

## **Blackfield 231**

Chapter 231.1: Something I Wanted To Tell You (2)

Kang Chan pulled out his phone as he looked out the window. As soon as he pressed the call button, the call was picked up.

“Anne, do I have the authority to order the assassination of the United States’ DIA director?” Kang Chan asked, getting straight to the point.

- You do, Monsieur Kang.

Mulling over his thoughts, Kang Chan looked up at the sky as he pressed his lips together.

- However, the moment you issue that order, it will be difficult for us to guarantee your safety. The same goes for the ambassador and the director and deputy directors of South Korea’s National Intelligence Service.

“You mean they will be retaliating?”

- Every assassination team the DIA and CIA have will immediately make their way to South Korea. The United States is also connected to a large number of organizations in South Korea, making this battle even more difficult for us to win.

Kang Chan smirked. His opponent was proving difficult to deal with, but he expected as much.

“One more thing. If I ordered it, can the DGSE broadcast the battle in Africa the same way our operation in Afghanistan was shot?”

- A 360-degree revolving camera was used at the time. The DGSE has far more advanced satellite cameras. Since two of them are used only for Africa, we would have the option to record the operation at a much higher quality.

“I see. What is France’s stance on this deployment request?”

- Somalia used to be under Italian colonial rule, Monsieur Kang. It’s safe to say that at least ninety percent of the wars fought within Africa are European countries fighting to gain more control.

“Why is the United States involving themselves in this matter, then?” Kang Chan asked.

- The United States hopes to eliminate you and the South Korean special forces team so they can exert a greater influence over South Korea again. Ever since South Korea became a part of the Eurasian Rail, the United States has been rapidly changing its policy on the Korean peninsula.

While this had been happening, Kang Chan had been far too busy fighting other enemies to get the chance to observe what the United States was doing.

“What about Gerard?”

- He and his men are on emergency standby right now as the commander of the Foreign Legion’s special forces. They are in the middle of an internal power struggle right now, but we have concluded that Commander Gerard has to handle this matter on his own.

Kang Chan found no fault in their decision. He and Seok Kang-Ho also went through a similar fight, which was why he wasn't worried about him. Gerard would probably take care of the opposition from the other special units with style.

"All right. I'll contact you again soon," Kang Chan said. Around the same time he hung up, Woo Hee-Seung went outside.

"Director Kim Tae-Jin and Manager Kim Hyung-Jung have arrived. He's heading down to guide them," Seok Kang-Ho informed him.

Kang Chan sat down at the table with Seok Kang-Ho and told him everything he talked about with Anne on the phone.

"Everything just has to be so difficult," Seok Kang-Ho grumbled.

"I know, right?" Kang Chan agreed.

A moment later, Kim Tae-Jin and Kim Hyung-Jung entered the office.

"Welcome to our place," Kang Chan greeted.

"Why is it so dull here? Should I buy some flowers to liven up the place?" Kim Tae-Jin asked as he looked around the office.

"It's because someone with no artistic sense at all decorated this place. What kind of tea would you like to drink?" Kang Chan offered.

"It's tradition to always have coffee with you, isn't it?" Kim Tae-Jin joked.

"I would also like some coffee," Kim Hyung-Jung added.

"Alright. Please have a seat," Kang Chan insisted, gesturing toward the same table he and Seok Kang-Ho were occupying.

This place had a spectacular view, offered more than enough privacy for them to no longer worry about other people, and had an air vent that sucked in all cigarette smoke. Why should they relocate to an uncomfortable reception room or a stuffy office?

"Mr. Kang Chan, we have finished a general investigation of the SSIS," Kim Hyung-Jung began as Lee Doo-Hee served them four cups of coffee. "Moreover, the six agents who will be coming with you to Mongolia are planning to submit their resignation letters today."

There was no time to waste making small talk and greeting each other.

"What about the company that Oh Gwang-Taek will enter a contract with?" Kang Chan asked.

"We intend to make a company that manages hotels and other establishments enter the mining industry. I've mentioned this before, but the DMZ King has also agreed to join us, which is somewhat of a consolation."

Kim Hyung-Jung glanced at Kim Tae-Jin, who then nodded in agreement.

“Are you sure someone who’s been away from the military for so long can play the part? He must be quite old by now too,” Kang Chan wondered out of concern.

“While that may be true, you should still think of that man as a living weapon. Many of us have made a name for ourselves in the DMZ and North Korea, but he is the only person to ever been called a king,” Kim Tae-Jin stated.

*Ha, what a nickname!*

Kang Chan smirked to himself because of how immature the title was.

“It was during his time that North Korea’s DMZ team took five of our men captive. Even though our superiors didn’t order us to bring them back, that man ran over to them alone. His bravery caused quite the problem, though, eventually forcing him to take off his uniform.”

“But you said he managed to rescue them, didn’t you?” Kang Chan questioned.

“Yes, but it led to an intense shootout all over the DMZ and ultimately put us on the verge of war. That was the problem. It wouldn’t be wrong to say that he was thrown away to appease the protests from North Korea and the US command,” Kim Tae-Jin explained.

“And how old is he?”

“Kang Chan, can you just trust him if I vouch for him? He has a painful background, and while I want to accept his help with this matter, I also want to help him make a comeback. I hope you understand.”

Kang Chan just nodded in response. He had no reason to refuse the addition of another team member anyway. He was just uneasy about them having such high expectations for an old, retired soldier.

“Oh, right! Seok Kang-Ho will be going to Jeungpyeong tomorrow. He’ll be taking charge of the soldiers’ training and preparation for the upcoming operation in Africa,” Kang Chan said.

“That would be nice. How in the world do you know about the SSIS and how to train against them, though?” Kim Tae-Jin asked, voicing out his suspicions.

Seeing Seok Kang-Ho smirk in reply, Kim Tae-Jin just shook his head from side to side.

“So it’s something I have to pretend not to notice again, huh?” he sighed as he picked up his cup of coffee.

“I plan to meet Colonel Park Chul-Su this afternoon. Would you like to accompany me?” Kim Hyung-Jung asked next, turning to Kang Chan. “He has only ever been in the special forces and has a strong personality that tends to make everyone a bit uncomfortable.”

“Dissonance between the commander and the soldiers isn’t really ideal, especially during a time like this,” Kang Chan said with concern.

“I will make my decision after meeting him tomorrow. He will probably visit Jeungpyeong tomorrow. If he does, he’ll be coming across Mr. Seok,” Kim Hyung-Jung informed him.

“I’ll see how my schedule turns out first. I might come with you,” Kang Chan replied.

“That sounds great,” Kim Hyung-Jung responded.

The men then spent some time talking about the current situation at Oh Gwang-Taek’s company and discussed the personnel and supplies that had to be sent to Mongolia immediately. They ordered lunch from a nearby place, but someone had to go downstairs to receive it, which was incredibly inconvenient. Unfortunately, it wasn’t like they could hire someone just for tea or lunch errands.

After their meal, Kim Tae-Jin and Kim Hyung-Jung left the office. Meanwhile, Kang Chan called Yang Bum to give a summary of what happened during his call with Vasili.

- Russia will not easily give up on this matter. It likely only ended at that level of escalation because of you. Anyway, please send me the documents about the company that will take over the mine. I will make sure to send a draft of the contract from the Mongolian Ministry of Resources within two days.

“All right. I’ll do that,” Kang Chan replied.

- Thank you, Mr. Kang Chan.

“No, I should be the one saying that. Thank you for your help.”

After the call, Kang Chan immediately informed Kim Hyung-Jung about the details. It was now a little past one in the afternoon.

*Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz.*

After a while, Kang Chan’s phone began to ring again.

“Hello?” he answered.

- Where are you?

Oh Gwang-Taek’s voice was the same as ever.

- Let’s meet at the hotel for a bit. Just let me know when you’re available so I can move my plans around to fit yours. If you’re busy, I’ll head over to where you are. Just send me a location.

“Where are you right now?” Kang Chan asked.

- On the way to the hotel. I'll be there in about twenty minutes.

"I'll be there around that time as well," Kang Chan said, then hung up. He stood up and got ready.

Chapter 231.2: Something I Wanted To Tell You (2)

Joo Chul-Bum ran over to greet Kang Chan as soon as he arrived at Namsan Hotel. Together with Seok Kang-Ho, they went up to the room to meet Oh Gwang-Taek, who looked as if he had just gotten out of the shower.

"Hey, kiddo. Hello, Mr. Seok. Please, have a seat," Oh Gwang-Taek said. There was coffee that was prepared for them on the table that he gestured to.

"Director Kim Tae-Jin already gave me a quick rundown. He told me I have to leave as soon as my sentence is given, is that right?" Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

"Yeah, that's probably what's going to happen. You're going to be accompanied by a few special forces soldiers, retired soldiers with skills that are on par with them, and some Yoo-Bi Corp employees. We need people like them at least until everything has settled a little," Kang Chan informed.

"Are we going to be armed with guns and shit?"

Seeing Kang Chan nod, Oh Gwang-Taek wrinkled his nose.

"I heard it's fucking cold over there."

"Yeah?" Kang Chan lazily responded.

"Hey! Were you going to send me there without even knowing that? I heard you can freeze to death over there if your car happens to break down in the middle of the road," Oh Gwang-Taek furiously protested.

"Then just don't get in a car!" Kang Chan mockingly exclaimed.

"Ah, shit!" Oh Gwang-Taek groaned, lifting his mug of coffee. "I'm going through my men right now. Only the ones who want to join will be coming with me."

"You should think about this carefully as well. This isn't something that you should decide on a whim," Kang Chan warned.

"All I did while I was locked behind bars was think. For now, Chul-Bum and a few other punks are going to be joining me. I told the rest to come if they wanted. Are you going to be there with us?"

"That's the plan."

"What about you, Kang-Ho Hyung-nim?"

"I have other things to take care of, so I won't be participating this time," Seok Kang-Ho responded.

“Hm? Why aren’t you going to be with this kiddo for this business?”

“It’s just how it ended up,” Seok Kang-Ho replied, dodging a direct answer.

“That’s a shame,” Oh Gwang-Taek said with genuine regret in his expression. “Anyway, I made plans to meet with Director Kim Tae-Jin this evening. He told me he wanted to introduce me to someone. Are you coming too?”

“I don’t know yet. I’ll have to see how my schedule plays out first,” Kang Chan replied.

“All right. Sounds good.”

Oh Gwang-Taek picked up a cigarette and offered it to them. They then lit up their smokes, putting a brief pause to their conversation.

“Hoo!” Oh Gwang-Taek exhaled a long breath of smoke and then looked at Kang Chan.

“I planned to move out of the country after getting out of jail,” he quietly began. “I wanted to start a new life, but I felt as if it was going to be impossible here in Korea. I was even ready to go to some random jungle. In that sense, Mongolia is like an opportunity for me. The fact that I don’t have to deal with paperwork and all that other crap makes it even better.”

“Just don’t forget that this going to be a dangerous job,” Kang Chan warned him again.

Oh Gwang-Taek nodded as he put his cigarette into the ashtray.

“It’s a hell of a lot better than going mad because I forced myself to do something I’m not even slightly familiar with,” he replied, still looking straight into Kang Chan’s eyes. “I’m going to think that I was born into a new life, so just protect me until I can walk again. I don’t know what kind of bastards the Russian mafia have, but I’m Oh Gwang-Taek. I won’t fall behind in a battle of determination.”

“All right.”

“Thanks.”

“Don’t you ever tell me that you’ve changed your mind once we’re over there,” Kang Chan half-joked.

Oh Gwang-Taek simply grinned.

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“What do you plan on doing now?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

“Why don’t we go to Misari and have a cup of tea?” Kang Chan suggested.

“On this freezing day?” Seok Kang-Ho questioned, turning toward Kang Chan in surprise. “We have to sit outside if we want to smoke, which will likely freeze our mouths shut.”

“Do you want to go back home, then?”

“It’s still too early to part ways,” Seok Kang-Ho refused.

Kang Chan walked out of the lobby and stood at the hotel entrance. Just then, he recalled the place that he went to with Kim Hyung-Jung last time.

“I just remembered a nice place. Let’s go,” Kang Chan said.

It wasn’t too far from the hotel either.

Kang Chan went with Seok Kang-Ho to the cafe where the large doll was holding up its thumbs and sat down at a table that had gas heaters turned on. Even though it was still quite early, the establishment already had quite a lot of customers likely due to the holidays.

He had already drunk a lot of coffee today, so he did what Seok Kang-Ho did and ordered some lemon tea instead. The sourness from the first sip he took made him tremble.

“Blegh!” Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed.

“Why would you order something like that?” Kang Chan scolded.

“Doesn’t ordering things like this make me look like a proper gentleman?” Seok Kang-Ho joked.

“You little shit!” Kang Chan jokingly exclaimed.

Whenever Kang Chan was with this bastard, he could chuckle about anything.

“Ick!” Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed again after another sip. After letting it pass, he then offered Kang Chan a cigarette. “Here, take this.”

They smoked a cigarette each.

“Are the preparations about done now?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

“We have only put out the urgent fires. I’ll have about a week in Mongolia before you and the men are deployed to Africa. I’m planning to figure things out with the Russian mafia during that time so I can fly over in time. Until then, keep communicating with Gerard. Make sure you protect the men,” Kang Chan replied.

“Got it.”

“Don’t forget that those bastards are trying to get rid of our special forces team. Participating in an operation we had no information on was how we found ourselves in a trap that put bullets in our foreheads. Unlike back then, we have

intel on this mission, but they might still have ulterior motives hidden behind this deployment. Make sound judgments and hang on until I get there.”

Seok Kang-Ho nodded.

“Now that Gerard has become the commander of the Foreign Legion’s special forces, make sure you discuss everything with him and ask for his thoughts.”

“Damn it!” Seok Kang-Ho complained.

“Hey!” Kang Chan reprimanded him.

“All right, fine! We only act that way because we can anyway. Did you really think I would fight him?” Seok Kang-Ho asked. However, it sounded as if he was saying, “I’m definitely going to fight with him!”

Kang Chan glared at Seok Kang-Ho.

“Okay, okay!” Seok Kang-Ho surrendered.

“Keeping our men safe comes before anything else.”

“Tsk, I know! Don’t worry!”

Kang Chan signed deeply, his eyes still on Seok Kang-Ho. He felt as if he was giving too much responsibility to a baby.

“Why are you looking at me like that? Well, anyway...” Seok Kang-Ho quickly changed the subject. “Why are you here with me instead of with Mi-Young on a day like this?”

“Just because. My heart’s been feeling strangely uncomfortable lately. It’s like something’s got a tight grip on it,” Kang Chan said.

“Is something bad going to happen?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

“That’s not it. You know the feeling when both your arms are tightly held and you can’t move? I don’t want to meet with anyone and just want to be alone,” Kang Chan said.

Seok Kang-Ho tilted his head in confusion, but Kang Chan couldn’t explain it either since he didn’t even know why he felt this way.

“Why don’t we go get some drinks?” Seok Kang-Ho suggested.

“Sure, why not?” Kang Chan agreed.

“All right. Let’s have a few bomb shots of soju and let off steam from the past year,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

“Let’s do that,” Kang Chan replied.



Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho stood up and left the cafe.

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Oh Gwang-Taek greeted Kim Tae-Jin and Kang Chul-Gyu when they entered his room. He then guided them to a sofa.

“This way,” Oh Gwang-Taek said.

“Did someone stop by?” Kim Tae-Jin inquired.

“Kang Chan and Kang-Ho Hyung-nim just left.”

“I should’ve called him in advance to see you together then. Anyway, let’s start with the introductions. This is Mr. Kang Chul-Gyu, the senior of mine whom I told you about. Kang Chul-Gyu Sunbae-nim, this is Oh Gwang-Taek, the owner of the company that will be taking over the mine.”

“Kang Chul-Gyu,” Kang Chul-Gyu greeted with a nod.

“Oh Gwang-Taek,” Oh Gwang-Taek reciprocated.

The two stood across from each other as they exchanged a handshake.

“Please, sit down,” Oh Gwang-Taek urged.

“Sir, take a seat at the head,” Kim Tae-Jin suggested.

Kang Chal-Gyu took him up on his offer.

“Would you like some coffee?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

Kim Tae-Jin looked at Kang Chul-Gyu. The latter nodded in reply.

Brief silence permeated the room as Oh Gwang-Taek brought new cups and poured them coffee.

“He will be taking charge of the training for the employees you’re taking, Mr. Oh. He will also oversee the entire security operation for the time being. I hope you understand and cooperate,” Kim Tae-Jin said.

Instead of replying, Oh Gwang-Taek just glanced at Kang Chul-Gyu.

“As far as we know, the Russian mafia is armed with new firearms. We have to exercise extreme caution,” Kim Tae-Jin said.

“Understood, sir,” Oh Gwang-Taek responded.

“Do you know how to handle firearms?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked Oh Gwang-Taek, lifting his gaze from the coffee cups.

“I was just a gangster. I’ve been in and out of jail since I was young, so I didn’t even get to go to my mandatory military service. The only guns I’ve ever touched were a few stolen pistols from Japan and recently one that I took from some guy after a fight,” Oh Gwang-Taek replied without any hesitation. “How should I

address you? I don't think Sunbae-nim works, and Hyung-nim doesn't seem right either..."

"Something that fits," Kang Chul-Gyu interrupted him.

"Let's go with Executive Kang for now. He will be a temporary executive at Yoo-Bi Corp anyway," Kim Tae-Jin chimed in.

"All right," Oh Gwang-Taek replied before looking at the clock. "Director Kim, it's a bit early, but there's a decent Korean baekban restaurant nearby. Would you like to have a stew with a glass of soju? It's the end of the year too, so it would be nice to celebrate. I can call Kang Chan and invite him too."

"Will he have time?" Kim Tae-Jin asked in doubt.

"It's the holiday season. If he's busy, we can just go without him," Oh Gwang-Taek said.

"I'm fine with that."

Kim Tae-Jin looked at Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Thanks, but I'm not going to drink. You and President Oh can drink together. I'll head on home now," Kang Chul-Gyu told him.

"Why not? You can't drink, sir?" Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

Kang Chul-Gyu just responded with a smile.

"I see. All right. Let me give Kang Chan a call now," Oh Gwang-Taek said instead of extending the invitation to Kang Chul-Gyu again. He picked up his phone and pressed the call button.

"It's me! I'm going to have some soju with Director Kim Tae-Jin at the baekban place out front. Want to come?" Oh Gwang-Taek asked. Immediately after, he grinned at Kim Tae-Jin. "You punk! You should've called me if you were going there. I'll head over there with the Director, so order a spicy fish roe soup for us."

The way Oh Gwang-Taek set his phone back down and chuckled was enough for everyone in the room to know what Kang Chan had said over the phone.

"He says he's already there with Kang-Ho Hyung-nim. Let's head over," Oh Gwang-Taek said, turning around to pick up his coat.

Looking between the two, Kang Chul-Gyu interjected, "How old is this Mr. Kang Chan?"

Chapter 232.1: I'm Sorry, Channy (1)

The week flew by.

Through it all, Seok Kang-Ho remained at Jeungpyeong, and Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek were busier than ever. Since Oh Gwang-Taek was bringing fewer men to Mongolia than they

expected, the two had to find more employees to send over. They also had to attend to other matters, which included issuing Visas and procuring a variety of equipment.

Kang Chan only had to look at them to know that they had a lot of things left to do.

Every day, Kang Chan would head to the office in the morning, spending his time searching online and talking to others on the phone, then head home in the afternoon.

He thought that they had to grow stronger so they could stop the United States from recklessly messing with them. However, considering everything that he heard from Kim Hyung-Jung and Anne, he couldn't help but feel as if his goal was unachievable.

South Korea had too many people who enjoyed wealth and power by flattering powerful people and mooching off their authority.

What was so bad about working hard for the wealth they'd use for themselves and their family? Why did only a few go down that path?

Kang Chan smacked his lips.

They had to leave for Mongolia in two days, yet they still hadn't finished preparing everything.

*Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—. Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—. Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—.*

Kang Chan's phone rang.

"Hello?"

- It's Seok Kang-Ho. What are you up to?

For some strange reason, whenever he heard this fucker's voice, Kang Chan would feel as reinvigorated as whenever he filled up with spite.

- I heard you're leaving in two days. I was thinking about going down from Jeungpyeong to see you tomorrow, but if you don't have anything special going on, how about you visit us for a moment instead?

"Why are you suddenly acting like this? I'm only going to Mongolia."

- But the men and I are going to Africa, aren't we? The men look like they want to see you before we leave. You should drop by.

Hearing Seok Kang-Ho's cheeky suggestion made Kang Chan want to see the soldiers again.

- What do you want to do?

"I'll come over. Since it's a little past four right now, we should have dinner together.

- Phuhuhu. Don't take too long.

"I won't."

Kang Chan hung up and told Choi Jong-Il that he was going to go to Jeungpyeong.

"Have you heard about Yoo-Seul?" Choi Jong-Il asked.

“Not really. Why? Is everything okay?”

“We heard that she’s been eating a lot,” Choi Jong-Il continued as he stood up. “Yoo-Seul said that she’s going to become a soldier, but her mom said that at this rate, she might become a pig first.”

Kang Chan couldn’t help but burst out laughing. It was even funnier because Choi Jong-Il—who was always serious—was the one telling him about it.

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“Is this really true?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“You can’t believe it either, can you? It’s probably just a coincidence, but you visited me after I decided to look for my son, and then you mentioned the name Kang Chan. That’s why I couldn’t help but be that interested.”

Kim Tae-Jin’s gaze alternated between the three pictures that Kang Chul-Gyu took out. “Your son looks just like you.”

“I don’t really remember his face that well.”

Kim Tae-Jin cautiously looked up, unable to understand what Kang Chul-Gyu meant.

“I was in so much pain back then. It sometimes got so severe that I felt as if skewers were being stabbed into my head. Getting drunk and high on drugs was enough to forget about all of it, but it also made me feel as if everything that approached me was trying to kill me,” Kang Chul-Gyu explained. He looked down at the photos, perhaps to look at Kang Chan at least one more time while he still could. “I’m not sure if you understand what I mean, but even though I knew he was my son, I also felt as if he was an enemy trying to put an end to my misery. Even though I felt bad and even pitied him, I couldn’t do anything about my thoughts and how I reacted.”

Kang Chul-Gyu smiled bitterly as he glanced at Kim Tae-Jin. “It’s probably hard to understand. Even as we speak, my body is badly craving drugs and alcohol. When I was dishonorably discharged from the army, my wife told me to live even if it meant I had to rely on drugs and alcohol. She told me to work tirelessly for our family the same way I never got tired of serving our country. Unfortunately, resorting to drugs and alcohol to keep me sane turned me into a demon.”

