even more emotion.

Although Kang Chan just told them shocking news, the atmosphere became warmer. Perhaps his parents thought that it was better to have their son properly trained than to have him leave to who-knew-where and return home injured.

Kang Chan and Kang Dae-Kyung then persuaded Yoo Hye-Sook not to cook more meat, albeit barely. Unfortunately, she insisted on making japchae instead. The two men busily tried to stop her, and, after some struggle, they finally had a cozy dinner together. Afterward, they watched TV to spend more time with each other.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

After a while, Kang Chan’s phone on the table rang, getting his attention.

“Hello?” he answered.

- Kim Hyung-Jung speaking. Do you have time to talk right now?

“Yes. I’m at home,” Kang Chan said.

- Can we meet in Samseong-Dong for a moment? If you can come, then I’ll contact Mr. Seok next.

“I’m on my way,” Kang Chan replied.

Kang Chan came back out to the living room and informed his parents that he was heading out for a bit.

“I’ll ask them about college while I’m there. I’ll be able to leave for France with my mind at ease then,” Kang Chan said.

“Okay, Channy. What if they say you can’t, though?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked worriedly.

“I’ll make sure I get an answer from them today,” Kang Chan responded.

Kang Chan naturally turned softer when he was talking to Yoo Hye-Sook. If they said no, he could just not go to the training in France.

Soon after, Kang Chan changed out of his clothes and left his home. When he stepped out of the apartment, he found Seok Kang-Ho already waiting for him.

“Have you had dinner?” Kang Chan asked.

“I had a bunch of pork belly slices with kimchi!” Seok Kang-Ho replied, clearly delighted.

I really need to have him get tested at the hospital someday.

It took them about fifteen minutes to get to Samseong-Dong. There was a bit of traffic because it was rush hour, but the ride wasn't boring.

They drove directly down to the underground parking lot and went up the building by elevator. When they reached the right floor, they found Kim Hyung-Jung waiting for them.

"Mr. Kang Chan," Kim Hyung-Jung greeted.

Kang Chan shook his head and walked in to find Jeon Dae-Geuk and Kim Tae-Jin inside.

"Mr. Seok!" Jeon Dae-Geuk warmly greeted. "How's the fatigue? Feeling better?"

"Yes, sir," Seok Kang-Ho replied.

Jeon Dae-Geuk was looking at Seok Kang-Ho with adoration. He was acting as if Seok Kang-Ho was his nephew or a trusted soldier on his team.

The five had some tea together and made some small talk about each other's well-being.

"We decided to hold the funeral on Monday next week," Kim Hyung-Jung steadily said. "We plan to have it quietly, so we're blocking out any media coverage. General Choi Seong-Geon has been posthumously awarded the President's Order of Military Merit and promoted by one star. The men who laid down their lives for the country were awarded the Hwarang Order of Military Merit and promoted one rank."

"What about the compensation for their families?" Kang Chan asked.

"They will be designated as national meritorious citizens, and they will receive consolation payments for the soldiers' sacrifices."

This outcome felt slightly unsatisfying, but Kang Chan didn't push any further. He really couldn't do anything about the regulations that they were currently following.

"On another note, in about ten days, I'm planning to go to France for a six-month training program," Kang Chan opened. When he did, he realized that Jeon Dae-Geuk, Kim Hyung-Jung, and even Kim Tae-Jin already had somewhat of an idea of his departure.

"The National Intelligence Service received some reports regarding this. The agency is looking forward to the fact that your development will be of great assistance to South Korea, but they also find it regrettable that the special forces team will no longer have a commander that can rally them," Kim Hyung-Jung said.

Jeon Dae-Geuk sighed quietly.

"If you don't mind, I'd like Seok Kang-Ho to look over the special forces team for a while. What do you think?" Jeon Dae-Geuk asked.

This Seok Kang-Ho?

Kang Chan turned to look at Seok Kang-Ho, who also appeared to be quite flustered.

“There shouldn’t be any issues with his qualifications. On paper, he is currently a special agent of the National Intelligence Service. He just has to check in on the team once or twice a week, at least until Cha Dong-Gyun returns...” Jeon Dae-Geuk said as he turned his gaze toward Seok Kang-Ho. “What do you say, Mr. Seok?”