While talking, Kang Chul-Gyu took out a passbook from an old box for his thermal underwear. “This is the passbook for the savings account that my deceased wife opened under my son’s name. She was planning to get him to move out after he graduated from high school, but my son acted first. The day after we were informed that he died in combat...”

“Did you go to the hospital?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“They said that I should take out the fragment that’s embedded in this side of my head, but the procedure poses too much risk. It’s making it difficult for me to proceed with it.”

Kim Tae-Jin sighed softly in response.

“My son’s name is also Kang Chan. He went abroad to work as a mercenary perhaps because he had my dirty blood coursing through his veins. He probably never knew that I used to be a soldier, though.”

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at the photos as he continued, “I don’t know how much help I can provide now that I’m over sixty years old, but I’m still going to try my best. Just help me find my son’s remains—no, I’ll be okay with even just one of my son’s mementos. Let me put my son to rest next to his mother.”

Kim Tae-Jin looked up at Kang Chul-Gyu.

‘This man is probably planning to die once he finds his son,’ Kim Tae-Jin thought, but he had no means to confirm if the gut feeling he had was right.

“Sometimes, I find myself wondering what was going on in my son’s mind during his final moments.”

Hearing Kang Chul-Gyu’s soft voice made Kim Tae-Jin quickly look up.

“There’s something I’ve always wanted to tell him...” Kang Chul-Gyu trailed off, holding back what he was about to say with a pained smile.

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When Kang Chan arrived in Jeungpyeong, he found Seok Kang-Ho and the soldiers grilling meat on the makeshift fire pit that they made by cutting a barrel open.

“Welcome,” Seok Kang-Ho greeted Kang Chan. His mouth was greasy with oil, having just eaten a piece of meat using tongs. The soldiers also approached and greeted him.

“Where’s Lieutenant Colonel Park?” Kang Chan asked.

“He hasn’t shown up even once since the first day he came here,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

Kang Chan looked up out of curiosity as he accepted a pair of wooden chopsticks.

“I heard that he told Dong-Gyun to take care of everything and plans to just sit by and watch even when we’re deployed to Africa. I’m not sure if he’s doing that because he knows something about the situation or because he’s just lazy,” Seok Kang-Ho continued.

“Lieutenant Colonel Park wouldn’t do that out of sheer laziness,” Cha Dong-Gyun responded. He then took a piece of meat and ate it, making sure to

position his left hand below his chin to prevent the food from falling on the ground. “He’s been in a lot of conflicts in the field. He got his reputation because he completely ignores the officers joining the operation when we should be greeting and taking care of them.”

Cha Dong-Gyun said everything that he wanted to say even though he was eating meat that was still hot.

“Let’s just observe how things go for now. Once you’re all in Africa, you should rely on Gerard whenever you have to at least until you’ve gotten the hang of the situation. Have you found an interpreter?” Kang Chan asked.

“We’re going to be bringing two with us,” Cha Dong-Gyun answered.

Kang Chan nodded.

After their meal, they joked around over coffee.

Kang Chan was planning on dropping by and finishing his business in Mongolia as quickly as possible so he could meet up with Seok Kang-Ho and the men in Africa in time, but there was no guarantee that everyone here right now would still be alive by then.

They ate to their heart’s content. Amid their meal, they also talked to Yoon Sang-Ki, who had a hole in his stomach.

As Kang Chan prepared to return to Seoul, the soldiers all came out and stood in front of the barracks.

“I’m going,” Kang Chan said.

“Take care of yourself. I’ll see you later in Africa,” Seok Kang-Ho replied.

Kang Chan smirked in response. He then got in the car and drove away from the military camp not long after.

As they merged into the national road, Choi Jong-Il, who was in the driver’s seat, told Kang Chan, “Once you’ve left for Mongolia, the three of us decided to join the special forces team at Jeungpyeong. We’re planning on going to Africa with them.”

“Aren’t the military’s special forces the only ones allowed to participate in this operation?”

“We can use the same reason that Mr. Seok Kang-Ho is using to join—we’ll be dispatched as members of the counter-terrorism special forces.”

Kang Chan simply smirked and nodded in response. However, deep down, Choi Jong-Il’s words reassured him.

He wouldn’t be able to find someone as strong and skilled as Choi Jong-Il anywhere. The man had a lot of experience as well, having accumulated them from the multiple operations they had gone on together.

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Upon waking up in the morning, Kang Chan went out for a run. When he got back, he took a shower and had breakfast with his parents.

“You’re leaving tomorrow, right?” Kang Dae-Kyung asked Kang Chan.

“Yes.”

“Will you be in dangerous situations this time as well?”

“Honey? Has something dangerous happened to our Channy before?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked.

As Kang Dae-Kyung’s mistake filled up his expression with shock, Yoo Hye-Sook’s gaze alternated between him and Kang Chan.

“Work related to the Eurasian Rail is always dangerous. Father probably only worded it that way because of what happened at the presentation hall, which was certainly quite dangerous,” Kang Chan answered instead.

“Y-yeah, that’s right! I just suddenly remembered how dangerous that situation was while I was talking. Channy told me that he’s just going to Mongolia to execute the contract for the Eurasian Rail’s establishment. He’ll return home as soon as he’s done with it.”

Kang Chan laughed because of Kang Dae-Kyung’s somewhat sloppy response. However, what surprised him even more was that the excuse was enough to convince Yoo Hye-Sook.

“I saw in the newspaper that this will have an enormous economic effect. Won’t a lot of people be accompanying you on this trip?” Kang Dae-Kyung wondered.

Kang Chan answered him to the best of his ability.

Kang Dae-Kyung, Yoo Hye-Sook, and most people close to Kang Chan all thought that he was departing to Mongolia to acquire a small and average mine. What they didn’t know was that this started from and was linked to the operation he led in Afghanistan and that Russia and China were also involved in this matter.

“I saw the weather over there. You should probably take warm and thick clothes with you,” Kang Dae-Kyung suggested.

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

Kang Chan ate kimchi soup, which was one of the things that he would miss the most.

Chapter 232.2: I’m Sorry, Channy (1)

“Huff! Huff!”

Kang Chul-Gyu sat on the floor with his back against the wall as horrible pain coursed through him. He bent his knees to his chest and pressed his temples with the palms of his hands. It hadn’t even been a day since Kim Tae-Jin visited him, but he was already in so much agony.

The sensation made him feverish, which in turn made him feel so cold that he began to tremble. He was in so much pain that he felt as if someone was stabbing his head with a skewer until morning came.

Interestingly, the pain subsided to some degree when the sun rose. The doctor told him that it was the effect of ‘psychological comfort,’ but he couldn’t really care less about what it was called. All that mattered to him was that it made the pain he was in wane even just a little bit.

“Phew!” Kang Chul-Gyu exhaled softly as he lifted his head. He smirked.

“We have to fight the Russian Mafia in Mongolia, huh?” he told himself, then breathed in deeply.

He probably wouldn’t die without suffering first. After all, he had killed too many people at the DMZ. That could even be the reason why his wife and son were taken from him in the first place.

“It seems like a fitting place to meet my death.” Kang Chul-Gyu opened the box for his thermal underwear, which he had put on his right.

“Chan...” He couldn’t even recognize Kang Chan’s face.

*I can’t believe I beat him up... He had that look in his eyes, so why didn’t he defy me once?*

Kang Chul-Gyu picked up Kang Chan’s photo and put it in front of him.

“I won’t be able to go where you are.”

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked.

“I heard you also found yourself fighting for your life on battlefield after battlefield, so I can’t say for sure that you won’t be in hell. At the very least, though, you won’t be in there as deep as I am since I’ll probably be dropped to the deepest part of it.”

Kang Chul-Gyu frowned as he twisted his head, suddenly feeling a sharp pain piercing his temples.

“Phew.”

A moment later, sunlight entered the room, brightening it up.

“If you’re alive... If I could meet you, even if it’s only while I take my final breath, I would like to tell you something...” Kang Chul-Gyu said, then looked around the empty room.

“I’m sorry, Channy,” he continued through gritted teeth. “You probably won’t be able to ever forgive me, but I hope that you’ll at least hear me out and that you won’t misunderstand what I’ll tell you. I’ll be apologizing with a clear mind.”

Kang Chul-Gyu took a few moments to bring his emotions under control. He then picked up the box for his thermal underwear and slowly stood up.



“I decided to donate the money that your mom saved up for you to a Foundation for orphaned children. It’s a far better use for it than letting some useless person waste it all on alcohol.”

Kang Chul-Gyu was talking as if Kang Chan was actually beside him. It had only been a few days since he had started feeling this way, but he had suddenly felt as if his son was actually listening from somewhere in the room. Rambling on like this seemed to decrease the pain he was in a little.

“Sunbae-nim!”

Kang Chul-Gyu heard Kim Tae-Jin calling him from outside the room.

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When Kang Chul-Gyu arrived at the Kang Yoo Foundation, he looked at the building with suspicion. It looked too new, making him suspect that this charity was a scam.

“Kang Chan said that he lowered the tenants’ rent. He’s the owner of this building, after all. Even if he didn’t, his parents aren’t the type of people who would trick others for money,” Kim Tae-Jin explained.

Rather than replying to him, Kang Chul-Gyu slowly tilted his head back to get a better view of the building. Changing the topic, he commented, “This is quite the tall building.”

With Kim Hyung-Jung’s help, Kang Chul-Gyu had withdrawn all the money in the account that his wife had made for Kang Chan. Once he donated it all to this foundation, which would use it to help kids in need, he wouldn’t have any more to wish for. He wouldn’t have any regrets either.

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Kang Chan stood in front of the window as he looked around the building.

*What is this feeling? What’s making me feel this strange?*

After the new year, he started getting this feeling more and more often. However, it had never been this intense.

*Are people trying to hide something from me?*

Although he was set to leave for Mongolia tomorrow, he was having trouble telling anyone about this new emotion welling up inside him. After all, in his entire life, this was the first time he had ever felt this way.

His guts could just be warning him that someone was about to snipe him down from a nearby building. However, if that was the case, then his heart should be pounding. He wouldn’t be feeling so down.

Even after letting some time pass, the feeling still didn’t go away. Hence, he decided to leave the building for now.

*Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—. Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—. Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—.*

Before he could, however, his phone began to ring.

“Hello?”

- Channy! We have just finished moving your father’s business and your mother’s foundation into the building. I’ll be starting my normal duties now. Aren’t you going to treat me to a meal?

Kang Chan couldn’t help but admit that Michelle had certainly gone through a lot for his sake.

Since he was already planning on leaving the building anyway, he thought it wouldn’t be bad to use this timely opportunity to treat Michelle out. He wouldn’t get another chance to repay her in a long while. After all, he would be flying over to Mongolia tomorrow and heading straight to Africa as soon as he was done taking care of business there.

“Sure. Would you prefer I treat you to lunch or dinner?”

- Let’s have lunch. Come down to the basement parking lot right now. I’ll meet you there.

“I will.”

Kang Chan hung up and took his time heading to the elevator. Strangely enough, his head was also starting to hurt.

He went down to the first floor using the private elevator, then took the normal elevator to the basement.

*Ding.*

By the time Kang Chan arrived at the second floor of the basement parking lot, Michelle was already waiting for him, her car parked right by the entrance.

“Hi! How come it’s even harder to see you now even though we’re finally working in the same building?” Michelle asked.

*Vroom.*

Kang Chan felt a little better when they drove away from the hotel and saw Michelle smiling as if to show him how happy she was.

“What do you want to eat?” Kang Chan asked.

“Galbi-tang! It’s really good.”

This French girl with blonde hair and blue eyes licked her lips as she talked about galbi-tang.

*Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—. Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—. Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—.*

Kang Chan’s phone rang.

“Hello, Mr. President?”

- Hey. Where are you right now?

“I’m out right now to have lunch. Why do you ask?”

- Haha! I’m at your building right now. I was hoping to have lunch with you.

Michelle examined Kang Chan's mood. She then gave him a glance that let him know that she wouldn't mind heading back if they had to.

"Would like me to head back? I can go now if you need me to."

- No need. My sunbae-nim is here as well, so we're heading out soon to meet Oh Gwang-Taek. Do take your time. We're going to Mongolia tomorrow anyway, so I see no reason to rush.

"Are you sure?"

- Of course! Let's talk later.

After Kang Chan hung up, he nodded to Michelle.

"You don't have to go back?" Michelle asked.

"Someone dropped by our building with an acquaintance, but they don't have enough time to wait for me to get back."

Michelle examined Kang Chan's mood again but didn't say anything else on the matter.

~

The galbi-tang restaurant was quite crowded, and there was a good reason for it—their food was quite delicious.

After finishing their meal, Michelle drove around to the back of Namsan and parked at a large cafe. It had a terrace and a gas heater with a wide top that looked like an umbrella.

"Don't you have to go back to the office?" Kang Chan asked.

"I don't have anything special planned today. My schedule will probably remain this way for the next two weeks."

Kang Chan just nodded. He wondered if there was any other profession out there that could tell the difference between when they were busy and when they were free this clearly.

They ordered coffee and made themselves comfortable.

"You're leaving for Mongolia tomorrow, right? Have you packed your clothes? Should I buy you some?" Michelle asked. Upon seeing Kang Chan smirking, she became more aggressive with her approach. "Why are you smiling? I was hoping I could make you feel better while we're out shopping for clothes, you know."

"If my guess is right and we buy the clothes that you have in mind, I doubt I'd be able to wear any of them in Mongolia. We're flying over to that place to build a military base, so what I need are sturdy and thick clothes that I can trust to withstand and last in rough situations and tedious environments. Like military uniforms, for example."

"We can buy clothes like that, then."

"Let's stop this conversation here," Kang Chan replied.

Michelle nodded upon seeing him smile once more.

Every time they met, Kang Chan felt more and more comfortable being around her.

Chapter 233.1: I'm Sorry, Channy (1)

“What is it that you really do, Channy?” Michelle asked mischievously.

“You’ll get hurt if I tell you,” Kang Chan replied with a grin.

Michelle laughed, her blue doe eyes sparkling. “You just changed out of nowhere. It’s as if you instantly matured in a single day. Although you’re younger than me, I couldn’t help but think of you as being the same age as me in the past. Now, you seem a lot older than me.”

She picked up a cigarette and put it in between her lips.

*Click.*

Kang Chan flicked a lighter on for her, and she leaned her head down a bit to catch the flame. Her long eyelashes seemed to charm everyone around them every time she blinked.

“Mysterious men are so attractive, especially when they make me feel like I can’t make them mine. Maybe the reason I find you even more alluring is because ever since we met, all your focus has been on that girl named Mi-Young,” Michelle said.

Kang Chan brought his cup of coffee up to his lips.

“Thank you for playing along whenever I vie for your attention like this. I only have one wish to ask from you,” she said.

“What is it?” Kang Chan asked, his curiosity getting the best of him.

“You really don’t know?”

“I don’t,” Kang Chan replied. He truly had no idea.

“I wish you’d let yourself get a bit steamy sometimes. It doesn’t matter if it’s with me or Mi-Young.”

“Why was I expecting you to say something else?” Kang Chan mock-groaned.

Michelle grinned, her amusement evident in her expression.

“What? What’s wrong with my wish?” she asked, feigning innocence.

“You are.”

Michelle burst out laughing. The men around them peeked over and sneaked glances at her face and chest.

“Why do you run away at the most decisive moments?” Michelle wondered.

“Who do you think you’re accusing of running away?” Kang Chan asked defensively.

“But I’m right, aren’t I? From what I’ve seen so far, you use Mi-Young as an excuse to keep your distance from me, but you still come up with excuses when you’re around her, including that she’s still too young. like she’s too young and you don’t know exactly how you feel about her. Tell me I’m wrong.”

“Hey, What are you suggesting I do with a high-schooler?”

“If someone heard you, they’d think you’re already in your thirties.”

Unable to swiftly come up with a retort, Kang Chan instead just gazed back at her.

“You do know that Mi-Young is waiting for you, right?” Michelle asked.

*Is she telling the truth right now?*

Kang Chan was speechless.

“Aren’t you already well aware of that too? As you say, a girl who’s still in high school is waiting for you to call all day. She has never told you that she doesn’t like you, and there is no doubt in your mind that she always greets you happily whenever you do call. Why can’t you just be honest about your feelings for her in return?” Michelle questioned.

“Well, that’s because...” Kang Chan trailed off. He was certain that he had his reasons, but he felt as if he wouldn’t be able to explain himself properly right now.

“Channy, I’ll always be ready. This is the first time I’ve ever loved anyone, so I’m genuinely happy and grateful for moments like these. But Mi-Young is different. It’s her first time with everything, right? From what I’ve seen so far, your parents are genuinely and madly in love with each other. That leaves me wondering what kind of traumatic experience has left you so scared.”

“You think I’m scared?” Kang Chan asked in disbelief.

“Don’t you agree? You always back down during crucial moments out of sheer fear. It’s like you’re scared to let someone in your heart.”

Kang Chan stared straight into Michelle’s big, blue eyes.

“Fine, let’s say your feelings are stopping you from sleeping with me. That’s the reason I fell for you so deeply anyway. What about Mi-Young, though? You don’t have to sleep with her. Her emotions and the way she behaves around you should be more than enough to let you know that she loves you. What are you so afraid of? Because she’s a high schooler? That’s a pathetic excuse. If Mi-Young sincerely loves you and is waiting for you, you’re being too cruel to her right now. You’re making her wait without even letting her know how long she has to.”

*Why is she going to such lengths about this topic today?*

Michelle was making such solid points from Kang Chan's perspective that he didn't even know what to say to her.

"If you can't come up with an answer yourself, then just do as I say," Michelle urged.

"What would you have me do?" Kang Chan asked.

"Stop thinking about all of this for a day and sleep with me!"

"Hey!"

Michelle giggled loudly at his reaction.

"Before you leave the country tomorrow, at least meet up with Mi-Young and try to tell her a bit of how you feel. I don't want you to be a coward in front of anyone. The Channy I love isn't that kind of man," she said.

Kang Chan quietly took a deep breath, then let out a long sigh. How could he have her understand all the emotions he was feeling right now?

"My birthday is next month, by the way," Michelle said out of nowhere, changing the topic.

"What?" Kang Chan asked in surprise.

"You didn't forget my birthday present, did you?" Her words were coated with mischief.

When Kang Chan grinned, Michelle smiled from ear to ear, her eyes crinkling.

"All I'm saying is that you should give the French girl the French treatment and the Korean girl the Korean treatment," Michelle continued.

"You know it doesn't work that way, don't you?" Kang Chan responded lightheartedly.

"I'll be happy for as long as you give me my birthday present."

Kang Chan laughed. Michelle laughed along with him.

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By the time Kang Chan left and returned to the office, it was already two in the afternoon. Not too long after he arrived, an agent from the French embassy arrived at his floor with Woo Hee-Seung.

"I've brought with me a package from the DGSE," the agent said. He pulled out a box that was forty-five centimeters in length and width and about twenty centimeters thick.

After getting Kang Chan's signature as proof of delivery, the agent immediately left.

The box was made of yellowish paper. Woo Hee-Seung brought a stationery knife and cut through the tape, revealing a flat, twenty-centimeter square monitor.

The electrical cord was a three-conductor type, so they couldn't use it immediately. After looking through the contents of the box, Kang Chan called Anne.

- Anne speaking, Monsieur Kang.

"I just got the monitor you sent over. What is this?" Kang Chan asked.

- It's a receiver that will allow you to simultaneously view screens captured by our satellites. Once you power it up, you'll see three satellites marked on the right side of the screen. You can select one by clicking on it, providing you with real-time footage of whatever it's capturing at that moment.

"The prongs don't match our outlets."

- Since you're in South Korea, you should be able to use it without any problem if you cut off the ground wire in the center. While you're in Mongolia, you can just use the UPS system for it.

"Is it functioning now as well?"

- One local satellite in Mongolia and two African satellites are automatically connected to it. If it is lost or stolen, the DGSE can destroy it remotely.

"This is amazing. Thank you, Anne."

- One more thing, Monsieur Kang. Never forget that you're the Deputy Director-General of the DGSE.

"Got it. I'll call you again later," Kang Chan replied.

After hanging up, Kang Chan had Woo Hee-Seung cut off the ground wire and connected it to an outlet. After about two minutes, the screen showed the building he was in right now and three small icons on the right.

"Huh? What's this? This is going to let everyone know what I ate today," Seok Kang-Ho remarked.

"This is incredible," Choi Jong-Il said. He, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee all looked at the device in amazement.

The monitor had a touchscreen feature, allowing them to move the camera around by dragging their fingers across it. They could even zoom in and zoom out.

"Damn it," Kang Chan swore lowly.

They had to fight a country that was most definitely using equipment as advanced as this. Kang Chan wasn't completely certain, but he assumed that England, the United States, Russia, and Germany were all on this level as well. He could make a phone call and those countries would likely only take minutes to figure out what he was talking about.

As he realized the huge gap in capabilities between South Korea and the other countries' intelligence bureaus, he selected a different satellite on the monitor. Much to his fascination, the screen immediately showed plains of either Africa or Mongolia.

"Give this to Manager Kim," Kang Chan instructed Choi Jong-II.

"Are you sure, sir?" Choi Jong-II questioned.

"I'm sure he can use it a lot more effectively than if I just carry it around."

"Understood, sir," Choi Jong-II replied. He pulled the plug and set it back inside the box.

*Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz.*

After some time, Kang Chan's phone began to ring.

'Who could this be?'

The call was from an unknown number, which was quite rare for him to get these days. Random advertisement calls occasionally came through, but they never displayed personal numbers on his phone screen like this call.

Kang Chan decided to pick it up.

"Hello?" Kang Chan answered.

- Hello. This is Colonel Park Chul-Su. Is this assistant director Kang Chan?

"Yes, this is Kang Chan speaking."

- I apologize for the sudden call. If it's all right with you, I would like to see you. When do you have time?

A person whom Kang Chan had never met before suddenly called him. The man sounded quite firm about his request, making it sound as if there would be consequences if he refused it.

"Where are you right now?" Kang Chan asked politely.

- I'm in Samseong-Dong.

"Are you with Manager Kim Hyung-Jung?"

- Yes, I am. He wanted to call you, but I insisted on calling you myself.

From the way the man talked to him, Kang Chan thought that he probably lived his life according to his temper.

"Can you and manager Kim come over to where I am right now, then? I have something I'd like to discuss with him anyway."

- Give me a moment.

A brief moment of silence enveloped their call after the man's short and sharp response. Park Chul-Su was probably asking if Kim Hyung-Jung was available to go to Kang Chan's office.

- Can we head over now?



“Sure,” Kang Chan replied.

- We’ll be leaving soon, then.

After hanging up, a chuckle escaped Kang Chan.

“Colonel Park Chul-Su said he’s coming over. Manager Kim will be coming with him, so we can just give this device to him then too,” Kang Chan informed the people in the room with him.

“Yes, sir,” Woo Hee-Seung replied. He brought over a small bag from inside the office and put the monitor’s box inside of it.

Chapter 233.2: I’m Sorry, Channy (1)

Oh Gwang-Taek’s office.

“I’ll just call you Hyung-nim, all right?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked politely.

Kang Chul-Gyu simply glanced over at him in reply.

“I apologize if you don’t think it’s respectful enough given your age, but I’ve lived this way my entire life. The title ‘Director’ just won’t stick to my mouth, and I can’t do anything about it. You have that look in your eyes anyway, so just let me call you Hyung-nim,” Oh Gwang-Taek added in an attempt to persuade him.

*Pft.*

Kang Chul-Gyu couldn’t stop himself from chuckling.

“Even though your faces are completely different, your expression, gaze, and even your laugh are exactly like Kang Chan’s. It’s strange. We should seriously look into this when we can. Do you think he’s a distant relative?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

“I wouldn’t know. I’ve never even met him,” Kang Chul-Gyu answered.

“So strange. Even your tone of speaking is the same.”

“Tae-Jin also said the same thing. Do I really resemble that guy? I heard he isn’t even 20 yet.”

“I am a hundred percent sure that he’s completely like you. That man is a total monster. If he had decided to be a gangster, I would have retired a lot earlier. Best to just quickly leave than embarrass myself by getting my ass kicked by him. I was surprised when he managed to take down the parking lot gang’s Park Ki-Bum all by himself, but I still didn’t expect him to be this much of a beast back then.”

Seeing the doubt in Kang Chul-Gyu’s eyes, Oh Gwang-Taek chuckled as he continued, “Hyung-nim, I’m feeling parched. Why don’t we—Oh, right! You don’t drink alcohol, do you? Why don’t I

tell you a bit more about this story over something nice and refreshing instead,” Oh Gwang-Taek suggested.

Kang Chul-Gyu only chuckled again in response. Hence, Oh Gwang-Taek nodded and pressed the button for the intercom.

“Hey! Get me a pint of beer and a pint of juice,” he ordered.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at Oh Gwang-Taek in disbelief.

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“Colonel Park Chul-Su,” Park Chul-Su greeted.

“Kang Chan,” Kang Chan said in response.

Park Chul-Su had the physique of a wrestling athlete. He was very well-built and was around one hundred seventy-five centimeters tall. What remained of his nearly-gone left ear made Kang Chan sure that he was a wrestler at some point.

Park Chul-Su saluted Kang Chan first, then held out his hand before Kang Chan could salute back. He gripped his hand tightly. When Kang Chan returned the favor, surprise flashed in his eyes.

“Why don’t we go somewhere we can sit down for now?” Park Chul-Su suggested.

“The office is better for meetings like this,” Kang Chan replied.

This open space only had one table and two desks, one of which was in the corner of the room.

Park Chul-Su was wearing black jeans, a collared shirt, and a bomber jacket. His posture remained straight as he sat down at the desk. When Lee Doo-Hee brought them some tea, Park Chul-Su glanced at him and nodded in a short greeting.

“I understand you’re busy, but I wanted to meet with you before you left for Mongolia, so I begged Manager Kim to give me the opportunity,” Park Chul-Su began.

“I wanted to go to Jeungpyeong as well, but my schedule is so hectic right now that I can’t find the time to,” Kang Chan responded, his voice filled with regret.

“No, I understand.”

Park Chul-Su’s tone and actions were stiff and curt, just like a soldier who had just entered the military.

“Do you smoke?” Kang Chan asked.

“Can I smoke in an office like this?” Park Chul-Su sounded surprised.

“You look like you would like nothing better than to smoke here,” Kang Chan replied with a grin.

Park Chul-Su smiled from ear to ear as he pulled out a cigarette and lighter from his bomber jacket's pocket. Kang Chan couldn't help but think that even the man's smile had a stiff angle to it.

"Here," Park Chul-Su said. He offered him a Korean cigarette—the priciest one on the market.

Kang Chan took no time to accept it. He then lit up Park Chul-Su's and Kim Hyung-Jung's cigarettes for them.

"We came here because Colonel Park said he has something important that he wants to tell you," Kim Hyung-Jung said.

"It's fine. I've been meaning to meet him as well," Kang Chan responded.

After some tea and puffs on the cigarette, the awkwardness died down a bit.

"I have a favor to ask," Park Chul-Su said after folding and extinguishing the cigarette firmly in the ashtray. "The only reason why I decided to take the special forces in Jeungpyeong is because I know what General Choi Seong-Geon would have wanted."

Kang Chan didn't know what Park Chul-Su was trying to say. Since Park Chul-Su hadn't made his point yet, he didn't really know how to reply.

"I will stop any unjust orders coming from the higher-ups in the military. In return, I hope you keep managing the special forces team the same way as before, Assistant Director," Park Chul-Su added.

*What is he talking about?*

Seeing Kang Chan look so confused, Park Chul-Su continued, "While I was part of the Third Airborne Forces, there was a time when I wanted to be discharged. General Choi stopped me back then. He said that a time would come when soldiers like me would be needed, and if the last fortress of our country couldn't be protected because it had no soldiers like me in that crucial moment, General Choi, the special forces in Jeungpyeong, and I would all be sinning against our country. Now, I've found what it is that I have to do. That's why I have taken command of Jeungpyeong's special forces team."

Kang Chan felt chills running down the back of his head, behind his ears, and on his neck—a testament to how powerful Park Chul-Su's expression, voice, and eyes were.

"You won't be able to find anyone to succeed General Choi Seong-Geon who knows his intentions as well as I do. He attempted to bring me over to Jeungpyeong about three times, but there was strong opposition from the higher-ups. They probably thought that if I was with General Choi, they would lose what little control they had left of his special forces team. They simply had no choice this time because no one else would take the position. Hence, as General Choi has done until he passed, I will be your shield. In return, please continue to lead the special forces team, Assistant Director Kang. That is all."

As Park Chul-Su picked up another cigarette, Kang Chan felt as if he had woken up from a spell. A chuckle escaped from him.

*Why are there so many incredible men in this damn country?*

Maybe it was because he now felt differently about this country than in the past, but he couldn't help but be amazed.

"Colonel Park," Kang Chan called.

"Assistant Director," Park Chul-Su replied, quickly putting his cigarette on the table.

Kang Chan didn't know if it was because of his position as assistant director or if it stemmed from the respect the man had for his accomplishments, but Park Chul-Su treated him as if he was his superior.

"If it wasn't for General Choi, none of the operations that we've gone on would have been possible," Kang Chan said.

This time, Park Chul-Su was the one who looked confused.

"If there wasn't anyone to link the special forces soldiers so tightly together, they wouldn't have gotten any golden opportunity that would have allowed them to join missions," Kang Chan continued.

The smoke from the lit cigarette rose, and the ceiling sucked it all up.

"There will come a time when the special forces team has to take command of themselves. I would likely not be able to join them during their upcoming mission in Africa. If you speak as if you're leaving the soldiers to fend for themselves, the soldiers won't have anyone to rely on. If you're in it, you're in it, and if you're not, then you're not. That's the kind of person General Choi was," Kang Chan asserted.

Park Chul-Su grinned and put out his cigarette.

"I understand what you're saying," Park Chul-Su stated.

"I'll leave the soldiers in your hands," Kang Chan said.

"Leave it to me," Park Chul-Su replied.

Kim Hyung-Jung, who was just quietly listening to the conversation, made the most satisfied smile that Kang Chan had ever seen him make.

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"You really didn't watch this?" Kim Tae-Jin asked Kang Chul-Gyu in disbelief.

“I told you. I was intentionally avoiding anything related to the military. I don’t even have a TV at home,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied.

They were now at Kim Tae-Jin’s office. Kang Chul-Gyu couldn’t take his eyes off the large TV that took up one side of the wall. Its screen was showing the battle that the South Korean special forces had in Afghanistan.

“That man is the one called Kang Chan, isn’t he?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“I do not have the authority to confirm that,” Kim Tae-Jin replied.

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked in response. His eyes remained glued on the screen, refusing to look away for even just a moment.

He flinched as he watched Kang Chan put up quite a fierce fight. It was as if he would spring forward at any moment.

Kim Tae-Jin looked at Kang Chul-Gyu’s glinting eyes, the loose smirk on one corner of his mouth, and his tightly clenched fists. He had heard Kang Chul-Gyu had devoted three full years to rehab. Even now, Kang Chul-Gyu’s eyes flashed with the struggle to overcome his pain, but his well-built physique could convince people that he was still on active duty.

“That guy has quite the gut instincts,” Kang Chul-Gyu suddenly remarked.

Kim Tae-Jin glanced up.

“It’s the kind of thing that you just know. Your heart tells you. The moment you fall into a state where you can start to count your breaths, you become the perfect killing machine,” Kang Chul-Gyu said firmly.

Kang Chul-Gyu gritted his teeth as he continued to watch the fight on the screen.

Chapter 234.1: And... (1)

After their meeting, Kang Chan went to his office and gave the satellite video receiver to Kim Hyung-Jung. He also instructed him to tell the team that was leaving tomorrow to pack it for Africa. Afterward, Kim Hyung-Jung left with Park Chul-Su.

They had done all preparations now.

Kang Chan could go home early to eat with Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook. He had enough time to meet up with Kim Mi-Young as well. Hence, he decided to give her a call before doing anything else.

- Hello?

Her voice was as clear as always. It made him question if being with her and talking to her was enough for him to corrupt her.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t contact you earlier.”

- I understand. You were busy, weren’t you?

*Is she really not upset or angry?*

“I’m sorry for calling you out of the blue, but would you like to have dinner with me?”

- I would love to! Are we going to go out today?

Kang Chan smirked. He wondered why she bothered asking if they were going to meet today when she had already essentially told him that she was available.

“I’ll be at the apartment entrance in about twenty minutes. It’s cold outside, so only head out once I’ve arrived. I don’t want you waiting too long in the cold.”

- Alright.

Kang Chan suddenly felt apologetic toward her as he was hanging up.

As he was leaving the office, he called Kang Dae-Kyung and told him that he was going to have dinner before going home. He then called the Japanese restaurant at Namsan Hotel and asked them to reserve a table for two people.

It took exactly twenty minutes for him to reach Kim Mi-Young’s apartment. Upon seeing him, Kim Mi-Young, who was sitting on the bench, stood up and ran over.

*Whoosh!*

Nothing changed since the last time they saw each other.

“You went out early, didn’t you?” Kang Chan asked.

“No.”

The faint smell of the soap and shampoo that she used was the same as well.

“Let’s go get something to eat,” Kang Chan suggested.

“Okay.”

They got in the taxi in front of the apartment and headed to Namsan Hotel.

“We’re going to eat at the hotel?” Kim Mi-Young asked.

“Yes.”

“Isn’t it expensive there?”

“I’m paid a monthly salary, so it’s okay.”

“Still. Isn’t it expensive?”

Kang Chan didn’t expect that seeing her black eyes staring at him would make him feel this breathless.

“Are you thinking of growing out your hair?” Kang Chan asked.

“Yup! I’ll graduate soon, so I thought it would be fitting. Why? Should I cut my hair instead?”

“It doesn’t matter to me.”

In truth, Kang Chan wondered if it would be better for her to trim it a little. More specifically, he wanted her to style her straight bangs a bit. However, it would be rude to just outright tell her that. When they arrived at the hotel, Kang Chan led Kim Mi-Young to the Japanese restaurant that he made a reservation in.

“Let’s have dinner here today. It reminds me of when we ate sashimi,” Kang Chan said.

“Is this place good?”

“Probably.”

The manager welcomed them when they reached the entrance of the restaurant.

“Please come this way,” the manager requested and guided them to the table they had prepared for them, which was near the window to the right. She then handed them hot wet towels.

“We want to eat sashimi. Choose a menu for us,” Kang Chan asked.

“I’ll do that. Would you like to be served some alcohol along with your food?”

“I’m not sure... Actually, I’ll have a beer.”

Kim Mi-Young’s surprised gaze alternated between the two. The manager smiled throughout their conversation.

“I’ll have it all prepared,” the manager said.

Kim Mi-Young leaned closer to Kang Chan when the manager left. “Do you come here often?”

“No, I’ve only ever been here twice before today. The last time I came here, I was with DI—the company that produces dramas. I came here for similar reasons the other time.”

Kim Mi-Young nodded. She then looked around the restaurant and out the window.

*Isn’t it normal for people who live in Gangnam to eat at this hotel at least once or twice? Her father Kim Kwang-Sik is a judge, no less.*

Nevertheless, Kim Mi-Young looked flustered. It was as if she found the situation awkward.

For some reason, Kang Chan thought that she would have the same expression and reaction to getting closer to his true nature.

*Yeah. I might have been making excuses because I was afraid that she wouldn’t accept my real self.*

While they were gazing out the window, they were served beer. They were served appetizers not long after.

“Quick, try it,” Kang Chan said.

“Okay!”

Kang Chan filled a glass a little more than halfway with beer and put it in front of Kim Mi-Young. He then filled his own glass with beer.

“Let’s have a toast,” Kang Chan suggested.

“Okay!” Smiling awkwardly, Kim Mi-Young held up her glass.

“Sorry I wasn’t there for you when you had your exams,” Kang Chan said.

Kim Mi-Young’s eyes curved a little as she smiled.

Kang Chan drank about half of the beer in his glass and put it down. After taking a sip, Kim Mi-Young put hers down with a frown.

She was like a child that lived in a completely different world.

It wasn’t something to be proud of, but when he was her age, he was already downing soju right from the bottle. He already smoked then, too.

“This is delicious!” Kim Mi-Young exclaimed.

*It tastes different from the sahim that we had at the beach, doesn’t it?*

Seeing her so happy made Kang Chan smile.

“Take your time. Eat to your heart’s content,” he said.

“I will! You should also have some too.”

Kang Chan was certain that their waiter and the manager were suppressing their curiosity about who Kim Mi-Young was.

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“Can I take a look at it again?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“We have it recorded, so you can check it out as much as you want. How about we have dinner first before you play it again... Why are you sweating so much?” Kim Tae-Jin asked back.

Ignoring the question, Kang Chul-Gyu took out two tissues from the box and wiped his forehead.

“What military unit is Kang Chan from?”

“I don’t have the faintest idea.”

Kang Chul-Gyu stared at Kim Tae-Jin.

“What would I gain from lying to you? I’ve already tried to find out where he’s from and how he was trained among a lot of other details. Unfortunately, despite asking him about it two or so times, I still haven’t gotten an answer from him. All I know is that he has those skills and that he speaks French like a native.”

Kang Chul-Gyu sighed softly, seemingly able to tell that Kim Tae-Jin was telling the truth.



“I didn’t expect you to be this interested,” Kim Tae-Jin commented.

“Look at this,” Kang Chul-Gyu responded as he showed the tissue that he was holding. It was damp. “I felt suffocated when I tried to imagine what it would be like to face someone like him as an opponent. I have never met anyone whose senses are as heightened as his. It also makes me angry, though. If only I could fight and represent South Korea like he did, I wouldn’t have felt as if I was treated unjustly.”

Kim Tae-Jin pursed his lips and nodded.

“I won’t have to go if he’s going with you guys.”

“He’s going to Africa in a few days.”

“Hmm, that doesn’t make sense. Is he really still just in high school? Only commanders who have at least over ten years of combat experience can show that level of skill. I doubt he’s been going out to battlefields shooting people down since he was eight or nine years old. This is so confusing!”

“Section chief Jeon, General Choi, Kim Hyung-Jung and I used to feel the same way. Now, we’ve just learned to accept the situation and assume that he is more capable than we’ll ever know.”

“Didn’t you see how he fought with bayonets?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“I watched that part a few times as well, so yes.”

Smirking, Kang Chul-Gyu looked at Kim Tae-Jin. “The special forces of France’s Foreign Legion use the same close-quarters combat techniques. How can someone so young be so familiar with such a martial art?”

“He gave a commissioned education session to five of our employees, so I’ve seen him perform those techniques firsthand. Even so, I still couldn’t figure out how he learned them. Moreover, the special forces of France’s Foreign Legion wholeheartedly accepted him as their commander. That’s why the National Intelligence Service has a rough suspicion that he’s an agent that France trained in secret.”

“Haha, this is making my brain hurt.”

“The majority of the people who got to know Kang Chan showed that kind of response.”

Kang Chul-Gyu shook his head and sharply looked at the TV. The video was paused on Kang Chan walking on the runway. Seok Kang-Ho was on his left and Kwak Cheol-Ho his right.

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The sky was already dark when Kang Chan and Kim Mi-Young's dinner finished. After leaving the restaurant, they headed to the lobby, where they found an oil lamp lit up on every table. A woman wearing a flowy dress was playing the piano on one side of it.

"Welcome," the manager greeted. She guided them to a table near the window that was furthest away from the entrance and put a menu on the table.

Lights filled the front garden, beyond which were city lights flashing brightly.

"What are you going to drink?" Kim Mi-Young asked.

"Coffee. What about you?"

"Hmm. I'll also drink coffee, then."

"Are you sure? What if you have a hard time sleeping later?" Kang Chan asked.

"Should I have hot chocolate instead, then?"

"Sure."

Kang Chan turned his head. The manager quickly approached them and took their order.

"Mi-Young," he called after.

"Yeah?"

*How can her smile be so bright?*

Kang Chan wanted to hold his tongue, but he decided to proceed with what he had in mind anyway.

"I've got something I want to tell you..."

Their coffee and hot chocolate were served in the middle of his sentence, stopping their conversation for a moment. Noticing the mood, the manager quickly put their drinks on the table and walked away.

Chapter 234.2: And... (1)

"I work at a government agency now," Kang Chan said.

"I know," Kim Mi-Young replied. He had already told her about it before. "My dad even told me to never bother you when you're working and that I should stop having feelings for you if I don't like waiting. I told him that I understood," Kim Mi-Young added.

Kang Chan couldn't help but laugh. He was disappointed that her father had already talked to her about this.

*What on earth is this?*

"What else did you hear from him?" Kang Chan asked. He initially planned to open his heart to her, but he was curious now about how much she knew.

"He told me that you're South Korea's chief manager for the Eurasian Rail."

Her answer made Kang Chan lean forward in surprise. He had already heard something like that before, but he never thought that he would hear it again from Kim Mi-Young.

“Did your father really tell you that?” Kang Chan asked again.

“Yes!”

“Where did he even hear that from?”

Kim Mi-Young discretely examined Kang Chan’s mood.

“Please don’t worry. I’m just asking out of sheer curiosity. That hasn’t been set in stone yet so that information is really hard to come by for most people,” Kang Chan explained.

“You know that a department in South Korea has been formed to take charge of the Eurasian Rail, right?”

“No.”

Kim Mi-Young looked at Kang Chan with surprise in her eyes. She looked as if she couldn’t believe it at first, but her gaze soon changed to one that seemed to ask, ‘Really?’

“I really didn’t know until now. I’ve heard they’re planning to create one, but I wasn’t aware that they have already pushed through with it,” Kang Chan added.

“If my memory serves me right, it was made around October last year. My dad said that he made a bid to become the head of that department’s legal division.”

“He did?”

“Yeah!”

*Damn it! How much does that man know?*

He suddenly felt as if his thoughts were getting all jumbled up.

Her girlfriend’s father being a judge was already burdensome as it was, but he was in charge of the legal duties of Eurasian Rail’s South Korean branch now?

*Damn it.*

Kang Chan suddenly thought that sleeping with her—no, even kissing her just went out of the window. The damn Eurasian Rail project never seemed to stop messing up his life. It was even stopping him from moving forward with his romantic relationship now.

“Is that why you’ve been so understanding despite my inability to call you regularly?” Kang Chan asked.

“My dad pays attention to what you do more than me. He said so many times that we should never do something that’ll harm our country since our family has made a living out of its money. He was also especially stern when he told my

mom not to talk about you. She can't even talk to her friends on the phone in peace lately."

*I lost! I have completely lost.*

He had completely forgotten what he was planning to tell Kim Mi-Young today.

*Considering everything that's happened, how could she still tell me all of this?*

Kim Kwan-Sik would have likely told Kim Mi-Young not to tell him anything.

"That's why I told him that I'll wait for you for as long as you need me to. I plan to stay true to those words," Kim Mi-Young continued.

She was certainly an honor student. Having memorized the answer, her eyes were now full of the desire to reach it.

Kang Chan decided to stop here for today. Talking about deeper subjects in this state would overdo it. They talked about something else for a moment, then went outside and strolled in the front garden of the hotel.

"I'm going to Mongolia tomorrow," Kang Chan opened.

"I see. Will it take a long time for you to come back?"

"I'm not sure, but it shouldn't take that long."

Kim Mi-Young held Kang Chan's hand. The noises she made sounded as if she was both crying and grumbling. She already knew what his answer would be, but she still looked as if she found it hard to wait for him.

"I'm sorry. I'll be back as soon as I can," Kang Chan said.

"Are we still going on the trip you promised after I graduate?"

"Are you really sure that you won't regret choosing me?"

"Of course I am," Kim Mi-Young answered.

The subject suddenly completely changed.

Kang Chan looked directly into her eyes.

"Do you know what I mean when I say that you should go on a trip with me?"

Kang Chan asked again.

Kim Mi-Young nodded. She was clearly feeling shy, but she didn't look away.

"What are you going to do if you regret this later on?"

"Like if we break up?" Kim Mi-Young asked back.

"Yeah. What if that happens?"

"Do I have to regret it after that?"

*Is she a bit stupid or has she always been like this and I just forgot about it because I haven't been seeing her often lately?*

“For as long as I think I made the right decision, I will never regret it. If I end up being wrong, I just have to figure out why and then avoid making the same mistake again. If you no longer like me by the time we come back from our trip, just let me know so I can figure out what I did wrong. Even in that scenario, I still won't regret going on that trip with you,” Kim Mi-Young explained.

*I lost on this one as well.*

Her answer was so perfect that it left him speechless.

Kim Mi-Young stepped closer to Kang Chan and hugged him.