Kang Chan expected Seok Kang-Ho to readily accept the proposal, but he surprisingly had a solemn expression. It made him genuinely curious about what was going on in Seok Kang-Ho’s mind.

“What is it?” Kang Chan asked.

“Well, the thing is, without you, my presence there really won’t change anything. Changing the person that rallies them can’t be changed so easily. The soldiers already have experience under their belt as well, having gone on missions to France, China, and North Korea, so it’s not like they still lack that either,” Seok Kang-Ko replied.

“Mr. Seok, that’s exactly what we would like to request of you. I know it won’t be easy, but please act as their commander at least until the men’s confidence in themselves becomes more solid. Eyes from all around the world are suddenly focused on us, and that’s making it the most difficult for the deputy general. We’re asking this of you because we think that role should be held by someone who actually fought alongside the soldiers,” Jeon Dae-Geuk insisted.

Seok Kang-Ho glanced at Kang Chan. After a while, he sighed as his expression turned grim.

“I understand. I suppose I can visit once or twice a week until Cap returns,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

“Thank you, Mr. Seok,” Jeon Dae-Geuk clasped his hands.

Kang Chan realized that the current Seok Kang-Ho was definitely different from the Dayeru of Africa. The serious expression that he had earlier was something that Kang Chan could never imagine Dayeru making.

Chapter 190.2: You Want To Go, Don’t You? (1)

“Is there anything you need before you leave for France?” Jeon Dae-Geuk asked Kang Chan out of concern, finishing his conversation with Seok Kang-Ho.

“My mother is worried if it’ll be okay to defer going to college for a year. Can you tell me how that will work?” Kang Chan asked.

Had the men been expecting something more serious? At Kang Chan’s question, Jeon Dae-Geuk made a disbelieving smile. Kim Hyung-Jung and Kim Tae-Jin had similar expressions.

“I will ask the prime minister’s office to take care of it,” Kim Hyung-Jung replied.

With that, Yoo Hye-Sook's concern was resolved.

"Anyhow, has there been any more information about Wui Min-Gook?" Kang Chan asked.

"There are likely some organizations and individuals who are still helping him, but with the current situation, it appears they are staying hidden," Kim Hyung-Jung answered.

Tsk! I won't be able to leave for France with peace of mind unless I twist his neck first...

The others' expressions didn't differ that much from Kang Chan's.

"I'm embarrassed to show my face in front of you and General Choi," Kim Tae-Jin said.

"None of this is your fault, Director," Kang Chan assured him.

"This wouldn't have happened if I hadn't said that we should just let Wui Min-Gook go that time," Kim Tae-Jin said with a genuinely apologetic face.

"Don't say that! Who could've predicted something like this would happen?" Jeon Dae-Geuk said in an attempt to reassure him, but Kim Tae-Jin still looked remorseful.

"We have received messages confirming the Russian President's visit to South Korea. The UK Prime Minister and the President of France will be visiting as well. All that's left now is the work to be done by the government, but they say we can still call them, so I will contact you to let you know every time progress is made," Kim Hyung-Jung told Kang Chan.

"Is that necessary?" Kang Chan asked dubiously.

"The Eurasian Rail still hasn't been connected yet. We should continue exchanging information with you as the situation develops," Kim Hyung-Jung said.

All Kang Chan would be doing was listening to how the situation worked out. The only danger that remained was Wui Min-Gook, which was something that Kim Hyung-Jung could take care of alone.

"Manager Kim, what are your plans for Huh Ha-Soo?" Kang Chan asked.

"The evidence is so clear that he won't be able to make any excuses. We are also discovering more individuals from within the National Intelligence Service who provided internal information to Huh Ha-Soo. It will be dealt with properly."

Kang Chan found it a shame that he didn't get to twist that motherfucker's neck, but it wasn't as if he was still a baekjeong[1] from the old times to be butchering all the criminals. It did feel like things were moving quickly, but that wasn't a problem.