“I'll wait for you. My dad is probably right. Still, I can't help but hope that we'll be able to create memories together. Do you remember when you appeared on TV? All the girls at our school started liking you because of it. Hmm, maybe not all of them, but most of them do. That's why I was hoping you would tell me that you like and miss me from time to time instead of just eating out like this.” Kim Mi-Young raised her head and looked at Kang Chan.

Kang Chan smirked, making her laugh.

“Jeez!”

“Huhuhu.”

Kang Chan gave Kim Mi-Young a big hug. “I missed you so much.”

“I missed you too!”

He found Kim Mi-Young's sparkling eyes quite beautiful.

*Damn it! Choi Jong-Il is probably watching us from somewhere.*

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After parting ways with Kim Mi-Young in front of her apartment building, he headed home and spent time with Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook.

They knew that he was leaving tomorrow, which made things a lot more comfortable for him. It was much easier to talk to them because he was taking a commercial plane to Mongolia, which meant his departure time and even flight number were public information.

Yoo Hye-Sook hinted that she wanted to give him a ride to the airport, but she decided not to when Kang Chan told her that the employees of Yoo Bi-Corp would be accompanying him.

“We can at least have breakfast together before you leave, right?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked afterward.

“That's right. I have to leave at ten in the morning, so you two will probably be at work by then.”

“About that. We’ve decided that your dad will go to work first, and I’ll leave after lunch. I get to see you off before I head out.”

Yoo Hye-Sook looked as if she felt much less upset this time compared to before since Kang Chan came home early and spent time with her for the past few days.

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When Kang Chan woke up the next morning, he went out on a jog and lightly worked out.

He wasn’t in a bad mood. However, the uncomfortable feeling on one side of his chest was still there even though it had already been a few days. Hence, he was worried that something would happen to Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook.

After seeing Kang Dae-Kyung off, Kang Chan began packing his bag. He decided to travel light.

According to the plan, they would be going to Ulaanbaatar[1] on a commercial flight and take a helicopter to the site from there.

He packed thick thermal and normal underwear and one pair of winter shoes. Kim Tae-Jin was supposed to be providing him with all this, but Kang Chan decided to take them from Yoo Hye-Sook and bring them with him because she was so worried.

Soon, Kang Chan picked up his bag and headed to the entrance. It was time for him to go.

“I’ll be back,” Kang Chan said.

“Channy!”

Yoo Hye-Sook got teary as she said goodbye to Kang Chan, who went out of the house often.

“Why are you crying? I won’t be long,” Kang Chan consoled her.

“Take care of yourself out there, Channy. I love you.”

“I love you too.” He would never get tired of being in his mother’s arms.

After saying goodbye to Yoo Hye-Sook, Kang Chan got on the elevator and went out of the main entrance of his apartment building.

Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee were already waiting for him, ready to head to the airport.

“I was told that the other team has left. Section Chief Jeon and Manager Kim told me to tell you that they want you to call them,” one of them told Kang Chan.

“Alright.”

They put Kang Chan’s bag in the trunk and left soon after.

On the way to the airport, Kang Chan talked to Jeon Dae-Geuk and Kim Hyung-Jung. He then called Seok Kang-Ho.

- Wrap up things in Mongolia as soon as you can, then meet up with us in Africa.

“I was just about to say that. Don’t overdo it and look after the soldiers properly.”

- Don’t worry.

By the time Kang Chan hung up, they were already on the road exclusively for those heading to the airport. Soon, they entered an employees-only parking lot.

Noticing the sticker on the car that verified their identity, the guard quickly opened the barricade for them.

Kang Chan said that they didn’t have to go inside with him, but the three went into the government office building and followed him to the front of the airline’s lounge anyway.

“You just have to go inside the lounge,” one of them told Kang Chan.

“I’ll see you in Africa.”

“Please be careful.”

Kang Chan shook hands with them before following the airport personnel waiting for him to the airline’s lounge.

“They’re over here,” the airport personnel said.

Kang Chan walked into the hallway, finding a blocked-off lobby with a huge arched entrance to his left. The people sitting inside had their chairs in a circle.

When they saw Kang Chan, they stood up and greeted him. Behind the Yoo Bi-Corp employees were Oh Gwang-Taek, Kim Tae-Jin, and...

*Damn it!*

Chapter 235.1: And... (2)

Kang Chan had never been this dumbfounded—not even when he ran into Sharlan and Smithen at the Namsan Hotel some time ago.

Kang Chul-Gyu didn’t just look the same as the last time Kang Chan saw him. The son of a bitch standing in front of him looked even healthier.

This man used to drink alcohol bought with the money that his wife earned and used his intoxication as an excuse to beat up his wife and son. Now, he was standing in front of Kang Chan looking perfectly sane, saying that he was going to Mongolia.

Kang Chan gritted his teeth as he held back the urge to punch Kang Chul-Gyu in the neck and at the pit of his stomach. If it wasn’t for the fact that it was the least he could do as a human, he would’ve already attacked him.

“Kang Chan...?” Oh Gwang-Taek called. Kang Chan’s eyes were glinting so much that even Oh Gwang-Taek was surprised.

Kang Chul-Gyu turned to stare intently at Kang Chan. Everyone, including Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek, looked taken aback.

“How’s the preparations going?” Kang Chan asked through gritted teeth.

“We’ve completed it all,” the flustered Oh Gwang-Taek responded.

“Do you know me?” Kang Chul-Gyu interjected, slightly cocking his head.

Kang Chan’s eyes glinted even more fiercely. When their eyes met, murderous intent instantly filled the airport’s lounge.

“Why would I know you, old man?” Kang Chan asked.

“Why are you looking at me with those eyes, then?”

“Why are you picking a fight with someone you’ve just met for the first time, old man? Do you want to die?”

The two had a similar smirk on their faces as they conversed.

“Kang Chan!” Kim Tae-Jin exclaimed, having lost his patience. Nevertheless, the two refused to look away from each other. “This man is the sunbae-nim that I told you about before. Kang Chul-Gyu sunbae-nim is that famous—”

“Stop!” Kang Chul-Gyu shouted, not wanting Kim Tae-Jin to continue.

*That troublesome drunkard is the DMZ King?*

*Fuck! I can’t believe they kicked up a fuss and told me that he’s a legend and whatnot when in truth it was all just nonsense that they made among themselves!*

“I heard that you’re the chief manager of this operation. If you don’t want me to join, then I can just step away from this operation,” Kang Chul-Gyu told Kang Chan.

“Are you saying that I have to spend effort to decide whether an old man like you should be part of the team or not?”

“Kang Chan! What’s wrong with you today?!” Kim Tae-Jin yelled.

“Kim Tae-Jin, I’ll be backing out of this operation. It’s for the best.” Kang Chul-Gyu picked up the bag next to him, caving in and raising a white flag.

At the same time, Kim Tae-Jin, who was standing beside him, said, “Even I can’t understand you today, Kang Chan. If you’re going to act like this, then I’ll also back out. I doubt I’ll be helpful to you if you can’t believe in someone I specifically chose.”

Clenching his jaws, Kim Tae-Jin picked up his bag.

*Damn it!*

*I didn’t want the situation to turn out like this. I know that I should give in right now... but how can I surrender to that man? He’s standing there looking like a normal person who’s never done anything wrong! There is no way that I can say that he should go with us.*

“Alright. Let’s cancel our departure today, then,” Kang Chan said, having completely lost his cool. With only anger left in him, he exploded with rage. He didn’t want to go to Mongolia in this state of mind.



Kang Chan immediately turned around and walked away.

*Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!*

No matter how many times he swore to himself, the wrath within him refused to subside.

“Hey! Kang Chan!”

Oh Gwang-Taek tightly grabbed onto Kang Chan’s arm but immediately flinched. Kang Chan had whirled around in anger and had barely stopped himself from hitting him.

Noticing that Kang Chan was in a fit of anger, Oh Gwang-Taek became enraged as well.

“You son of a bitch! Did you think I’m your subordinate just because you got me out of prison? You motherfucker!” Oh Gwang-Taek yelled.

“Let go,” Kang Chan stated.

“Fine. There, you motherfucker!”

“Hyung-nim! I’m sure that Kang Chan hyung-nim has his reasons!” one of the gangsters yelled as he grabbed onto Oh Gwang-Taek.

“Let go! Let go of me, you sons of bitches!” Oh Gwang-Taek shouted.

Joo Chul-Bum and a few others ran toward them and held Oh Gwang-Taek as if they were clinging onto him. They then dragged him away from Kang Chan.

“Let me go! Argh! Let go! I said to let go of me, you fucking assholes!” Oh Gwang-Taek yelled again.

“You should go outside for now.” Three employees who looked like agents blocked Kang Chan.

“Let go of me, you fucking bastards! Hey! Kang Chan, you motherfucker! Where do you think you’re going?!”

Kang Chan could still hear Oh Gwang-Taek yelling.

The employees of the airport ran over, but they didn’t dare to approach them. All they could do was watch the situation with frightened expressions.

“Mr. Assistant Deputy Director, you should probably leave this place for a bit,” one of the agents urged.

The situation had become a total mess.

“Huuu!” Kang Chan shook his head and then went outside.

When Kang Chan and the three agents headed outside, the employee who was standing at the entrance stepped back. He looked quite surprised. The passengers glancing at them because of all the shouting quickly looked away.

“Tsk!”

Kang Chan knew that people often laughed when they were dumbfounded, but he had no idea whether he should be laughing or crying in this situation.

This wasn't right.

It would be ridiculous to go to Mongolia in this state, but it felt even more ridiculous to go back inside still feeling this way and reconcile with Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Please come this way," an agent said as he cut across the main lobby and led them to the other side of the hallway. They were going to the National Intelligence Service's Airport Office, which Kang Chan had once dropped by.

When the agent pressed the button at the entrance, the door opened. The ones inside didn't even check who it was.

"I'm going to use the meeting room," Kang Chan said.

*Click.*

An agent opened the glass door closest to the entrance and stepped aside so that Kang Chan could enter.

It was a normal room with a big circular table and a portable board in the inner part of the room. Kang Chan simply sat on a chair.

A moment later, two agents came inside with an ashtray and a paper cup filled with instant coffee.

*Chk chk.*

"Whoo

!"

Kang Chan didn't say anything. He just accepted the cigarette that an agent handed him and lit it up.

"I'll escort President Kim Tae-Jin in," the agent said.

Kang Chan nodded. He had no hard feelings toward the president.

Finally calming down a bit while smoking, he couldn't help but let out a sigh.

*How am I going to explain this situation?*

*Fuck! Should I confess that the man they just recruited was my father in my previous life and that he treated us like trash whenever he was drunk?*

He had never been this worked up in his entire life. For a moment there, he truly lost his cool.

Although he had felt this worked up on the battlefield and during operations before, he could always easily calm down by killing those whom he considered his opponents—even if it meant refusing to listen to anyone trying to stop him. Unlike back then, he couldn't even punch Kang Chul-Gyu, which only made him even angrier.

Kang Chan couldn't understand how Kang Chul-Gyu could have the same look in his eyes as he was fucking pissing him off.

*He asked if I knew him? Damn it! If there's any other fucker out there that knows him as well as I do, tell him to come out!*

Even when he got shot in the neck in Africa, leading him to his death, the only memory Kang Chan had of his father was him drinking alcohol, beating up his wife, and beating up his child for trying to stop him.

That kind of trash was the DMZ King?

*Did he earn that title back in the days people fought about which fucker drank more alcohol and bullshitted more?*

Kang Chan took out another cigarette and lit it up again.

“Who!”

Kim Tae-Jin entered the room while Kang Chan was still enraged. His eyes were full of anger as well, but he also looked just as curious about what was going on.

Kang Chan had to give him an answer—an honest one—but he really didn't have anything to say.

Kang Chan extinguished his cigarette as he stood up from his spot. “Can you guys give us a minute?”

“Of course, sir.” The agents exchanged glances, then walked out and closed the glass door behind them.

“Please take a seat,” Kang Chan said.

“Hmm. You should sit as well.”

Kim Tae-Jin clearly had more maturity and experience. He was still clearly furious, yet he managed to suppress it all just so he could calmly talk to Kang Chan.

“What's going on? I have to know why you're suddenly acting like this if you want me to properly coordinate with you, don't I? As far as I know, there's no reason for you to behave this way,” Kim Tae-Jin said.

Just as Kim Tae-Jin finished asking questions as if he was confessing his frustrations, they heard someone knocking. One of the agents put coffee on the table and then left.

“Go ahead and smoke. It should help you calm down. Even if you're holding back for my sake, it doesn't look too good to see you holding back your urge to smoke right now,” Kim Tae-Jin offered.

“It's okay. I just finished smoking.”

“Alright, then tell me why on earth you acted like that.”

Kang Chan couldn't help the corner of his lips from quirking up at the absurdity of this situation.

*How am I supposed to explain this?*

“Did you know Kang sunbae before today?” Kim Tae-Jin asked. He now sounded as if his anger had melted a little bit.

Kang Chan didn't want to disappoint him either.

"Will you keep everything that I tell you right now a secret?" Kang Chan asked.

"Yes."

Chapter 235.2: And... (2)

Kang Chan inhaled, then softly said, "That man had a son that had the same name as me."

"How do you know that?" Kim Tae-Jin looked as if he couldn't believe what he was hearing. "So? What about it?"

"Did you know that his son went to Africa because he couldn't stand how that man acted when he was drunk? That eventually got him killed."

Kim Tae-Jin blanked out and froze up for a moment. With a dumbfounded expression, he managed to reply with a nod.

"I personally knew his dead son. Perhaps that was why I suddenly got very emotional. My anger got the best of me, which led to me acting that way. After all, I was staring at a man who was standing there, looking all sane, and saying that he wanted to go to Mongolia when I knew that he had caused his son to die like that," Kang Chan explained.

"My goodness..." After a moment of silence had passed, Kim Tae-Jin asked, "But is it possible for you to know his son?"

"I just know him enough to know about his life."

Kim Tae-Jin held up his paper cup and drank about half of the coffee. "There isn't a lot of time left until the plane departs. Let's leave for now, then I'll tell you all about my sunbae-nim on our way there. This is going to be very helpful to our country, so please just follow my instructions for now. Can you do that for me?"

Noticing Kim Tae-Jin's firm expression, Kang Chan found it hard to refuse or argue.

"I'll get my sunbae and Oh Gwang-Taek on the plane first, so keep that in mind. You and I should move to the first-class seats for now but don't feel bad about it. The plane ride isn't that long anyway. It would just be for the best if you don't run into them at least until we arrive, so just listen to me this time, alright?" Kim Tae-Jin continued.

"Alright."

"I'm going to take one agent with me and contact you through him. When I do, get on the plane immediately."

"Will do."

"Phew!" Kim Tae-Jin sighed as he stood up from his seat. He then shook his head as he was looking at Kang Chan, then left through the glass door.

*No wonder I have been in a foul mood for the past few days!*

Kang Chan took another cigarette as he glared at the table...

Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—. Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—. Buzz— Buzz—Buzz—.

Jeon Dae-Geuk was calling.

Kang Chan sighed and smiled at the same time.

“Hello?”

- Are you okay?

The old man had a sly side to him.

“I decided to board the plane after all.”

- It's good that you're a hot-blooded youth, but don't overdo it. How would it look if the assistant deputy director of the National Intelligence Service fought with a gangster at the airport?

Kang Chan's lips twitched. It was more painful to hear this than to be called names.

“I'll be back.”

- Alright. Work hard.

Jeon Dae-Geuk was probably curious. Considering the gentleman's personality, he had to be dying to ask what was going on but probably hung up anyway because he thought that Kang Chan had to get on the plane soon. Perhaps Kim Tae-Jin was going to answer every single one of Jeon Dae-Geuk's questions on the phone later.

As soon as Kang Chan hung up, his phone rang again. This time, it showed Kim Hyung-Jung's number on the screen.

“I decided to get on the plane.”

- Are you okay?

“Yes. I'm sorry for everything.”

- Don't worry about it. I take it that you're going to Mongolia, then? Do you need help with anything else?”

“No. I'll contact you when I return.”

- Thank you for all your efforts.

When Kang Chan hung up, an agent came into the room and told him that it was time for him to board the plane.

*Damn it! I should've held back my anger a little bit.*

As he was walking toward the lounge again, he felt so embarrassed that his face seemed to be on fire.

*If only it wasn't for that fucking bastard, I would be on the plane and laughing with Oh Gwang-Taek already.*

When Kang Chan walked past the airport's lounge, he gritted his teeth. The very subject of his anger right now was right in front of him again.

*That motherfucking son of a bitch!*

How could he go around looking all normal and sane? When he was told that his son had died, he didn't even accept his son's mementos. Instead, he made Gérard carry them around.

He wished he was allowed to kick him out of the plane.

Kang Chan walked down the hallway and turned to go inside, finding an informal CIQ checkpoint. After passing through it, he finally reached the boarding gate.

"Come on," Kim Tae-Jin said.

The boarding time was almost over. Three or four passengers were busily heading into the boarding gate, and Kim Tae-Jin was waiting for him right behind them.

Kang Chan got on the plane with Kim Tae-Jin.

The first-class seats were on the left side of the entrance.

He was always accompanied by darkly tanned men whenever he boarded a plane before, so it felt nice to have sophisticated flight attendants guiding them for a change. It was a bit uncomfortable to be told to sit down, fasten his seat belt, and watch the safety video, though.

After some time, the plane had a smooth takeoff.

Slippers, blankets, and an eye mask had been prepared for them. He was also served wine and peanuts.

"I'm going to explain the situation as best as I can, so listen carefully," Kim Tae-Jin began. For approximately thirty minutes, he told Kang Chan everything, starting from why he looked for Kang Chul-Gyu to everything that had happened until this morning. Every now and then, he would take a sip of his wine. "I didn't tell you this, but he also donated all that money to the Kang Yoo Foundation, which your mother runs. Doesn't all that make it worth at least trusting his sincerity?"

Kang Chan just listened in silence.

*Should I trust Kang Chul-Gyu?*

Kim Tae-Jin trusting Kang Chul-Gyu meant that Jeon Dae-Geuk and Kim Hyung-Jung also trusted him.

However, Kang Chul-Gyu wasn't someone Kang Chan could bring himself to trust.

Bluntly put, even if he did all of that to forget about the pain, the fact remained that he beat up his wife and child. His son, who died with a bullet in his neck, and his wife, who hung herself to death, would never come back to life.

“He joined this operation under the condition that we’ll help him find the remains or mementos of his son who died in Africa in return. Please be a little more understanding of him,” Kim Tae-Jin continued.

At times like this, Jeon Dae-Geuk, Kim Tae-Jin, and Kim Hyung-Jung always seemed as if they were born with the innate ability to persuade Kang Chan.

“Kang Chan!” Kim Tae-Jin called him softly, but Kang Chan still couldn’t bring himself to answer. No matter how much he gritted his teeth, his heart wouldn’t allow it to happen.

Kang Chan didn’t want Kang Chul-Gyu to go to Mongolia.

Kang Chan would rather live with a snake. How could he endure the anger that he welled up inside him when he looked at Kang Chul-Gyu’s damn face—no, how could he even endure the anger that he felt just from thinking about him?

“Phew.” Those damn cargo planes suited Kang Chan better. It would be much easier to endure this if he could at least have some instant coffee and a cigarette without worries.

“Mr. President,” Kang Chan called.

“Yeah?”

“I’ll pretend not to notice him for now, so please make arrangements to prevent us from running into each other if possible. I also won’t go out of my way to mess with him. This is the best I can do right now.”

He suddenly felt sorry when he saw Kim Tae-Jin looking upset, but Kang Chan couldn’t do anything about it.

“I also need time to accept what you told me,” Kang Chan added.

“Phew, okay.”

As Kim Tae-Jin nodded, a flight attendant approached them. When they were given the lunch menu, Kang Chan asked for ramen.

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Oh Gwang-Taek and Kang Chul-Gyu, who were sitting next to each other, chose beef for lunch.

“Hyung-nim, do you want beer? Ah, right! You don’t drink. I’m going to have to drink by myself, then,” Oh Gwang-Taek said as he accepted the can of beer that he asked a flight attendant for.

*Chkk!*

After opening it, he took three or four sips.

“Don’t be too displeased about Kang Chan. That fucker isn’t usually like that. He probably just got slapped after asking out a girl that he likes before coming here or just came here because she’s on her period. If he keeps up with this bullshit, I’ll also quit and leave. Let’s just live the rest of our lives managing a business together if that happens,” Oh Gwang-Taek said.

“Why did he act like that when he has never seen me before?”

“Ha! Even if this is his first time meeting you, just seeing the look in your eyes is all he needs to determine whether he likes you or not. Let’s manage a business—we’re both lonely anyway. Believe me, though, when I say that that bastard really isn’t that kind of man. I give you my word on that. You saw how embarrassed President Kim Tae-Jin was a moment ago, didn’t you?”

“Only time will tell,” Kang Chul-Gyu responded.

“Jeez, hyung-nim, why do you have to be so narrow-minded? What do you mean only ‘time will tell?’ Anyway, he will probably apologize after we get off the plane. Just accept his apology.”

Kang Chul-Gyu simply looked out the window with a smirk.

Perhaps it was because he was on a plane, but his head hurt so much it seemed to be breaking into pieces. He felt so upset that his heart actually started to hurt.

Kang Chul-Gyu used to live as a king at the DMZ. He used to be determined to lay down his life at any moment for the country. He also lived an honest life, never taking home even just one hardtack from work.

*What did I do wrong to be treated like this?*

He wouldn’t have felt this upset if it was his dead son despising him this much.

Kang Chul-Gyu never imaged that one day, he would be despised by someone who wasn’t even twenty years old in front of Kim Tae-Jin—who looked after him and treated him with respect now that he was old just because he was his sunbae—and a famous gangster in Gangnam.

This entire situation made him realize how he looked right now once more. With each breath he took, he felt sorrow well up inside him.

He was old; he had gotten old.

If his younger self—the one known as the DMZ King—was the one in that situation, someone would’ve already died. He would have taken down the young punk.

‘I’m going to find my son’s remains and mementos no matter what humiliation I have to suffer.’

Staring out the window, Kang Chul-Gyu repeated that promise in his mind over and over again.

Chapter 236.1: Says Who? (1)



It took them a little less than four hours to reach Ulaanbaatar. Since Kang Chan and Kim Tae-Jin had first-class seats, they were the first to disembark.

“Will you wait here for a moment?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“Sure,” Kang Chan responded. He felt bad for Oh Gwang-Taek and the rest of the agents.

Kang Chan obediently sat down in the lounge of the arrivals area. A moment later, Oh Gwang-Taek and Joo Chul-Bum walked over to him.