“Don’t just go suddenly changing your nationality to French, okay?” Jeon Dae-Geuk joked, instantly lightening up the atmosphere. “If you come back as a Frenchman because you fell for their offer of pretty women and money, I’m not going to stay still.”

Jeon Dae-Geuk’s eyes were so sharp that Kang Chan thought he might not be joking after all. However, when he grinned, the others also chuckled along.

“Promise me,” Jeon Dae-Geuk continued through his smile.

His serious expression and command were even funnier, but Kang Chan couldn’t laugh to his face. Before Kang Chan could answer, though, Jeon Dae-Geuk continued, maintaining his grave expression.

“Before you leave for France, let me ask you this one thing. Just where did you and Mr. Seok obtain such experience? I also think it’s better not to know the answer to this question, but I can’t help being curious.”

The atmosphere changed instantly again. Kim Tae-Jin and Kim Hyung-Jung focused their entire attention on Kang Chan.

However, this wasn’t a question that Kang Chan could answer, no matter how much he trusted them. Even if they were to believe what he said, what would come out of telling them? There was no knowing if his response could put him or Seok Kang-Ho in danger.

“Chief Jeon, I’ll have to keep take that secret to the grave, but in return, I promise not to get a French nationality,” Kang Chan replied.

Seeing Seok Kang-Ho’s stiff expression, Jeon Dae-Geuk let out a low sigh.

The vacation house was located over an hour’s drive further into Eupnae of Gapyeong.

‘Looks like the agents are gonna have their work cut out for them.’

Kang Chan had informed the agents of the location beforehand, but the winding roads and the hilly terrain were a nightmare from a security perspective. The two sedans in front of them and the vans and sedans following them were probably all agents assigned to protect them.

To be honest, Kang Chan also became alert every time a truck passed by them on the other side of the road. He had a gun holstered to his ankle and a radio behind his back, but the receiver wasn’t in his ear.

“It really is autumn,” Yoo Hye-Sook remarked in wonder. The mountains blanketed in red leaves were a vast change from the scenery that the hotel and their home offered. Fallen leaves were strewn along the roadside.

They reached their reserved vacation home about two hours after they left home. The location was quiet, peaceful, and had a lovely view. They could certainly relax in this place if it wasn’t for the threat that Wui Min-Gook posed.

As Kang Dae-Kyung confirmed their reservation, Kang Chan and Yoo Hye-Sook unloaded their luggage from the car and moved them to the place they rented.

The vacation home was made up of five separate houses, and the owner directed them to the second one to the left.

The house they reserved was a white wooden building with a spacious living room and bedrooms with large glass windows. Above was a loft with a bed accessible by stairs under a glass roof that revealed the sky. By the time they put the food in the fridge and tidied their belongings, it was already around two in the afternoon.

If it weren't for the damn glass windows in the living room, this place would've been really cozy.

It was the perfect structure to get sniped from the mountains.

Kang Chan eventually put the receiver of his walkie-talkie into his ear.

Chk.

“What should we do about the mountains from across the living room?” Kang Chan asked.

Chk.

“We have already deployed troops there yesterday. We conducted two searches, and they were ordered to surround the entire mountain and have ambush training until tomorrow,” Woo Hee-Seung immediately answered.

Damn it!

The soldiers were suffering just because his family was staying at a vacation home for a day. Kang Chan wanted to invite all the soldiers here to have a barbecue with them if he could. However, he decided to keep the information to himself because he didn't want Yoo Hye-Sook to feel bad.

“Should we close the curtains in the living room?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked quietly, away from Yoo Hye-Sook.

“It should be fine for now. They'll be able to see inside at night, though, so we should close them then,” Kang Chan replied.

They would've had to draw the curtains at night anyway to have privacy from their vacationing neighbors.

“Honey! What are you doing? Let's go outside!” Yoo Hye-Sook happily suggested.

Click.

“The bathroom and everything else is so clean,” she said.

“Were you hoping to clean the bathroom or something, honey?” Kang Dae-Kyung jokingly asked.

“I was just looking around,” Yoo Hye-Sook shot back.

As they continued to exchange banter, the three walked outside together.