“Hey!” Oh Gwang-Taek grumbled as he sat down next to Kang Chan. “Why did you act like that? You weren’t yourself.”

“Sorry about earlier,” Kang Chan apologized.

“All good. I wasn’t exactly in the right either, and it’s only natural for real men to get angry when someone gets on their nerves. Why did you suddenly throw a hissy fit, though?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked out of curiosity.

“Let’s just let this one go,” Kang Chan replied, beating around the bush.

“All right.” Oh Gwang-Taek slapped Kang Chan on the back before drinking from the water bottle that he was holding. Even though they were in the arrivals terminal, they were still quite cold.

Not too long after, an agent approached and informed them that the helicopter they were going to take was already waiting for them.

“Please follow me,” the agent said. “This way.”

Kang Chan, Oh Gwang-Taek, and Joo Chul-Bum did as instructed. They were given entry stamps in a small corridor before walking out to where the runway was.

“Fuck! My nose is going to freeze off!” Oh Gwang-Taek gruffly cursed. Although it was the middle of the day, the weather in Mongolia was still extremely harsh.

They hurried onto a civilian transport helicopter. It seemed Kim Tae-Jin and Kang Chul-Gyu were going to take a different helicopter since the one they were in had two agents and two of Oh Gwang-Taek’s subordinates.

Their entire group occupied a total of six helicopters, two of which had large nets filled with cargo dangling underneath them.

*Du du du du du du.*

The helicopter wasted no time leaving the airport. It would take them approximately three more hours to reach Chuluunkhoroot District, their destination.

Everyone fell silent as they changed into the thicker clothes and insulated boots in their bags. Wearing warmer outfits made them feel a lot better.

- Kang Chan.

Oh Gwang-Taek was speaking into the microphone attached to their headsets.

- I don't know what's happening between you two, but go easy on the old man, will you?

Oh Gwang-Taek's words displeased Kang Chan, but he just scowled instead of saying anything. He had already treated him rudely enough earlier.

- I know someone like you wouldn't react the way you did a while back for no reason, but still.

"Oh Gwang-Taek," Kang Chan began.

- What?

Oh Gwang-Taek seemed glad that Kang Chan actually spoke up.

"I'll only be here for a few days before having to leave for Africa, so it doesn't really matter. You're the top brass of this place. You get to decide who to use and who not to use, not me, so feel free to do what you want. Whatever the case, I'm sorry about today," Kang Chan said.

- Hmph! You motherfucker! You're finally starting to act more like yourself.

When Kang Chan smirked, Oh Gwang-Taek patted him on the back again.

*Yeah. At most, I'll only be here for a week.*

Until then, Kang Chan could just pretend as if that man didn't exist. Once he left for Africa, it was highly unlikely that their paths would cross again. He couldn't care less whether or not that guy enjoyed his life, ate good food, slept well, or got married to a Mongolian woman. All that mattered was that he would never have to see him again.

Kang Chan let out a low sigh as he made a promise to himself.

*Let's not act immature.*

That man didn't know that his son was right by his side.

Kang Chan's horribly pitiful mother had already lived the end of her poor life, and this man would be seeking a new life here.

*That's it. It's over.*

Kang Chan would simply think of the father he had in his old life dead. With his ex-father already in the afterlife, he should have nothing to be mad or resentful about anymore. Letting his anger for the deceased linger was pointless.

Kang Chan planned on calling Vasili the moment they landed at their destination. If he wanted to wrap up his business here as fast as he could and head to Africa as soon as possible, he would have to come up with a solution with Vasili. Kang Chan felt more at ease now that he had come to a decision.

*Not being able to drink coffee or smoke in commercial planes or civilian helicopters fucking sucks.*

He pulled out another piece of thick clothing from his bag, spread it across the ground, and leaned against his bag. Oh Gwang-Taek and Joo Chul-Bum looked at him with respect, which was nothing new to Kang Chan. He fell asleep not too long after.

*Du du du du du du.*

Kang Chan woke up to the feeling of someone shaking him. By the time he opened his eyes, the helicopter was already descending to the ground.

- We're now preparing for landing.

One of the agents spoke into the headset, updating him about the situation.

Getting some shuteye made Kang Chan feel a little better. On the ground below them, he could see container-shaped barracks covered in insulation and a long line of solar panels. There were also soldiers wearing Chinese military uniforms gathered on one side of the exterior fence.

“Apparently, that is the Mongolian border patrol, sir,” the agent said.

Kang Chan nodded in response. Aside from a few valleys that varied in size, he didn't see anything surrounding the barracks.

*Du du du du du du du.*

The helicopter soon landed on the ground.

As people stepped off the aircrafts, the border patrol approached them and unloaded the cargo that was attached to the helicopters. An agent strode and spoke to the border patrol soldiers, then returned to Kang Chan, who guessed that the agent's specialty was speaking Mongolian.

“The leader of the border patrol defense troops wishes to speak with you,” the agent informed him.

“Then it would be better to introduce him to Director Kim Tae-Jin or President Oh Gwang-Taek,” Kang Chan replied.

“Understood, sir,” the agent replied.

In agreement with what Kang Chan said, Kim Tae-Jin, Oh Gwang-Taek, and Joo Chul-Bum left to greet the leader of the border patrol troops.

“What's the status of the weapons?” Kang Chan asked, approaching a nearby agent.

“We have M16 rifles, ammo, and bayonets among the cargo that we loaded onto the helicopters,” the agent replied.

Kang Chan nodded. He wanted to wrap everything he had to do outside as soon as possible so he could finally get warmed up. The cold weather here was no joke.

After a quick introduction, the border patrol troops helped the South Koreans move their cargo. Meanwhile, Kim Tae-Jin walked over to Kang Chan.

*Swish!*

A strong gust of wind flew by and slapped Kang Chan and Kim Tae-Jin's faces. Kang Chan felt as if his nose and mouth were going to be sliced off.

"The border patrol will be accompanying us until tomorrow. How should we assign the rooms in the barracks?" Kim Tae-Jin asked.

"We agreed that you would take care of things like this, remember? Go do whatever you see fit," Kang Chan answered in a friendly manner.

*Whoosh! Whoooosh!*

The wind blowing here was like a mad banshee. Its sound and direction were impossible to predict.

"All right! Let's divide the rooms based on the groups assigned to each helicopter, then. You and President Oh can use Building A, which is the one over there. I'll handle assigning everyone else their rooms," Kim Tae-jin stated.

"Got it."

*Swiiish! Whoooosh! Whoosh!*

"So this is what below thirty degrees feels like! Get some rest for about an hour! I'll head over around that time."

"Got it," Kang Chan responded.

There were about ten barracks. As instructed, he went to the barracks of Block A.

*Click!*

"Whew! Finally, some warmth," Oh Gwang-Taek exclaimed as he tossed himself on the sofa.

The barracks were made of six twenty-foot containers combined together, making its interior far more spacious compared to how it appeared from the outside. It had a kitchen attached to the living room, a bathroom, and three rooms with two beds each.

The winds hitting the containers sounded faint, almost as if it was coming from far away.

"Hey! Make some coffee," Oh Gwang-Taek ordered.

"Yes, Hyung-nim."

One of Oh Gwang-Taek's subordinates quickly dug through the bags and took some bottled water into the kitchen. Meanwhile, an agent carried Kang Chan's luggage inside a room, and Joo Chul-Bum took Oh Gwang-Taek's to a different one.

Most of those who came with them had also been assigned to their own rooms as well. Kang Chan didn't even have to do anything.

When Kang Chan sat down on the sofa, Oh Gwang-Taek offered him a cigarette.

"Do you think we'll have enough beds?" Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

“From what I’ve seen, we have about ten barracks available. If any of our men don’t have beds, we can probably just send them over to other barracks. If that’s not an option, then they can just sleep on the sofa here. I’m sure we’ll find a way to accommodate them later if it comes to it,” Kang Chan replied.

*Click.*

“Hoo, I suppose you’re right.”

As they were smoking, they were served coffee in paper cups.

“Shit! The second act of Oh Gwang-Taek’s life begins in the fucking cold!” Oh Gwang-Taek shouted. When Kang Chan smirked, he did as well.

They didn’t have to tidy anything up right now, so they all just poured some coffee into paper cups and smoked.

*Fuck!*

With the windows bolted shut, they had no choice but to leave the door open so the smoke wouldn’t be stuck in the room.

Chapter 236.2: Says Who? (1)

Moon Jae-Hyun, Hwang Ki-Hyun, Jeon Dae-Geuk, and Kim Hyung-Jung gathered in the emergency conference room.

“The National Assembly plans to approve the proposal to deploy our soldiers,” Hwang Ki-Hyun began.

“We already knew that, though, didn’t we?” Moon Jae-Hyun replied.

“The opposition party is requesting the position of South Korea’s Eurasian Rail manager.”

Moon Jae-Hyun sighed loudly.

“Those who are wary of Assistant Director Kang Chan gaining power are starting to form a group. I’ll be honest, they have an overwhelming number and influence,” Hwang Ki-Hyun added.

“Now, now! I trust everyone here can be discreet and keep quiet. How overwhelming are we talking about?”

Hwang Ki-Hyun glanced at Jeon Dae-Geuk and Kim Hyung-Jung. With a determined expression, he answered, “We have discovered that even military officials are joining hands with them.”

“Does that include the field army as well?” Moon Jae-Hyun asked.

“When those in our military get promotions, they are often elevated to strategy-specific officers. That’s why they consider the Jeungpyeong Special Forces team to be too powerful. They believe that power is...” Hwang Ki-Hyun trailed off.

“They think that power is under Assistant Director Kang’s control,” Moon Jae-Hyun finished for him.

“Yes, sir.”

Moon Jae-Hyun sighed quietly.

“We have to acknowledge the uniqueness of our special forces. The most outstanding soldiers from each Airborne Force are assigned to the 606, UDT, or one of the thirty-five Brigades. The best among them are then reassigned to Jeungpyong. Moreover, the Third Airborne Forces are also under the umbrella of the Jeungpyeong team. In this system where all the soldiers are closely connected as seniors and juniors, the Jeungpyeong team is at the top of all special forces. The biggest problem would be if they openly show that they want to follow the lead of Assistant Director Kang.”

“Is it a threat to the military officials if the Airborne Forces and the special forces teams are attracted to Assistant Director Kang?” Jeon Dae-Geuk questioned.

“The strategy and operations officers have always been wary of the field army,” Hwang Ki-Hyun immediately answered. “Since the United States isn’t too pleased about the President’s policy toward certain rules or Assistant Director Kang Chan right now, the demands of both sides are starting to align perfectly. The bottom line is that the United States does not want our country to be a part of the Eurasian Rail.”

“Director Hwang, if the opposing party gains takes over our political scene, will the Eurasian Rail agreements still push through?” Moon Jae-Hyun asked.

“They will absolutely not.”

Another low, frustrated sigh filled the conference room, followed by a short moment of silence.

“Anyhow, this deployment to Africa involves four other countries besides us. I believe it would be best for Manager Kim Hyung-Jung to give you a direct briefing regarding this matter,” Hwang Ki-Hyun continued.

Moon Jae-Hyun turned his gaze to Kim Hyung-Jung, who immediately began to speak.

“According to Assistant Director Kang, there is a high probability that the South Korean team will take on the most dangerous role in this operation. He said that although this deployment is done under the pretext of providing reinforcements for the Somalian civil war, in reality, the adversary the soldiers will be facing is an armed Islamic force called the SSIS,” Kim Hyung-Jung stated.

“I don’t quite understand what you mean. Can you explain it to me in more simple terms?”

“It means that our country has a higher chance of losing our entire special forces team in Somalia. We are also expecting the United States and England to collaborate and orchestrate such a situation. If our predictions are correct, then our men will have even lower chances of surviving.”

Moon Jae-Hyun just listened quietly.

“According to our investigation, what Assistant Director Kang said was true. The SSIS is indeed active in Somalia. As for the other part he mentioned, we can only speculate because this is our special forces team’s first time joining a joint operation. He also told us that the US soldiers will mainly provide support such as bombing, and we believe he’s right.”

“To summarize everything you just said, we’re basically sending our precious special forces team to their deaths,” Moon Jae-Hyun mused grimly.

“Unfortunately, yes we are,” Kim Hyung-Jung responded.

Moon Jae-Hyun pressed his lips together. Mulling over his thoughts, he stared into the empty space in front of him.

“Even if the United States does end up proving your predictions right, I find it inconceivable to think that our military leadership is willing to send out the best special forces to die just because of a power struggle and that our National Assembly agrees with them...” he trailed off.

After some time, he shook his head. “All right. I understand the problem at hand now. Have we come up with a solution? No, let’s hear any alternatives if there are any.”

The three people with him remained silent, unable to say anything.

“As I said earlier, I’m sure everyone in this room can keep a secret. What is it? What conclusion did you all reach that it’s making you hesitate so much to speak up?” Moon Jae-Hyun asked, breaking the silence.

“Mr. President,” Hwang Ki-Hyun began.

“Go ahead. Tell me,” Moon Jae-Hyun replied.

“Our only other option now is war.”

Moon Jae-Hyun lifted his gaze and then laughed in disbelief. “You’re not suggesting we launch a preemptive attack on North Korea, are you?”

“We have to punish the pro-Japanese collaborators,” Hwang Ki-Hyun replied firmly.

Moon Jae-Hyun laughed out loud again.

“As the Director of the National Intelligence Service, you know better than anyone that we cannot do that. More than half of the congressmen in the National Assembly are descendants of pro-Japanese collaborators. The same goes for major media outlets and the wealthiest businessmen in the financial sector. I’m sure your plan isn’t simply to incite a civil war or assassinate those individuals, so is there another method?”

He leaned back in his chair and slowly looked at each of the three men.

“Do you think our citizens are unaware of that fact? The people of South Korea are not fools. They have higher educational enthusiasm than any other country in the world, and they have immense academic achievements. The citizens know why the pro-Japanese collaborators and their descendants live the affluent way they do, as do the three of you,” Moon Jae-Hyun said. He then glanced at Hwang Ki-Hyun and smiled bitterly.

“That’s exactly why we wish to be a part of the Eurasian Rail. It will make our economy strong enough to support the livelihoods of our people even without the assistance of the pro-Japanese collaborators’ descendants. Only then can the pro-Japanese collaborators be punished,” Moon Jae-Hyun continued. “I’m sure you all know this already, but that’s the reason they’re putting up such a strong opposition against the Eurasian Rail and precisely why they are attempting to reduce the income of our citizens and make their livelihoods difficult. If we try to punish the pro-Japanese collaborators now, our people’s suffering will intensify tenfold. Moreover, if the opposition party ever manages to grab hold of the administration, they will put an end to the Eurasian Rail,” Moon Jae-Hyun continued.

“Mr. President, at this rate, we will have to hand over the responsibility of the Eurasian Rail to them again,” Hwang Ki-Hyun said.

“I will appoint the new overseer of the railway. We can establish it as a presidential agency just like the National Intelligence Service.”

“If we don’t hand over the responsibility to them, we might suffer a second IMF crisis,” Hwang Ki-Hyun rebutted.

Moon Jae-Hyun tilted his head in confusion.

“Apparently, if we don’t give them what they want, foreign investment firms from the US and the Jewish community will sell all the stocks they hold. They will essentially be ‘selling Korea.’ We’ve received a deadline of two weeks.” Hwang Ki-Hyun sounded as if he had finally made up his mind to speak now. “Foreign companies aren’t subjected to margin requirements for derivative products, so if they actually do sell all of their stocks, 95% of the foreign exchange reserves that our country holds will disappear in the blink of an eye.”



“Did the opposition party really say all those things?” Moon Jae-Hyun asked in disbelief.

Hwang Ki-Hyun couldn't respond.

“Did the leading opposition party of the Republic of Korea really convey such intentions?” Moon Jae-Hyun repeated in shock.

His question circled the conference room in silence.

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After taking about an hour of rest, everyone gathered in the auditorium to listen to the orientation about the rules and regulations for living in this environment.

The first and foremost instruction they received was to never go past the fence alone after sunset because it was dangerous out there. They could freeze to death in thirty minutes or get mauled by wolves—or both. Hence, if one strayed too far and got lost, they would be as good as dead.

The next was about water. They were advised to use toilets that flushed with air instead of water, and each person had to take care of all their washing and drinking needs with only a 1.5-liter bottle of water per day.

They also received a short lesson about the use of firearms and identification of the border patrol units and instructions about meal times, the layout of the barracks and the mess hall, and when the lights off and on were.

“It is currently thirty minutes past four in the afternoon. Dinner is scheduled at five-thirty, so please get your weapons before then. That will be all,” the agent explained, closing off his speech. He then looked at Kang Chan and Kim Tae-Jin.

The two decided that this was enough for the first day. Kang Chan was satisfied, and Kim Tae-Jin didn't seem to have any objections either.

“President Oh Gwang-Taek and his employees will stay behind for an additional orientation about handling weapons. Everyone else may take a rest as they see fit,” the agent said.

Kang Chan nodded and walked over to get his weapons.

*Clink! Clank!*

Kang Chan pulled the breechblock to look inside the gun and immediately loaded it with the magazine he was given. These weapons, which were Mongolia supplied, were a bit lacking compared to the weapons that the Russian mafia procured from the Russian military in terms of recoil, noise, and the number of rounds they could shoot.

*Well, having the better weapons doesn't really guarantee you'll win anyway.*

Kang Chan frowned when he was given his bayonet. It was in such a bad condition that he thought he would have to pull an all-nighter just to sharpen its goddamn blade.

*Swiiiiish!*

He left the auditorium not long after he got all his weapons, cutting through the mad banshee wind and entering Building A. The moment he stepped through the door, his nose started running.

It only took a second for him to get dirty.

“Would you like a cup of coffee?”

“Sure, I’d like that,” Kang Chan replied.

The time zone difference was only about an hour with South Korea. Kang Chan leisurely enjoyed a cup of coffee and decided to make some phone calls afterward.

*Glug, glug.*

Hot steam began to rise from the kettle.

*I’ll put the instant coffee inside this paper cup now, so while I wait for it to mix, I can have a nice smoke...*

Kang Chan was picking up the cigarette on the table when he suddenly glanced up at the space in front of him.

*Thump, thump, thump, thump.*

His heart began to race.

Chapter 237: Says Who? (2)

*Click!*

Kang Chan stood up from his seat, M16 gripped tightly in his hands.

“Do you have a radio with you?” Kang Chan asked.

“Yes, I do, sir,” replied the agent who was about to pick up a kettle. Seeing Kang Chan’s expression, he quickly picked up his radio and gun instead.

“Radio the agents over. Have them all wear masks and gloves since I don’t know how long it will take.”

“Yes, sir.” Well aware of Kang Chan’s capabilities, the agent’s sharp eyes glinted as he put on a mask. At the same time, Kang Chan covered his nose and mouth with a mask that looked like it would be worn by motorcyclists.

*Creak.*

Kang Chan opened the door and headed out.

*Chk.*

“All agents, arm yourselves and assemble at Building A,” the agent radioed in as he followed behind Kang Chan.

*Swiiiiish!*

Violent winds swept past Kang Chan.

With thick pants, a large winter bomber jacket that made him look more than half his actual size, a mask, and winter boots that resembled the boots that street merchants would wear in the cold, Kang Chan thought he probably looked as if he was dressed for a guerilla war.

The wind shot at him from every direction, blowing as wild as an angered banshee.

‘Where is it?’

Although they were on a vast plain with nothing on the horizon, the few scattered barracks prevented him from having a clear view of his surroundings. It was likely structured this way to block off some wind, but from a security standpoint, whoever set it up this way more than deserved to be chewed out and heavily berated.

*Swoosh! Clank! Clank! Clank!*

Kim Tae-Jin and the other agents dashed over, dressed similarly to Kang Chan. Their guns clattered behind them.

“What is it?” Kim Tae-Jin asked with urgency.

“My gut’s telling me that enemies are approaching us. Is there an observation tower we can use to look outside?” Kang Chan asked.

After quickly talking to the Mongolian border patrol, one of the agents replied, “They say a ladder is installed at the outermost barracks that will take us up to a vantage point.”

“Alright. Let’s go.”

*Whoosh!*

The look in Kang Chan’s eyes made the agents break into a sprint.

As the border patrol soldier said, they found a small staircase behind the outermost barracks.

*Damn it!*

The clothes they were wearing were too thick to move freely.

Kang Chan did his best to climb up.

*Swish! Whooosh! Swoooosh!*

The wind blew at them like a mad banshee lashing her arms out at them.

The sun was still up in the sky.

With his gun slung around his right arm, Kang Chan scanned their surroundings. Meanwhile, Kim Tae-Jin, the agents, and a Mongolian border patrol soldier followed him up.

*Thump, thump, thump, thump.*

Kang Chan slowly looked around him.

It was January.

The setting sun obviously fell from the east to the west at a twelve-degree angle—this was something that all special forces soldiers learned along with how to find water in desolate environments like this, estimate cardinal directions, and even how to dig trenches or secret hideouts.

Kang Chan sharply scanned his surroundings one more time. With this visibility, he could only see about two kilometers ahead of him.

*Thump, thump. Haah, haah.*

His heart was still beating rapidly, and he could still clearly hear his own breathing.

Kim Tae-Jin turned to Kang Chan, his curiosity evident in his expression.

Just then, Kang Chan saw a cloud of dust rising in the distance. It was a little over five kilometers away.

“Ask if the border patrol knows about that!” Kang Chan shouted.

An agent quickly did as instructed. “He says it’s the Russian mafia. They will be coming in three vehicles.”

Did the soldier just count the number of vehicles? That was impossible unless he had the eyesight of an eagle.

When Kang Chan turned around, he saw the border patrol soldier heading back down the barracks. Meanwhile, the cloud of dust was still zooming straight toward them.

*What is that?*

Kang Chan looked sharply ahead of him when his heart suddenly dropped to the ground.

“Ask the Mongolian border patrol soldiers if they have any sniper rifles. One that has a range of over one kilometer! Hurry!”

In Mongolian, one of the agents radioed in what he said.

“What’s going on?” Kim Tae-Jin asked, his expression stiff.

“If our enemies fire a Mistral or an Iгла from that distance, we’ll have no way of stopping them! The guns we have right now only have a kilometer in range!” Kang Chan replied.

Not long after, the agent speaking in Mongolian earlier reported back. “They do not have any sniper rifles.”

*So this is why my heart is beating so fast!*

Kang Chan looked at the truck and the jeeps that were parked at the entrance of the barracks.

“Bring me the car keys to those vehicles! I need someone to drive and someone to cover me!” Kang Chan shouted.

“Yes, sir,” the agent replied.

“If there’s anyone in front of the barracks, have them all take cover behind it! Director Kim, please provide me some cover from here!”

“Got it,” Kim Tae-Jin replied.

*Click! Click!*

The agents on top of the barracks knelt down and got into position while their interpreter headed down the stairs. The agent accompanying Kang Chan and one other went back down as well.

“Where are the car keys?” Kang Chan asked, rushing the people around him.

“We are paying for it right now,” an agent replied.

*What kind of bullshit is that?*

“They’re asking for a thousand USD,” the agent explained.

“What? These fucking—!” Kang Chan cursed in frustration. He clenched his teeth as he waited in front of the jeep, finding no other options right now. A moment later, the agent interpreting for them hurried over with the keys.

*Vroooooom! Vroom! Vrooom!*

An agent slid into the driver’s seat and another into the passenger’s seat. Kang Chan stood at the back, hanging the rifles on the racks of the car. The fuckers didn’t even include an M60 with the jeep.

“Did you bring your radios?” Kang Chan confirmed.

“I have one here, sir.” The agent who would be covering him raised his radio to show him.

“Then get driving already!”

*Vroooooom!*

The jeep quickly drove away from the barracks.

*Fuck!*

It was so cold that Kang Chan felt as if his eyes were going to freeze and crack off.

*Vrooom! Swiiish! Swiiish!*

“Swerve as much as you can! They might launch missiles at us!” Kang Chan shouted.

The jeep’s engine, the wind, and the mask made it difficult for Kang Chan to deliver his instructions properly. He waved his left hand like a snake at the agent. Since this wasn’t an official hand signal, the agent had to observe and understand the situation to do what he wanted.

“We need to get closer! Anywhere between six to seven hundred meters!” Kang Chan shouted at the top of his lungs, hunching over to yell louder. The agent in the driver’s seat nodded.

*Clunk! Clunk! Swiiiiish!*

They were about one kilometer away from the incoming vehicles.

*Clank!*

Kang Chan leaned against the safety rack and raised his rifle with his left arm.

*Haah. Haah.*

He could see it. The wind digging into his eyes was making him tear up, but he could clearly see the enemy's movements.

*I knew it!*

As the Mongolian border patrol soldier said, there were three vehicles in total—two jeeps and a one-ton military truck.

*Damn it!*

Kang Chan was sure of it now. A Mistral was mounted on the back of the truck.

They were still too far.

The only silver lining they had right now was that their enemies would require some time to park the car and set the target for the Mistral.

However, if the missile landed right in the middle of all the barracks...

*Bang! Baaaang!*

Loud gunfire echoed. Suddenly, the jeep driving at the forefront lost control and swerved dramatically.

*Which punk was it?*

Kang Chan didn't even have the chance to look back.

*Baang! Baaaang! Baang! Baaaang!*

Gunshots sounded different in fields as vast and open as this. The moment Kang Chan pulled the trigger twice, more gunfire reverberated, overlapping with the previous ones.

The remaining jeep swerved, and the truck carrying the Mistral drastically slowed down.

“Floor it! Keep it straight!” Kang Chan yelled.

They would be fools if they missed this opportunity.

Kang Chan roared at the agent to continue driving. They were now about five hundred meters away from the enemies.

*Baang! Baang!*

Kang Chan fired consecutive shots.

*Baaaang! Baaaang!*

As he did, two gunshots echoed from far away again.

*Just who in the world...?*

How could they hit an enemy a whole kilometer away with a mere M16?

*Vroooooom!*

Thinking that this was their time, the agent in the driver's seat began to speed up.

*Baang! Baang!*

Kang Chan pulled the trigger and let loose toward the truck that was carrying the Mistral.

*Shatter! Shatter!*

Kang Chan saw the glass of the passenger's seat crack. The enemy sitting in it slumped over.

*Vroooooom! Creeeak!*

Kang Chan and the two agents quickly dashed out of the vehicle.

With his rifle aimed, Kang Chan raced toward the jeep at the very front.

*Click! Thud! Thud!*

Both of the enemies inside it had slumped over, their heads a bloody mess.

*Haah, haah!*

The agent who was checking the jeep to its right nodded. He, too, had his rifle aimed in front of him. Hence, Kang Chan swiftly rushed toward the truck.

*Thud!*

The agent who had run on ahead had opened the door of the passenger seat and was pulling the dead enemy out. The enemy had been shot in the forehead, white steam still coming out of his head.

*Click! Click!*

Although it already seemed safe, they knew better than to let their guard down. They thoroughly checked the back of the truck before they finally relaxed a bit.

“Get a few more agents over here and take this to the barracks,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Yes, sir,” the agent replied.

Kang Chan turned to the barracks.

Who in the world could hit a target from such a distance? The soldier earlier had really good eyesight, which was perhaps how he could see the enemy from afar.

Kang Chan tilted his head.

*Having good eyesight and being an accurate shot are completely different, though.*

Was it Kim Tae-Jin? Kang Chan shook his head. Based on what he saw from Kim Tae-Jin when during the live ammo training in Jeungpyeong, he shouldn't expect that much from him.

While he was mulling over his thoughts, the agents dragged out the enemy's bodies and dropped them outside. It was important to confirm that they truly were dead.

The additional vehicles left the barracks five minutes later, likely because they had to pay a fee again.

*Swiiiiish! Swish!*

The blood on the enemy's head was completely frozen over and reflecting the sunlight. They were probably as hard as frozen fish now.

Four agents and border patrol soldiers came rushing to the truck.

The moment the agents were about to load the enemy's corpses on the truck, the border patrol soldiers stopped them and said something that Kang Chan didn't understand.

"They say the wolves will take care of the bodies if we leave them here. We have no way to get rid of them even if we take them anyway, so they're saying we leave them," the agent said.

Kang Chan intended to ask the soldiers to handle the corpses after taking them back anyway. Noticing Kang Chan's gaze, the border patrol soldiers grinned darkly.

"Alright. Let's do that, then," Kang Chan agreed.

Kang Chan hopped onto the back of a jeep. Agents were still on top of the barracks in the distance.

*Vrooom. Clunk! Clunk! Swiish! Swiish!*

Kang Chan swallowed the expletives about to escape his mouth as he turned back and saw the corpses.

They were Russian.

However, Kang Chan and his men could have been the ones in those people's positions. There was no way of knowing which of their own soldiers could be left behind as wolf food in the same scenario.

The men traversed through the horrid wind to return to the barracks. Kim Tae-Jin and the agents with him welcomed them back.

"Unload the Mistral and set it on top of the barracks," Kang Chan ordered.

"Yes, sir," the agents replied. Three of the agents immediately got to work behind the truck.

"Who was providing cover fire for us?" Kang Chan asked Kim Tae-Jin.

"Kang Sunbae," Kim Tae-Jin replied.

*That old man did all of that?*

Kang Chan turned to the Mistral, not wanting anyone to see him look so surprised.

*That damn old geezer!*

At the very least, he would be pulling his weight here.

"Dang! This is a pretty brutal neighborhood!" Oh Gwang-Taek grumbled as he observed the vehicles with cracked glass windows.



“The Mongolian border patrol soldiers say they need to take back the cars and the weapons,” the interpreter told Kang Chan with an awkward and uncomfortable expression.

“Who’s the punk in command here?” Kang Chan asked curtly.

“It’s Bhat, the chief of the border patrol.”

“Tell him to come over here.”

“Yes, sir.”

The agent disappeared and returned a minute later with a middle-aged man. The man was short and wearing a bulky Communist Party executive uniform.

“Interpret my words exactly as I say,” Kang Chan directed the agent.

“Yes, sir,” the agent replied.

Bhat looked at Kang Chan with a disgruntled expression.

“I can tolerate having to pay for using the vehicles,” Kang Chan began.

The agent quickly fired some Mongolian.

“If you spout any more bullshit, I will either leave this place or call the Chinese special forces team here myself,” Kang Chan continued.

Bhat looked sharply at Kang Chan and then muttered something to the interpreter.

“He says this is all a misunderstanding and that he doesn’t care if he has to return the money. The ownership of the weapons obtained at the border should rightfully belong to the border patrol troops,” the agent interpreted.

“You son of a bitch!” Kang Chan swore. Bhat seemed to have understood his outburst. “Tell him I’m going to call China now and that I’m going to protest to the head of the Chinese intelligence bureau.”

The agent rapidly began to utter words in fluent Mongolian.

“And tell him we’ll request the weapons and soldiers we need, so they’ll be on their own,” Kang Chan added.

At the end of his words, Kang Chan looked Bhat directly in the eye.

Just then, Bhat grinned from ear to ear, revealing his yellowed teeth. He spoke briefly in Mongolian.

“He says there’s no need for that and that you can do as you wish,” the agent translated.

Kang Chan nodded shortly twice, then turned to the agent.

“What time is it right now?” he asked.

“It’s five-twenty in the afternoon,” the agent answered.

“Do you think you can have the Mistral set up?” Kang Chan asked.

“We need equipment to secure it. It’s hard to work at night as well.”

Bhat interrupted their conversation.

“He said he can have it installed if you give him a thousand dollars,” the agent said.

Kang Chan almost smashed all of Bhat’s teeth with a butt plate. The son of a bitch would probably ask for money even if they were just hoping to borrow a few tools.

“Have him set it up right away. I’ll pay him once I’ve checked that the missile was properly installed,” Kang Chan stated.

After listening to the agent’s interpretation, Bhat grinned in satisfaction and held out his hand.

Kang Chan couldn’t help but chuckle in disbelief.

*Fine! I guess this is just how you live here!*

Having the Mistral installed would make a huge difference, so the payment was a reasonable amount to bear.

Kang Chan briefly shook hands with Bhat, then directed his gaze toward Kim Tae-Jin.

“I think we’re going to have to have some security,” he said.

Kim Tae-Jin nodded in agreement. Just then, Bhat spoke up again.

*Does this motherfucker actually know how to speak Korean or something?*

Even the agent in charge of interpretation seemed flabbergasted now.

“What did he say? Did he say he’ll have his men stand guard for us for a thousand dollars too?” Kang Chan mocked.

“He’s requesting two thousand dollars per night,” the agent replied with a hint of disbelief.

The request was so absurd that Kang Chan, the agents, Kim Tae-Jin, and even Oh Gwang-Taek laughed out loud. Nevertheless, Bhat looked as shameless as shameless could be.

“I can’t trust these guys to stand guard for us. Let’s have an hourly rotation of guards up the barracks instead. Just to be safe, gather all the hand warmers you brought if you have any,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Yes, sir.”

For now, Kang Chan decided to set up their own security. He remembered the monitor that Anne gave him, but the one-minute lag on the screen bothered him. One minute was more than enough time for enemies to approach them, comfortably launch missiles at them, and even have a smoke.

Kang Chan headed back inside the barracks first. Once he stepped through the door, a gust of warm air came rushing at him.

*Click!*

He set his rifle down in one corner and removed his mask.

“Would you like some coffee?” an agent asked him.

“Yes. That sounds great,” Kang Chan replied.

This neighborhood was horrible for drinking coffee. Why was it so hard to just have a cup?

Taking the paper cup that the agent handed him, Kang Chan lit up his cigarette. At that moment, Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek entered the room.

“Don’t do that! It only makes me uncomfortable if you do that!” Kim Tae-Jin exclaimed with a wave of his hand when Kang Chan tried to extinguish his cigarette.

“Can you get us a cup of coffee as well?” he then asked.

“Yes, sir,” the agent replied politely and headed to the kitchen. All the agents who came here were well aware of Kim Tae-Jin’s honorable reputation.

“Starting tomorrow, the guys and I are going to have some firearm training,” Oh Gwang-Taek said as he watched Kang Chan snuff out his cigarette a bit.

“Anyway, from what I saw today, the old man’s skills were pretty damn incredible!”

*What’s this bastard trying to get at?*

Oh Gwang-Taek avoided Kang Chan’s gaze as he quickly took the paper cup the agent offered him.

Chapter 238.1: Yes, It’s My Decision (1)

After finishing his coffee, Kang Chan asked an agent to bring him the satellite video receiver. The agent returned with the device in hand a moment later.

“Director Kim, if you turn this monitor on, it’ll give you a view of everything around the area,” Kang Chan explained as he connected the monitor to a portable battery. He then showed the men how to use it.

“This is incredible,” Kim Tae-Jin murmured in awe.

“Whoa! That shit’s so fucking cool!” Oh Gwang-Taek exclaimed.

Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek had their own unique ways of expressing their amazement.

“But please keep in mind that the footage displayed on the screen is from one minute ago. A single minute in the same situation as the one we were in today would be enough to blow up this entire place,” Kang Chan warned.

“Wouldn’t zooming out enough to see anyone approaching from another minute away resolve that issue?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“That increases the chance of us missing anyone trying to approach us in disguise. Anyway, all I’m saying is that we should use it to our advantage, but it’s dangerous to just let our guard down and rely too much on this device,” Kang Chan answered.

“I suppose that’s true.” Kim Tae-Jin nodded in agreement.

*Chk.*

An announcement was made on the radio shortly after.

“Dinner is ready! Please proceed to the mess hall for your meals!”

Kang Chan, Kim Tae-Jin, Oh Gwang-Taek, and the agent with them left the barracks together. Night had not fallen yet, but it was already freezing. If it wasn’t so windy, they probably wouldn’t feel this cold.

The moment they walked into the dining hall, a wave of heat and the smell of delicious food rushed at them. The tables were occupied by just as many Mongolian border patrol soldiers as people from the South Korean team. They were taking up the seats, eating ravenously.

The table was already set with a few basic side dishes, and each person could go fill their trays with however much rice and soup they wanted.

Kang Chan filled his plate with rice and soup and then took a seat in an open area. The trays were covered in plastic, probably to conserve water instead of washing dishes every time. Kang Chan thought to himself that they went the whole nine yards to save as much water as they could.

Kang Chan honestly felt apprehensive about going to the dining hall because he could run into Kang Chul-Gyu, but he didn’t see him. But it wasn’t like he was going to ask where he was either.

Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek sat down opposite where Kang Chan was sitting, and the agent sat next to them.

“Enjoy your meal, Hyung-nim.”

“You too.”

Oh Gwang-Taek’s subordinates came over and made a fuss of greeting him, but Oh Gwang-Taek was the only one who could tell them to stop doing that, so Kang Chan left it alone. He pretended not to notice and just focused on eating his dinner.

Maybe part of it was because he was starving since he had only eaten a single bowl of ramyeon for lunch, but the food was quite delicious. In fact, even if he wasn’t so hungry, it probably wouldn’t have been too bad.

“They’ll probably come at least one more time, don’t you think?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“I’m not sure either. I’m thinking of giving Russia a call in a bit, though,” Kang Chan replied.

“Do you know someone in the mafia?” Kim Tae-Jin asked curiously.

“I’m planning on asking the Russian intelligence bureau, but I’m not expecting them to give me a positive response.”

“I see,” Kim Tae-Jin mused.

Their conversation ended there, allowing them to focus on their food. It took them about fifteen minutes to finish their dinner. They gathered the leftovers from the side dishes and unwrapped the plastic from the trays to throw them out before leaving the dining hall.

The cold weather and the fierce wind made it difficult to even dream about having a smoke in front of the dining hall.

*Will I ever get used to this?*

Kang Chan shivered in dread on his way back to the barracks. Even in that short moment, he made sure to give his surroundings a quick scan. At this point, it had become something like a habit of his.

When he turned his head, he saw Kang Chul-Gyu standing on top of the barracks with his gun slung around his right arm. It was no wonder Kang Chan hadn’t seen him around. Kang Chul-Gyu had taken the first shift on guard duty.

“He stepped up and volunteered to do the first shift,” Kim Tae-Jin quickly explained, noticing where Kang Chan was looking.

From far away, darkness was beginning to fall.

“President Oh and his men aren’t used to standing guard yet, so we agreed to have the agents take turns for security for now,” Kim Tae-Jin informed Kang Chan.

“You can add me in too,” Kang Chan said.

“That’s not really necessary,” Kim Tae-Jin refused worriedly.

“Even if we start the guard duty now, we’re going to need twelve people for twelve hours. Considering we’re up against people who are already so violent with their attacks even though this is just our first day, I don’t mind standing guard until everyone gets used to it,” Kang Chan responded.

“All right, then. I’ll take you up on that offer,” Kim Tae-Jin accepted.

While Kang Chan and Kim Tae-Jin spoke, they all entered the barracks. Carrying his gun, Joo Chul-Bum followed them inside. Five men were sitting on the sofa in total.

Kang Chan thought he should get his next business over with since he had already brought it up. It was a bit awkward, but he decided to call Vasili anyway.

He brought over his phone, looked for Vasili's number in his contacts, then pressed the call button. The dial tone rang two times before he heard Vasili's voice over the line.

- I heard you just wrapped up a noisy welcome greeting.

“You just know everything, don't you?” Kang Chan shot back.

- I'm sure you didn't make this call to crack jokes like that. I'm busy with my next appointment, so get to what you want to say already.

*This little motherfucker.*

Kang Chan thought of the prospect of having to stick close to Kang Chul-Gyu and forced himself to keep his head.

“Vasili, I don't want to be uncomfortable staying here or be on awkward terms with you. I hope you can keep the mafia away from us,” Kang Chan said.

- There seems to be a misunderstanding.

Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek just watched Kang Chan as he spoke on the phone. Meanwhile, Vasili continued to talk to him in a rude tone.

- The mafia over there is different from the ones in Moscow. While it is true that we coveted the denadite, we don't want it so bad that we are willing to fight a newly emerging hero.

At the very least, he didn't sound as if he was lying.

- All the men that we commissioned to handle our business over there have already withdrawn. The mafia who visited you today is the local mafia in that region. If you want to have them taken care of, I would have to send troops for it. If that's what you wish, we can have a separate discussion about that.

Was Vasili really speaking the truth? Kang Chan turned to Oh Gwang-Taek for a moment.

*Nah.*

Oh Gwang-Taek was the gangster who had taken over all of Gangnam in Korea, but it was unlikely for even him to know how the Russian mafia system worked.

“Then that means I don't have to worry about doing something wrong to you if I clean this area up,” Kang Chan remarked.

- Huhuhu.

There was nothing special about their conversation, yet Vasili still laughed as if his pride was hurt.

- You'll be going up against the most brutal of the Russian mafia. Because of the environment over there, the only thing they have to rely on is the minerals. Let me give you one piece of advice. I do acknowledge your capabilities, but you should not expect the rest of your men to fare as well as you

did today once you leave for Africa. We received intelligence that former Spetsnaz mafia members are heading over there.

Kang Chan sighed quietly, making sure that it wouldn't be heard over the phone.

If the mafia was truly sending in former Spetsnaz members, then the agents with him would inevitably find themselves in the face of challenging opponents.

- I can lend you a hand if you wish, but for me to do that, our military will have to be stationed there.

"I see. Thanks for the help, Vasili," Kang Chan replied.

- *Whew!*

Vasili sighed for reasons that were beyond Kang Chan's understanding.

- Fight back enough to show your strength, but negotiate if possible. The commander of the border patrol troops, Bhat, can most certainly mediate for you. Offering him a certain amount per year will be mutually beneficial.

"Vasili," Kang Chan said.

Vasili stayed silent even though Kang Chan called his name.

"Thanks."

- *Hmph!*

The call was disconnected after a loud snort. Kang Chan thought that the punk had to learn some things about manners on the phone.

Kang Chan put his phone down and informed Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek about his conversation with Vasili.

"That's not a bad idea," Kim Tae-Jin responded first.

"You're saying I, Oh Gwang-Taek, have to pay other people off?" Oh Gwang-Taek grumbled.

A moment of silence dawned upon them as they had difficulties making a decision.

Chapter 238.2: Yes, It's My Decision (1)

*Creak.*

The door opened, and one of the agents peeked inside. "They say they have finished setting up the Mistral and would like for you to take a look at it, sir."

"All right. I'll be on my way soon," Kang Chan replied, immediately getting up.

The sun was already setting on the horizon the ground, casting a hue that was as red as blood over the desolate land.

When Kang Chan climbed up the barracks, he was greeted by two agents, three of the border patrol soldiers, and Kang Chul-Gyu.

*Is it okay for an old geezer to stay outside for so long?*

Kang Chan couldn't help but wonder.

While trying to avoid looking at him, Kang Chan examined the Mistral and then turned back toward the agents.

"After checking it twice, I can confirm that it has been installed properly. However, I don't know if we can still operate it if the temperature drops further," an agent said.

Kang Chan nodded, then took the metal stairs back down the barracks.

"Pay him the amount," Kang Chan instructed.

"Er, Bhat says he has something to tell you," the interpreter said. Bhat then stepped forward.

*Do these bastards not get cold?*

Bhat had a strange mustache that didn't suit his shabby face. He spoke in some Mongolian that Kang Chan naturally didn't understand.

"He says he has a son and a daughter, and he would like for them to study abroad in South Korea," the agent said.

It was such a ludicrous request that Kang Chan was about to laugh when the agent spoke again.

"He also says that he will stop the Russian mafia from approaching our location for about a month if you can make it happen," the agent added.

"Tell him I'll discuss it with Director Kim and President Oh first and give him a decision tomorrow," Kang Chan directed.

The agent quickly relayed Kang Chan's words. Bhat nodded, then turned around to leave.

Kang Chan wanted to know which bastard had given the important role of commander of the border patrol troops to that corrupted punk. He couldn't help but think that this was probably how people from the intelligence bureaus of the United States or China felt whenever they met greedy Korean politicians or businessmen who were looking for any opportunity to sell off their country.

*Clunk.*

Kang Chan, Kim Tae-Jin, Oh Gwang-Taek, the agent, and Joo Chul-Bum returned to Kang Chan's barracks.

"They say in 2009, the Democratic Party, which is the minority party, will produce a president for the first time. All the ministers and key positions in the government will likely be replaced. There are a lot of people who are eager to get their share before stepping down," Kim Tae-Jin explained, likely having read Kang Chan's expression. "In my opinion, it's not a bad idea to grease Bhat's palm a bit and collaborate with the Russian mafia."



“I’m the one leaving this place soon. If that’s what you decide after talking it over with Gwang-Taek, I won’t oppose it,” Kang Chan replied.

“So it’s not something you’re inclined to do, huh?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

Kang Chan nodded in response.

“Whether it’s bribing someone or giving someone some money so they wouldn’t attack us, once you start giving, it will never end. And when we start profiting from this business, don’t you think their demands will only keep getting bigger?” Kang Chan questioned.