“Whew! The air is so fresh!” Yoo Hye-Sook exclaimed after taking in a deep breath. Except for the sound of two children from the home next to them running around, there wasn’t any noise.

“Let’s pick some chestnuts. They said we have to wear hats and sunglasses and also asked that we only pick as many as we can eat,” Kang Dae-Kyung reminded.

They leisurely walked into the mountain, following the path.

Kang Chan quickly scanned their surroundings and stayed by Yoo Hye-Sook’s side. Fortunately, he wasn’t getting any warnings from his gut.

“Should we not go?” Yoo Hye-Sook cautiously asked.

“It’s fine, Mother. They said there are chestnuts in this place, right? Let’s go over there,” Kang Chan suggested.

It was unfortunate for the agents and soldiers, but Kang Chan and his family might as well enjoy themselves while they were here. He would regret going back home before he could do anything, so he continued to walk along, pretending everything was fine.

They strolled through the forest along a narrow path and reached a slightly larger clearing.

“Wow!” Yoo Hye-Sook and Kang Dae-Kyung exclaimed. Kang Chan also looked around, equally surprised.

They had come across a grove of chestnut trees on a plateau. It was on a mountain’s incline, so it wasn’t visible from below. Chestnuts covered the ground, having fallen from the roughly thirty or more chestnut trees on it.

“They prepared those for us,” Kang Dae-Kyung pointed at a few nets and sticks.

“I’ll do it,” Kang Chan said.

“The head of the household should be the one to do something like this,” Kang Dae-Kyung replied with a grin.

Kang Dae-Kyung hit the tree, and chestnuts came pouring down. They picked up the fallen chestnuts and opened them to reveal plump, juicy chestnut meats.

The part that made Kang Chan the happiest was seeing Yoo Hye-Sook’s childlike delight as she enjoyed the chestnuts.

What more could he wish for?

Once they had collected a reasonable amount, the three looked around the area.

“It looks like there’s a stream around here,” Kang Chan noted.

“Let’s go,” Kang Dae-Kyung said.

They walked past the grove of chestnut trees and down the mountain to find a stream with stone basin placed here and there to collect water.

“Parents would enjoy visiting this place with their children in the summer,” Yoo Hye-Sook remarked.

Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook exchanged smiles while washing their hands.

They passed the stream and followed the hiking trail, reaching the parking area where they first parked their car. Although they had walked for about an hour and a half, the fresh air and pleasant conversation were so nice that time flew by unnoticed.

“Have you gone chestnut-picking yet? Huh? Why is this all you picked? I’m sure there were plenty of chestnuts out there,” the friendly female owner said when she saw the pouch of chestnuts that Kang Chan was carrying. She sounded as if she found the amount quite a pity.

“We only have to pick as much as we can eat,” Yoo Hye-Sook replied.

“What? You can grill some of them when you’re eating meat later and save some on the way back too. Most people pick too many, but I guess there are folk like you too. Who’s this, though? Your little brother?” the woman asked with a smile.

She’s just saying nice things for business.

“You two look so much alike. He has to be your little brother,” the woman added.

“He’s my son,” Yoo Hye-Sook replied with a beam.

“What?! How can someone as young as you have a son?”

The owner’s cheeky, joking remarks took about ten minutes of their time. If she was an actress, she would have won the grand prize in a heartbeat.

Mother won’t fall for that obvious lie, will she?

“Dear! I must look really young!” Yoo Hye-Sook exclaimed.

Kang Chan quietly laughed it off.

It was good to see Yoo Hye-Sook happy.

The three then spent a leisurely afternoon and had dinner with Kang Dae-Kyung’s homemade chicken as the main dish. They shared some beer as well.

As time passed and darkness fell, Yoo Hye-Sook seemed to feel the reality of Kang Chan’s upcoming departure.

“Don’t forget to take care of yourself even in France, okay?” Yoo Hye-Sook said out of genuine concern.

“I will, Mother. Don’t worry,” Kang Chan reassured her.

When Kang Chan held her hand, Yoo Hye-Sook looked as if she was on the verge of tears, but she still smiled.