“If we grow bigger, won’t they be more careful about rushing in to raid us?” Kim Tae-Jin countered.

“I don’t know,” Kang Chan answered, glancing at Oh Gwang-Taek. “Their demands will most definitely grow in the future. They already have a habit of taking money, and we’ll likely have to get their permission to build a factory on top of that. The moment they consider us an endless source of money, they’ll start coming at us with everything they’ve got. They don’t have any other choice either if they want to keep what they’ve been enjoying with that money.”

“Good point.” Oh Gwang-Taek nodded in agreement. “Once you start paying bribes, you won’t be able to stop. Channy’s correct about that.”

“Hmm, It will be tough to fight them once you’ve gone off to Africa, though,” Kim Tae-Jin commented, concern evident in his voice.

“When will the second team be coming in?” Kang Chan asked.

“At the very least, it’ll take them at least three weeks.”

“How many combat personnel are among them?”

“Some of them would be those who served at the DMZ with me, one of which would be Sang-Hyun. It took a bit longer because a few of them were restricted from leaving the country,” Kim Tae-Jin explained. Seeing Kang Chan’s curious gaze, he continued, “Well, there were a few guys who committed some crimes outside of the military after they were discharged.”

*I suppose that makes sense.*

Kang Chan just moved on instead of dwelling on it too much.

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Feeling the coldness of the gun in his hands, Kang Chul-Gyu observed the darkness falling on the desolate horizon. He didn’t expect he would ever pull another trigger again in his life.

As he watched the blood-red setting sun, he thought that his wish might just come true.

*I could die here.*

Kim Tae-Jin said he would help him find his son's belongings, and more importantly, he heard that the young man named Kang Chan knew his son.

The moment Kang Chul-Gyu heard that, he almost grabbed Kang Chan and begged him to talk about his son. What were his last moments like? What was he like in everyday life? What was he like on the battlefield?

His father? Bullshit. Kang Chul-Gyu was no father.

Even if he put himself in Kang Chan's shoes, he probably would have jumped on him, grabbed him by the throat, and beaten him to the ground. In fact, Kang Chul-Gyu was grateful to Kang Chan for caring about his son so much.

Kang Chan hadn't even turned twenty yet—no, he was now twenty. Seeing the twenty-year-old's eyes, Kang Chul-Gyu was reminded of his younger self. Would Kang Chan believe that?

Kang Chul-Gyu would bark like a dog if Kang Chan ordered him to, and he would stand guard every night if that was what Kang Chan wanted.

As for his son... Kang Chul-Gyu couldn't even remember what he looked like even if he looked at a picture of him.

*My son probably resented me so much.*

That was the only thing Kang Chul-Gyu could think of.

His son was already dead, so he wouldn't know about Kang Chul-Gyu's feelings, apologies, or regrets. His son was dead.

Kang Chul-Gyu had grown older. Now, when he thought about his son, there were times when tears welled up in his eyes.

*I'm sorry, my son!*

Kang Chul-Gyu wanted to scream those words at the top of his lungs. He wanted to cry out loud and voice out that he regretted his actions. However, doing those things felt as if he would be dishonoring his son. He knew better than anyone what it was like to die on the battlefield.

How could Kang Chul-Gyu scream and wail just to have some peace when he was the one who had set him up to die like that? Kang Chul-Gyu didn't deserve to cry. Even dogs would know better than to cry in his position.

*In this place, in my current state, I should be there soon. When I get there, you can swear, spit, and punch me as much as you want. If that's what it takes to make you feel better, do it all. If I fall too far to the bottom of hell for you to reach me, I'll grit my teeth and climb higher for you.*

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at the edge of the ground, which looked as if the darkness had almost completely devoured it.

Suddenly, a terrible pain shot up from the back of his head. Kang Chul-Gyu grimaced and then smiled, thinking of it as his punishment for leading his son to his death. He could only hope that death was waiting for him at the end of this pain.

*If I die at the hands of the enemy... I want it to be in the most cruel way possible.*

He wanted to pay for his sins by having to struggle through pain.

He had lived for his motherland.

He had lived as if his team members were the most important thing in the world.

Yes, Kang Chul-Gyu had made a decision. It was only right for him to pay the price for it.

*Click!*

Kang Chul-Gyu saw something move in the dark, so he quickly slung his rifle over his shoulder.

He wouldn't let anyone touch the people here, especially Kang Chan. He wouldn't let anyone get to a man who got angry in his son's stead.

*The King of the DMZ. None of you knows the weight of that name. I will protect Kang Chan with my own hands so he can get out of this place safely.*

Was it because of Kang Chul-Gyu's sharp gaze? A few wolves lifted their heads in his direction, but they didn't budge after that.

*Clank.*

Kang Chul-Gyu slung his rifle around his right arm again.

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"All right. We'll leave in four days," Seok Kang-Ho told Kang Chan.

- That soon?

"We were informed that if the National Assembly passes the motion tomorrow, we will be leaving the country immediately," Seok Kang-Ho answered. He turned around to glance at Cha Dong-Gyun before asking, "Anyway, how was it during the night? Since all the people who came in the morning ended up dead, didn't the rest come to take revenge or something?"

- I don't know, to be honest. I think we managed to get by with the help of the border patrol soldiers for now. Tomorrow's the real problem, though.

"What about electricity? Will you be able to charge your phone?"

- We have a generator that runs on gasoline here.

"So you have pretty much everything you need, then!" Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed half-sarcastically.

- Wow, shocker!

Seok Kang-Ho laughed, then continued, "Don't worry about us over here and take care of yourself while you're over there. I'm more worried about the people you'll be leaving behind when you fly over to Africa."

- Yeah, me too. But it's not like I can just sit around waiting for the second team to come over. They're going to be here in three weeks. It's a mess.

“You should see how things turn out first before leaving.”

- I will. Anyway, be careful.

“Got it, Cap,” Seok Kang-Ho replied light-heartedly.

After hanging up, he picked up a cigarette.

*Click.*

“Apparently... whew, it sounds like things aren't looking too good over there. I heard they already fought the mafia today, killing six of them. They also took their Mistral,” Seok Kang-Ho told Cha Dong-Gyun.

“I was only told that they fought the Russian mafia. I didn't know they showed up with such advanced weaponry,” Cha Dong-Gyun replied, surprise clear in his expression.

“Argh! Now isn't the time to worry about others, though. Here, have a smoke,” Seok Kang-Ho said, offering him a cigarette, which Cha Dong-Gyun readily accepted. “How's the interpreter doing?”

“I saw him going in earlier. He looks like he's about to pass out any minute because this is their first time working together.”

“Phuhuhu,” Seok Kang-Ho laughed cruelly. “We took a guy who has only ever interpreted in an office setting and had him fire a shit ton of live ammo. Honestly, I'm amazed he didn't piss himself.”

Cha Dong-Gyun tried to muffle his laughter as he chuckled, making him sound as if he was sobbing.

“What if those assholes run away and hide so they don't have to come tomorrow?” Seok Kang-Ho asked jokingly.

“I'm sure they won't do that. They're technically still soldiers, after all,” Cha Dong-Gyun replied, still forcing his laughter back.

Chapter 239.1: Yes, It's My Decision (2)

Kang Chan's shift for guard duty was from ten to eleven in the evening.

They initially planned to exclude Oh Gwang-Taek and his men from that task, but on Oh Gwang-Taek's insistence to learn as much and as fast as he could, they integrated them into the rotation. Hence, the agents and Oh Gwang-Taek's men now stood guard in teams of two.

Oh Gwang-Taek went outside with Kang Chan.

*Swish!*

Whenever the wind swept past them, they felt as if the skin around their eyes, which their masks didn't cover, were being stabbed with a knife.

“Fuck!” Oh Gwang-Taek swore.

With the temperature close to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ , the wind almost seemed to be biting them.

Oh Gwang-Taek kept bouncing on his feet. He felt as if he would freeze up if he stopped moving.

“Do you regret coming here?” Kang Chan asked.

“I don't! Fucking bastard!”

The moisture from Oh Gwang-Taek's breath rose, coating his eyebrows with frozen white droplets.

“Start by looking into the distance. No matter how dark it is, the horizon will always be visible. Slowly examine the area around it, then slowly shift your gaze to areas closer to you. While you're examining your surroundings, look to the horizon again as you're examining from left to right in a zigzag pattern,” Kang Chan said.

“Where did you learn this?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

“The internet.”

“You son of a bitch!”

Kang Chan couldn't help but smirk despite being criticized.

Oh Gwang-Taek was furious and understandably so, considering this was his first time feeling his body freeze up on a cold day like this.

“Move and wiggle your muscles around slowly, one part at a time. We actually have it easy. On days like this, someone among the people waiting in the tank usually freeze to death,” Kang Chan continued.

“I doubt that... Do you really think someone could freeze to death just because they sat still?” Oh Gwang-Taek looked as if he couldn't believe what Kang Chan said.

“You'll feel too lazy to do anything once you start freezing up. This will lead to you stiffening up and your blood gradually freezing. If you don't do something about it, this cold can kill you in an hour.”

Oh Gwang-Taek looked at Kang Chan with surprise in his eyes.

“Soldiers in tanks can die not just from the heat. Days as cold as this can freeze them to death as well. People might run away if they find themselves in places like this, but they won't feel any pain as they slowly freeze up. If you start feeling sleepy while you're out here in the cold, then it could be a sign that your body is freezing up. If you ever find yourself in that situation, you better drop what you're doing and head inside.”

“I would rather just fucking freeze to death! Why would I go inside? That's fucking embarrassing!” Oh Gwang-Taek exclaimed.

Kang Chan, who was looking at the horizon, slowly drew his gaze closer to them.

“You probably don't believe me now, but in the next fifteen days, you're going to see it happen so often that you'll get used to it. That's more than enough time for your men to freeze to death. You're the eldest here, so you tell me. Are you more afraid of being embarrassed or of your people dying to the cold?” Kang Chan asked.

Unable to respond, Oh Gwang-Taek glared at Kang Chan from the side.

“We're going to connect the Eurasian Rail. This place is where all of that starts. I wouldn't have asked you to do this with me if this wasn't important. I actually feel bad because of it, but you're the only one I knew I could count on to handle this.”

“That's right! You should entrust something like this to me, the great Oh Gwang-Taek!”

“Then for the next fifteen days, forget about being embarrassed while you're still getting used to this. Let's connect the Eurasian Rail to South Korea. After we get rid of the distractions from Russia, China, and Mongolia, we will become the heart of Asia,” Kang Chan added.

“Those sons of bitches! My blood is boiling.”

Kang Chan smirked at Oh Gwang-Taek. He then stared into the distance again.

*Click!*

Not long after, he put the stock of his rifle against his shoulder, then sharply aimed its barrel somewhere.

“What is it?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

Suffocating silence dawned upon them.

*Clank.*

Kang Chan lowered his rifle. “I think it's a wolf—as far as I can tell, it's dragging what remains of the body that it was eating just a moment ago.”

“Ugh!”

“Train yourself to see wolves first. As you slowly draw your gaze closer to you from the distance, you'll start to notice and see the wolves faster. You won't get a better chance to train than now,” Kang Chan continued.

“Where is it?”

Oh Gwang-Taek shifted his gaze according to Kang Chan's instructions for about five minutes before finally exclaiming, “Hey! I see it!”

“Be quiet. If you talk this loudly at night, they'll be able to hear you from more than a kilometer away.”

In response, Oh Gwang-Taek just stopped speaking and looked at the horizon again.

After an hour, which felt more like half a day, Joo Chul-Bum climbed up to the top of the barracks with an agent.

“Where are the night vision goggles?” Kang Chan asked the two.

“We brought them with us.”

“Good luck.”

“Thank you for your hard work,” the agent and Joo Chul-Bum said in unison.

Oh Gwang-Taek went down the narrow iron stairs with Kang Chan.

Leaning toward Kang Chan, Oh Gwang-Taek immediately asked, “Hey! We had night vision goggles all this time? Why didn’t we wear them?”

“If you’re going to be the leader of this place, then it’s only proper that you’re not wearing one. You should be able to examine your surroundings without something like that, shouldn’t you?”

Oh Gwang-Taek nodded. His eyes started glinting.

Clank.

Hot air rushed toward them as they entered the barracks.

“Phew! God damn it!” Oh Gwang-Taek sank down into the sofa.

“Oh Gwang-Taek, check the safety catch of your rifle first when you enter the barracks. If you put it up against a wall like that and it falls over, then it’s definitely going to go off,” Kang Chan said as he removed his mask and gave him a look.

Rather than grumbling or arguing against him, Oh Gwang-Taek slipped the safety catch on the M16 in place and propped it on one side. It seemed like Oh Gwang-Taek’s determination to take responsibility for his men was making him obediently accept Kang Chan’s orders.

“Fuck, I like that I feel like I’m getting a little closer to you,” Oh Gwang-Taek said.

“Oh shut up, you fucker. Let’s go have a smoke.”

“Give me a minute. I’ll make coffee.”

Kang Chan smirked as he took off the winter pants that he had layered on top of his regular pants. The mighty Oh Gwang-Taek was standing in the kitchen to make instant coffee while wearing clothes for North Korean soldiers.

It was during times like this that Kang Chan felt genuinely emotional for his men.

They had two cigarettes and two paper cups of coffee.

Kang Chan took out a lighter and lit up Oh Gwang-Taek’s cigarette.

*Chk chk.*

“Whooh!” Oh Gwang-Taek exhaled the cigarette smoke, then burst into laughter, perhaps finding the situation absurd.

“I don’t regret doing this, so don’t spout bullshit!” he grumbled as he glanced at Kang Chan.

Humans were difficult to predict. Who would’ve guessed that the gangster who dominated Gangnam would be making coffee while wearing clothes for North Korean soldiers in the wilderness of Mongolia?

“I chose to do this, so I won’t ever regret it,” Oh Gwang-Taek repeated.

“I never said otherwise.”

The two joked around as they drank coffee and smoked. Afterward, they headed to bed.

They had to sleep and eat whenever they could.

They had to keep doing those two things no matter what—even if they were in combat or on operations. After all, if they wanted to survive, it would be best to keep doing what they had to do.

Kang Chan lay in his bed and stared at the ceiling.

Unlike when he was in Africa, he now missed people—Kang Dae-Kyung, Yoo Hye-Sook, Seok Kang-Ho, and Kim Mi-Young.

*Good night, everyone.*

Not long after, Kang Chan unknowingly fell asleep.

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*Vroom! Vroom! Whoosh!*

Kang Chan jolted awake and immediately stood up from his bed.

*Whoosh!*

He then hurried out to the living room and picked up his rifle. As he did, he saw a radio on the table. During times like this, communication via the radio was the best.

*Chk.*

“Guards! What was that noise?” Kang Chan asked.

*Chk.*

“The Mongolian border patrol is returning to their military base,” someone responded.

*Chk.*

“What time is it right now?”

*Chk.*



“It’s four in the morning.”

*Those fuckers are always so full of shit!*

*Chk.*

“Is the car that we hijacked still there as we left it?” Kang Chan asked again.

*Chk.*

“President Kim Tae-Jin has the keys.”

Considering the situation, Kang Chan wasn’t too disappointed that they were leaving.

Kang Chan wondered if the Mongolian border patrol was plotting with the Russian mafia, but even if so, the agents guarding their base were from the special forces. Hence, he believed that they at least wouldn’t be caught flat-footed.

He put his rifle down and went back into his room.

Kang Chan felt slightly perturbed, but they had no right to stop the Mongolian border patrol from leaving, so he just went back to sleep.

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Kang Chan got another hour of sleep. When he woke up, he lightly warmed up inside the barracks. Afterward, he picked up and took a sip from a 1.5-liter bottle of water, then went into the bathroom.

People adapted to the situation.

He wet and lathered his face and head just enough to slightly create bubbles. He then poured the remaining water straight down to the top of his head, cleaning himself using the soap and water that flowed down his body.

Although it seemed horrible, the difference between lightly washing up and skipping it entirely was like heaven and hell.

Kang Chan had gotten so used to showering with just one bottle of water that if he took a shower with two or three bottles, he would have water left over. It made him feel odd.

As he came out of the bathroom, Oh Gwang-Taek looked at him with respect.

“Come inside the bathroom,” Kang Chan said. Since Oh Gwang-Taek was going to be leading this place, it was best to show him how to shower here.

After Oh Gwang-Taek took off his clothes, Kang Chan made him crouch down and finish showering with only one bottle of water.

“Damn! This feels amazing,” Oh Gwang-Taek commented afterward, drying himself off with a towel, then came out of the bathroom with a completely different expression from when he entered. He looked as if he could feel the difference between showering like this and not showering at all.

“How much more do I have to learn?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked. He looked worried.

“You shouldn’t worry about that. Just do what you have to do with the mindset that you’ll adapt and get used to things. It’s still important for you to learn everything about weapons and combat, though.”

Oh Gwang-Taek nodded in response.

Chapter 239.2: Yes, It’s My Decision (2)

Kang Chan held up his phone and checked the time but soon cocked his head. His phone wasn’t working. Although he just spoke to Seok Kang-Ho on the phone yesterday, he wasn’t picking up any signals anymore today.

“Oh Gwang-Taek, check your phone,” Kang Chan said.

“My phone? Why?”

“My phone isn’t working.”

“Yeah?”

Oh Gwang-Taek, who was putting on thick clothes, stopped halfway and waddled to his room.

“Hey! Mine isn’t working either,” Oh Gwang-Taek responded.

In the middle of their conversation, an agent entered the barracks, and Joo Chul-Bum—who just woke up—went out to the living room.

“Did you get a good night's sleep, hyung-nim?” Joo Chul-Bum asked Kang Chan.

“Yeah. Wash up quickly so you can eat.”

Joo Chul-Bum nodded in response and then went into the bathroom.

“Our phones aren’t working,” Kang Chan said, turning to the agent who just entered. “Do you know anything about it?”

“I was actually just about to tell you about it. The Mongolian border patrol seems to have left with the Mobile Base Station.”

Kang Chan immediately realized that he was right—something was amiss.

*No wonder those sons of bitches left first thing in the morning.*

It wouldn’t have been easy for them to move the Mobile Base Station. After all, even though it was labeled as ‘portable,’ it was still quite large. That was why he didn’t expect that anyone would steal it in the first place.

“Let’s go get something to eat first,” Kang Chan said as Joo Chul-Bum came out of the bathroom looking like he only washed his face.

Kang Chan examined their surroundings as he made his way to the mess hall.

Kang Chul-Gyu was on top of the barracks again. The weather and the wind weren’t any different from yesterday.

*Won't that old man lose focus if he keeps standing guard on an empty stomach?*

Kang Chan immediately shook his head.

Would Kang Chul-Gyu really miss any enemies approaching them on a bright morning like this when he could put a bullet through the throat of a target more than a kilometer away from him?

Not liking that he cared about Kang Chul-Gyu, Kang Chan picked up the pace and entered the mess hall. He then picked up a plastic-wrapped food tray, put rice and soup on it, and sat down at a table. Not long after, Kim Tae-Jin approached him.

They briefly greeted each other before eating.

“Our phones aren't working. Do we have any other way to contact others?” Kang Chan asked Kim Tae-Jin.

“I've already talked to manager Kim Hyung-Jung using the satellite phone that we brought with us. If you need to use it, just tell an agent. They'll bring it to you.”

“I'll let you know if I need it, then.”

Kim Tae-Jin didn't say anything else. He looked nonplussed, though.

After finishing their breakfast at around forty minutes past seven, they returned to the barracks with Kim Tae-Jin and drank coffee together.

“What time does the training start?” Kang Chan asked Kim Tae-Jin.

“We're planning to start in an hour and twenty minutes. Will that be okay?”

“I don't see why it wouldn't be. Is there a problem?”

“Not really. I just asked because the Mongolian border patrol leaving so early in the morning and even taking the Mobile Base Station with them is making me feel uneasy.”

Kim Tae-Jin looked at Kang Chan as he drank his coffee.

Since they had arrived in Mongolia, Kim Tae-Jin's eyes had been becoming fiercer as time went on. Being in such a nerve-wracking situation seemed to be making the senses and instincts he had in the past quickly come back to him.

“Is that... old man over there going to train Oh Gwang-Taek and his men?” Kang Chan asked.

“That's right.” Kim Tae-Jin nodded. He was putting in a lot of effort to disregard the way Kang Chan referred to Kang Chul-Gyu.

“Proceed with the training, then. I can stand guard when it starts. It's a lot better than just wasting time doing nothing.”

“Are you sure about that?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“Of course. I don’t have anything to do right now anyway.”

Kim Tae-Jin left the barracks when their conversation ended, having to issue orders. He also seemed to have left in consideration of Kang Chan and Oh Gwang-Taek, wanting to give them the space to smoke in comfort.

*Chk chk.*

Kang Chan, Oh Gwang-Taek, the agent, and Joo Chul-Bum put a cigarette in between their lips.

“Do you have enough cigarettes?” Kang Chan asked.

“Don’t worry. We filled one bag with it. We might run out of food, but we will never run out of cigarettes,” Oh Gwang-Taek answered, making Kang Chan suddenly miss Seok Kang-Ho.

That fucker really knew what to do to console Kang Chan during times like this. How many people out there in the world could laugh as groups of their enemies were rushing toward them?

Just before the clock struck eight, Kang Chan put on winter pants, a hat, and a mask.

“Why are you already ready to go out? Didn’t you say that you’ll stand guard when the training starts? There’s still about an hour left,” Oh Gwang-Taek said.

“Isn’t it about time to change shifts anyway? We have to give the agents a little more rest at moments like this if we want them to endure this situation in the night as well.”

Oh Gwang-Taek exhaled softly, seemingly finding it unfair that he couldn’t imitate Kang Chan. His exhale also seemed to convey his desire to be able to act like him as fast as possible.

*Click! Clank!*

Kang Chan replaced his magazine with a new one, then pulled the breechblock.

The agent who stayed in the same barracks as Kang Chan put on the same outfit as him. He then picked up his radio and rifle before following Kang Chan outside.

Kang Chan had no reason to tell the agent not to follow him, especially since the agent’s duty appeared to be to accompany him anyway.

*Swoosh! Swoosh!*

As the two left the barracks, the mad banshee wind rushed toward them from all four directions again. It was as if it was waiting for them to go out.

It could have been a little easier to endure if the wind consistently blew toward them. Even if that was the case, though, this wilderness would still be horrible.

The two went around the barracks and went up the narrow iron stairs. Kang Chul-Gyu, who was standing guard on top, gave Kang Chan an awkward stare.

“You should head down,” Kang Chan said.

As instructed, Kang Chul-Gyu headed down the stairs without saying anything unnecessary.

*Why is the damned old man pretending to be obedient!*

Kang Chan pressed the stock of the rifle against his right shoulder and put his left hand on its barrel. He then slowly examined their surroundings.

The agent positioned himself near Kang Chan and held his rifle in the same way. He then examined the area opposite from the one Kang Chan was checking.

*Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!*

“Do you want a hard-warmer?” he asked.

“I’m good, thanks.”

The agent didn’t take his eyes off the distance even as he spoke to Kang Chan, a behavior that showed that he used to be in the special forces.

The sun shone so intensely that they felt as if it was right in front of them.

Getting exposed to this much sunlight for even just a week would be enough to tan anyone’s face. Unlike applying tanning oil and getting tanned at the beach, though, the tan they got here didn’t look nice. Unlike the rest of their face, the inner layers of their wrinkles would still be pale, making them look like beggars.

Slowly shifting his gaze, Kang Chan smirked. They would look like beggars wearing clothes for North Korean soldiers. Fortunately, he was wearing a mask. He also lowered the visor on his forehead to further avoid that outcome.

Although it likely seemed odd, people often got motion sickness when experiencing endless flatlands for the first time, especially if they were used to living in places surrounded by mountains like South Korea. That was why the agent accompanying Kang Chan kept shaking his head.

Not even marine training could help avoid the sensation. After all, it was different from seasickness. It was somewhat bearable at night because they could only see a bit of the flatlands, but there was no way to avoid it during mornings with the sun brightly lighting up their surroundings.

“Head back into the barracks. Leave the radio,” Kang Chan told the agent.

“I’m okay.”

“You’re going to lose consciousness if you stay here. It takes at least three days to get used to this view, and those who are slow to adapt even take as much as ten days. We don’t know when our enemies are going to attack, so don’t be stubborn just for the sake of it. Go back down and don’t look outside unless absolutely necessary.”

The look in Kang Chan’s eyes and the way he spoke made the agent apologize and hand his radio over. Before climbing down, he looked straight at Kang Chan

with eyes that seemed to be asking, 'Who are you? How do you know things like this?'

Kang Chan couldn't help but smile. If he could tell others all about it, then Kang Chul-Gyu would already be dead.

Now that he thought about it, Kang Chul-Gyu didn't get motion sickness. He didn't like anything about that old man because he didn't seem human at all. That was probably why his wife hung herself and his son died, too.

About fifteen more minutes had passed since the agent with him climbed down.

At the very least, they had to stay here in the morning. Someone would have to come up and eat lunch here, but the only ones whom he thought could do that were Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin.

*How good would Suh Sang-Hyun be?*

*Badum badum.Badum badum.*

As Kang Chan slowly shifted his gaze, his heart began to beat faster.

The Mongolian border patrol left with the Mobile Base Station first thing in the morning.

His heart beating faster could be a natural reaction to this situation.

Sharply scanning his surroundings, Kang Chan noticed a cloud of dust rising in the distance.

It was still quite far away.

Kang Chan held up his radio.

*Chk.*

"An unconfirmed vehicle is approaching. All agents—prepare for combat. I repeat. An unconfirmed vehicle is approaching. All agents—prepare for combat," Kang Chan said.

He put his radio down and glared at the incoming cloud of dust.

*Pow-pow-pow! Click! Click! Pow-pow! Click!*

The sound of rifles and footsteps noisily rang out from inside the military base.

If the enemies were from the Spetsnaz, then Kang Chan's team was in for one difficult battle today. During moments like this, the only people he expected to be helpful were Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin.

*Badum badum.Huff huff.*

Just as Kang Chan turned to look inside the barracks, Kang Chul-Gyu walked up the iron stairs.

*Swish!*

The wind roughly swept past between the two as their gazes met.

*Huff huff.Huff huff.*

“The enemies might be from the Spetsnaz,” Kang Chan said.

“Got it.” Kang Chul-Gyu obediently answered Kang Chan.

Chapter 240.1: Even If My Life Is Filled With Tears (1)

*Swiish! Swiish!*

The air mercilessly blew against Kang Chan’s fur-brimmed hat, but he just kept glaring at Kang Chul-Gyu, never budging an inch.

*What’s wrong with you? Why are you suddenly acting so obedient?*

At that moment, Kim Tae-Jin and the agents rushed up the metal stairs, leaving Kang Chan no choice but to look away.

“I need someone to man the Mistral!” Kim Tae-Jin shouted.

“Understood, sir,” an agent said as he retrieved the laser guidance device and got into position.

Kang Chan looked around their surroundings.

The base they were in was right smack in the middle of an empty field, and to make things worse, they only had a mere total of ten agents.

“We won’t have any way out if we get surrounded here. Have Oh Gwang-Taek and his subordinates stand by in the dining hall,” Kang Chan ordered the agents.

“You expect us to be surrounded?” Kim Tae-Jin asked with sharp, glinting eyes.

“Considering the number of incoming cars, it is definitely a possibility. We’re the only base here, and there has to be a reason the border patrol took our Mobile Base Station,” Kang Chan quickly replied, then looked at the agents. “According to our intel, there are former Spetsnaz members among that group. Go up in pairs to the top of each barracks, but keep your heads down. In the worst-case scenario, don’t ever dare come down from the barracks without my command even if we engage in hand-to-hand combat. Go!”

Kang Chan pointed his men to four different locations on top of the barracks, assigning them to their positions. The cloud of dust had gotten closer, now only two kilometers away.

“Old man! Can I trust you with Director Kim?” Kang Chan asked.

“Of course,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied.

“Then I need you and the Director to take charge of the barracks that we’re in.”

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded without hesitation.

“Director, if we lose control of this base, we’re definitely all going to die,” Kang Chan grimly said.

“Got it,” Kim Tae-Jin solemnly replied.

Kang Chan turned his gaze to the center of the base. On the small empty field in the middle of all the barracks, two agents were trying to have Oh Gwang-Taek retreat to safety, but he kept refusing to head inside the mess hall.

Kang Chan quickly climbed down the barracks. He then firmly ordered, “Oh Gwang-Taek! Wait at the mess hall with your subordinates!”

Oh Gwang-Taek gave Kang Chan a defiant gaze, still refusing to leave.

*Swiish! Whoosh! Swish!*

“Our enemies right now are the Russian Spetsnaz, one of the top special forces teams in the entire fucking world. They’re almost here, so I need you to hold back your temper for now, all right? If you let your pride get the best of you, your men are going to get shot through the head before you can even get the chance to pull the trigger,” Kang Chan warned.

Oh Gwang-Taek gritted his teeth so hard that Kang Chan thought they would crack. He knew that Oh Gwang-Taek fully understood his orders but was having a hard time accepting them.

“Oh Gwang-Taek! We don’t have time for this!”

“Argh!” Oh Gwang-Taek bellowed in frustration. His eyes dropped to the ground as he shook his head. He then looked back up at Kang Chan with red, bloodshot eyes. “Hurry up and teach me already! I don’t care if I die, but at the very least, give me the skills I need to fight back against those bastards!”

“I will, but you have to survive first,” Kang Chan assured him.

Oh Gwang-Taek nodded and turned toward the mess hall.

Two of the agents assigned to the barracks climbed to the top. After ensuring that his orders were properly followed, Kang Chan began striding toward the barracks that Kim Tae-Jin was standing in front of.

*Clink!*

He then swung his rifle around his right shoulder. The enemies were already less than a kilometer away from their base.

*Swiish! Swiish!*

Kim Tae-Jin, who was watching Kang Chan from the top of the building, turned around and met Kang Chul-Gyu’s gaze.

‘Are you all right, Sunbae-nim?’

He couldn’t help but be concerned about Kang Chul-Gyu’s health and the fact that Kang Chul-Gyu was speaking formally to Kang Chan. Much to his surprise, however, Kang Chul-Gyu had a bitter smile on his face. It was as if he was remembering something.

“The commander is truly impressive,” Kang Chul-Gyu praised.



“Pardon?” Kim Tae-Jin questioned.

With his rifle still slung around his arm, Kang Chul-Gyu looked around him. “He’s all alone down there. He’s sure that we’re going to be engaging in hand-to-hand combat, which means that he’s essentially going to try to fight all the enemies by himself while we cover him from above.”

*Is Kang Chan really thinking of doing something so unbelievable? Wait, did Kang Chul-Gyu just catch on to Kang Chan’s plans?*

As Kim Tae-Jin began to look down in shock, Kang Chul-Gyu continued, “They don’t have any heavy weapons on the approaching vehicles. That means they already know everything about us, including our numbers and what we’re capable of. That also means they intend to be brutal with their retaliation for yesterday’s incident.”

Kim Tae-Jin had also inferred that this was what their enemies’ lack of heavy weapons had meant.

“We seem to have about five minutes left. Would you watch over here for a moment?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“Yes, sir,” Kim Tae-Jin replied with glinting eyes, feeling as if the clock had turned back by thirty years.

The DMZ King was back.

Kang Chul-Gyu’s violently sharp eyes, tone, attitude, facial expression, and the arrogant way he looked around him were now no different from the past. When he casually gave Kim Tae-Jin the order to stand guard as if it was nothing, the baby chick, Kim Tae-Jin, became certain that the DMZ King had finally woken back up.

Kang Chul-Gyu descended the metal stairs with heavy steps. Kang Chan could clearly hear the loud noise.

Now that the enemies were only a kilometer away, they had slowed down their advance to almost walking speed.

They had three trucks, three jeeps, and two sedans.

Enemies making their advances in this way emphasized the overwhelming advantage they had in terms of manpower. Hence, it would’ve been understandable for fear to steadily creep into their targets’ minds.

*Pft. That technique only works against ordinary soldiers.*

Feeling someone behind him, Kang Chan turned around. Kang Chul-Gyu was approaching him with his rifle slung across his right shoulder, his arm pressing against its handguard.

Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu’s gazes met once more.

“I have a favor to ask,” Kang Chul-Gyu began.

Instead of answering, Kang Chan simply waited in silence.

The man had changed. This wasn’t the Kang Chul-Gyu whom Kang Chan knew in the past. His eyes had changed just as much, now exuding a powerful charisma.

*So this was the man they called the DMZ King?*

“If you’re staying down here to intercept any hand-to-hand battles alone, allow me to stay here as well. An agent is with Kim Tae-Jin at the top of the building anyway. They should be enough to cover that position,” Kang Chul-Gyu said, bending over to pull up the bottoms of his thick winter pants.

*Shing.*

He then unsheathed a bayonet and held it out to Kang Chan by the blade.

“I sharpened it,” Kang Chul-Gyu informed him.

*Why? Why would this man do that? Why would a soldier with such an impressive gaze do that?*

Kang Chul-Gyu lifted his gaze over Kang Chan’s shoulders, then held out the bayonet in his hand again. He seemed adamant about making Kang Chan take it.

“I sharpened two bayonets, so you can take this one,” Kang Chul-Gyu insisted.

The enemies were almost upon them.

Kang Chan was worried about the dullness of his blade anyway, so he accepted the bayonet without hesitation. He took it by the handle and hung it backward around his left sleeve.

Taking his silence as permission, Kang Chul-Gyu stood next to Kang Chan. He tilted his head as he looked at their incoming opponents.

They were only about nine hundred meters away from the base now.

*Swiiiiish! Swish! Swiish!*

It was awfully awkward. Maybe that was why the wind occasionally rushed past them. It was as if it was clicking its tongue at them in annoyance.

How would Kang Chan have treated this old man if he wasn’t his father?

Kang Chan peeked over at him. Just then, Kang Chul-Gyu, who was scowling and had his teeth clenched together, slightly lifted the corner of his mouth into a faint smile. He then glanced over at Kang Chan, causing them to make eye contact again.

“There’s some shrapnel stuck in the back of my head, so I feel random bursts of pain every now and then,” Kang Chul-Gyu opened out of nowhere.

*Did anyone ask?*

Kang Chan thought that the old man was getting terribly chatty now that he was given the opportunity.

*Pft.*

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked as if he read Kang Chan’s mind. They certainly had different facial features, but the way Kang Chul-Gyu smiled was so similar to Kang Chan that he felt as if he was looking in the mirror.

The distance between them and their opponents was now down to eight hundred meters. Kang Chan planned to open fire as soon as they were within five hundred meters of them, which meant they still had about three hundred meters of leeway.

“Is there anything you want to say to your son?” Kang Chan asked out of the blue.

*Why did I ask something so stupid?*

Kang Chan couldn't help but smirk as well.

Since he was wearing a mask, Kang Chul-Gyu could probably only see his eyes, but that was enough for what he meant to be properly conveyed.

“I wouldn't be so shameless that I would try to tell him anything. Still...” Kang Chul-Gyu trailed off, glancing at the enemies and then back at Kang Chan again. “If I could say just one thing...”

*Why's he dragging this out for so long?*

Kang Chan felt irritation rush up inside of him.

“If you've got nothing to say, don't try to come up with something just so you would,” he said with annoyance.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded and shut his mouth.

*Godammit! You're actually going to stop talking because I told you to?*

Kang Chan reigned in his exasperation and turned back to the enemies.

“I've always wanted to tell him that I'm sorry, that I'm truly sorry,” Kang Chul-Gyu finally answered.

*Swiish! Swiish!*

The weird answer to Kang Chan's random question only made the awkwardness between them worse.

Chapter 240.2: Even If My Life Is Filled With Tears (1)

Kang Chan glared at the enemies as he reproached Kang Chul-Gyu in his mind.

*You shouldn't have done anything to be sorry for in the first place! You chose your country and soldiers over everything else, but that is not an excuse to treat your fucking family like shit!*

Their enemies were now only six hundred meters away.

“Thank you,” Kang Chul-Gyu suddenly added.

“For what?” Kang Chan asked.

“For giving me the chance to die in a place like this.”

“I wasn't the one who made that decision. It was Director Kim.”

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded. “Thank you for remembering my son as well.”

Their opponents would only have to cover fifty more meters now before Kang Chan would have to pull his trigger. As soon as he began firing, the gates to the hell that he was too familiar with would open wide. Nevertheless, he still found the time to glare sharply at Kang Chul-Gyu.

“Do you really regret what you’ve done to your son?”

Kang Chul-Gyu’s smile at that moment seemed to be the perfect example of a pained smile.

“Make up an excuse for why you beat him up so much, then,” Kang Chan ordered.

They only had thirty meters left.

“Don’t you have anything to say?” he questioned, spite coating every word he uttered.

“I’m sorry,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied.

“Enough. Just explain why you did something so despicable.”

Kang Chul-Gyu quieted down, pressing his lips shut.

“What did he do that was so fucking wrong that you had to beat him up?! Why did you treat your son that way when all he was doing was trying his best?!”

“I’m—” Kang Chul-Gyu began.

“You want to die? Do you even understand how your son felt when he left for France to die? You lived your life as you saw fit, so I doubt you have any regrets! What about your son, though? Your innocent wife?! What did they do to you that was so wrong they had to be treated like shit?!” Kang Chan roared.

The enemies had narrowed down the distance to five hundred meters.

Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu gritted their teeth as they glowered at each other, but they had to put an end to their conversation now. After all, the gates of hell were about to open.

*Swiiish! Swish!*

The incoming opponents kicked up a heavy storm of dust into the wind.

“Son, I’m sorry,” Kang Chul-Gyu muttered as if he was talking to himself just before Kang Chan could pull the trigger.

Kang Chan just brushed it off, though. Anyone could say something sentimental to themselves when they were in the face of death.

*Pft.*

How could the DMZ King say something so pathetic, though? It was a waste of such a good title.

For now, Kang Chan decided to focus on the driver’s seat of one of the trucks that was driving straight toward them.

*Baaang!*

As the truck slowly came to a halt, all hell broke loose.

*Baaang! Baaang! Baang! Baaaaang!*

Within the same second, both sides began to trade shots.

*Baaang! Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang! Clang! Bang, bang! Clang!*

Sparks flew and metallic sounds echoed as the enemies' bullets hit the buildings.

The effective weapon range of a rifle was fifty meters. Shooting at targets further than that or anywhere close to a hundred meters had little to no meaning unless it was to provide cover or prevent the enemy from coming closer. There would always be a risk of a stray bullet killing someone, but it was a rare occurrence.

Killing someone in the middle of a battle would prove difficult for anyone except snipers. Even if the enemy was already close enough for their faces to be identifiable, failing to shoot them down was still quite common in combat.

Anyone who heard that would probably think it was an exaggeration, but it was true. People weren't target practice dummies that would just stand still with their hands over their heads. They, too, would try to cover their heads as best as they could and open fire as soon as they saw a window of opportunity. In this dance, the two factions would repeatedly peek out of their cover to shoot, exposing themselves, then hide again in the blink of an eye.

Those who didn't have enough combat experience wouldn't be able to see anything in that short period. It was like sportsmen who had never joined an actual match before making mistakes or missing a goal during a penalty kick. However, the stakes in combat were incomparable to the stakes in sports. After all, making a mistake in this situation meant death.

*Bang, bang, bang, bang! Clang! Baang! Pew! Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!*

The enemies' bullets hit the barracks all over.

If Oh Gwang-Taek and his subordinates had joined this fight, they would have been nothing but sitting ducks waiting to be shot at. For every ten men he had, nine would have been killed.

*Baaang!*

Kang Chan pulled his trigger, and the enemy right next to the truck fell back like a log.

*Baaaaang!*

Kang Chan's gun spewed sparks as he shot down another enemy. The man standing next to the other truck staggered and plunged to the ground.

When their opponents stopped approaching them, Kang Chan quickly picked up his radio.

*Chk.*

"Hold your fire. I repeat. Hold your fire," Kang Chan immediately ordered.

*Bang, bang, bang, bang! Bang, bang, bang!*

A few more rounds of bullets rang out before heavy silence enveloped the barracks. Kang Chan pressed his lips together and kept his eyes on their foes, observing how they would react.

The border patrol soldiers were the ones who supplied his team with weapons and ammunition, so their enemy most likely already had a rough grasp of how many bullets they had. Even if Kang Chan requested help now, only the border patrol would be coming to their aid. They could call China, but it would defeat the purpose of him coming all the way here. Moreover, reaching out to Russia entailed Vasili's conditions with countless strings attached.

Kang Chan could see the enemies nonchalantly smoking in the trucks they brought.

*Chk.*

“Should we use the Mistral?” Kim Tae-Jin asked over the radio.

Kang Chan picked up his radio.

*Chk.*

“They're probably hoping that we use it first. Once we expend it, we'll have no way to defend against whatever firepower they bring,” Kang Chan replied, rendering Kim Tae-Jin speechless.

*What the hell do those bastards want?*

The easiest way out of this would be to attack during the night. Their second best option was to wait until their backup arrived.

*Let's go over this one at a time.*

They still had some food left. In the worst-case scenario, Kang Chan would have to request help from China, which would mean that the enemies didn't exactly have time on their side either.

*What is it?*

Kang Chan sharply scanned where their opponents were and the surrounding areas.

“Old man,” Kang Chan called, making Kang Chul-Gyu quickly glance at him.

“Can you head up the barracks and stop our enemies from shooting at us?”

“Got it,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied.

It wasn't going to be easy for someone so old to last a long time in the cold. However, Kang Chul-Gyu was the most reliable soldier Kang Chan had at the moment. They were the only ones who had managed to kill hostiles since they landed in Mongolia.

Kang Chan held his radio up.

*Chk.*

“Director Kim, can you come down to the barracks and keep an eye on the satellite video receiver?” Kang Chan requested. “We're going to have to keep the situation around us under constant surveillance.”

*Chk.*

“Understood,” Kim Tae-Jin replied. At the same time, Kang Chul-Gyu took a step back and left, making no sounds as he did.

Kang Chan noticed Kang Chul-Gyu was moving differently from before. It seemed as if the skills he had during his glory days were naturally coming back to him the longer he stayed here.

Kang Chan looked sharply at where Kang Chul-Gyu disappeared.

*If I faced an enemy who could move so quietly that they practically made no noise...*

Kang Chan felt shivers run down his spine.

*Pew! Clang!*

A moment later, the sound of a sniper rifle echoed. A bullet then hit the barracks, letting out a noise that sounded as if the building was complaining in agony. Kang Chan deduced that the enemy sniper tried to shoot Kim Tae-Jin as soon as they saw him move.

*Baaaang!*

And that just now was Kang Chul-Gyu responding with gunfire.

Kang Chan sighed quietly. He had no choice but to give credit where it was due. In his mind, Kang Chan cursed at Kang Chul-Guy and told him to eat shit, but the marksmanship the old man displayed, the way he drew his bayonet from his ankle, and the movements he took that allowed him to reposition without making a sound all evidenced that he was at least as skilled as Seok Kang-Ho, perhaps even better. Kang Chan had to admit that much.

That was why Kang Chul-Gyu was the first person Kang Chan sought during urgent situations and why he felt relieved whenever Kang Chul-Gyu shot their opponents. The feeling was hard to explain.

*Rustle.*

Kim Tae-Jin approached Kang Chan in a way that paled to how Kang Chul-Gyu did.

“Let’s head inside,” Kim Tae-Jin said.

“Why can’t we just look at it here?” Kang Chan asked.

“We don’t have any power outlet to connect it to.”

*Damn it! They should’ve given us one that has a rechargeable battery! How could they invent something so incredible but fail to think of adding a battery to it?!*

Kang Chan picked up his radio and pressed a button.

*Chk.*

“I’m going to leave for a moment,” he informed the agents, then looked at Kim Tae-Jin and the enemies. He had to prioritize keeping the agents safe above all else.

*Chk.*

“Until I get back, the old man is in charge,” he declared.

Kang Chan began to make his way inside the barracks, leaving Kim Tae-Jin, who looked surprised, behind. He felt as if he could hear Kang Chul-Gyu say, “Got it,” from somewhere.

“Let’s go,” Kang Chan said, rushing Kim Tae-Jin.

“Hm? Oh! Yeah!” Kim Tae-Jin responded, finally brought back to his senses. He hurriedly followed after Kang Chan.

*Baaaang!*

Another loud M16 rifle gunshot echoed.

Kim Tae-Jin looked back in surprise, but Kang Chan just continued to walk. He was sure that it was just Kang Chul-Gyu firing another bullet.

Kang Chul-Gyu could probably differentiate the gunshots Kang Chan made from the others, too. Understanding the breathing and rhythm it took to pull the trigger made that possible.

Kang Chan felt so reassured that he felt as if Seok Kang-Ho was the one standing guard on top of the barracks.

“Damn it!” he cursed as a burst of annoyance strangely flared inside him.